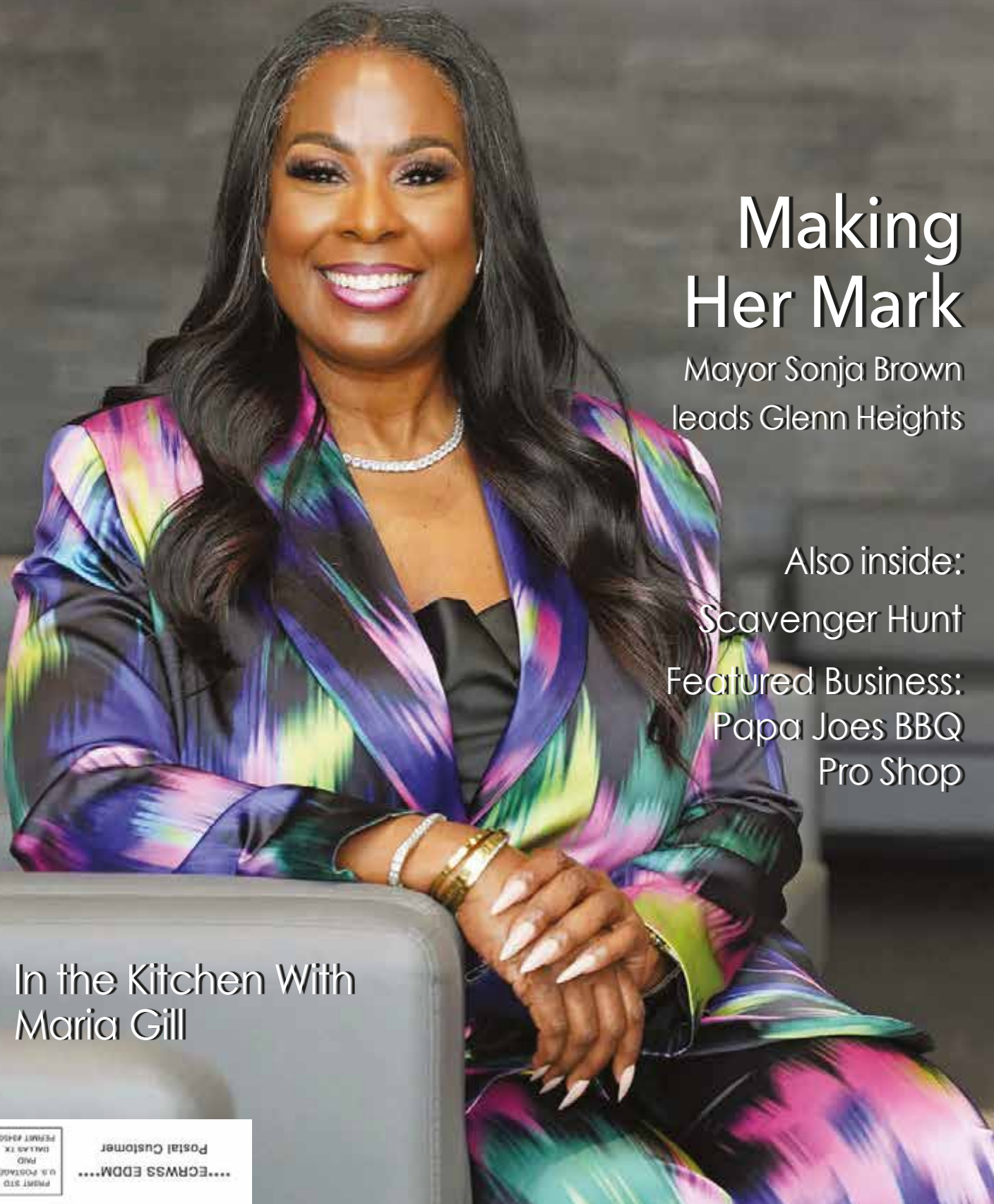


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JULY 2024



Making Her Mark

Mayor Sonja Brown leads Glenn Heights

Also inside:

Scavenger Hunt

Featured Business:

Papa Joes BBQ

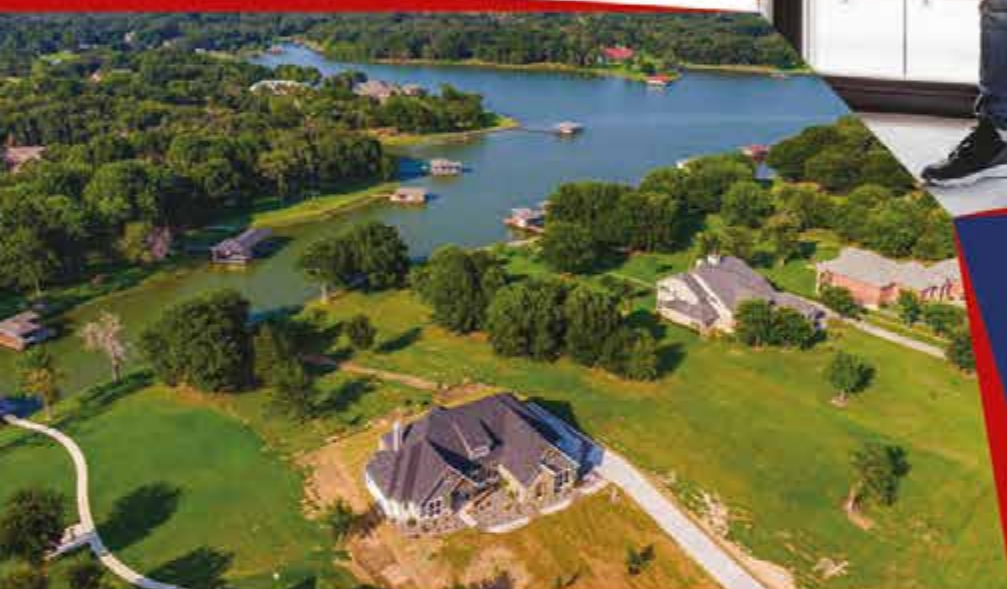
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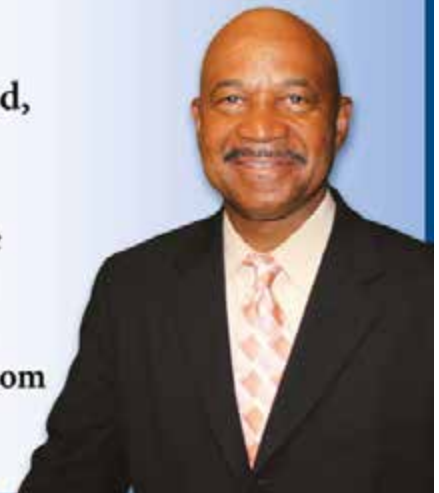
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EDITOR'S NOTE



Angel

Angel Morris
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You're a grand ol' flag ...

July is a great month to take a closer look at the American flag. Most are aware that its 50 stars represent the number of states in the country, and 13 stripes signify the original colonies, but here are some facts you may not know ...

The flag's colors stand for bravery and valor (red); innocence and purity (white); and justice, perseverance and vigilance (blue). Modified each time a state joined the country, its last star was added when Hawaii was incorporated — and that design has been in use more than 60 years. While there is debate as to whether Betsy Ross was actually the first to sew the original flag, we know, at least, that the current flag was designed by 17-year-old Robert G. Heft for a high school project. (His B grade was upped to an A after President Eisenhower selected it to represent the nation).

The flag has a few nicknames, including "Old Glory," "the Stars and Stripes" and — per our national anthem — *The Star-spangled Banner*. It merits its own code of use, which outlines when and how it should be displayed, lowered, passed and properly retired. While it's OK for clothes to be printed with flag representations, the flag itself should not be worn. (Flags on things meant to be discarded, like napkins and plates, is a common faux pas.) It's also against code to display a tattered flag, but they can be mended and washed for re-hanging.

When displaying a flag vertically, the blue square should be in the top left to the viewer's eye. Flying the flag at half-staff is a decision only the president or state governors are allowed to make. Visit online resources for more flag facts and etiquette!

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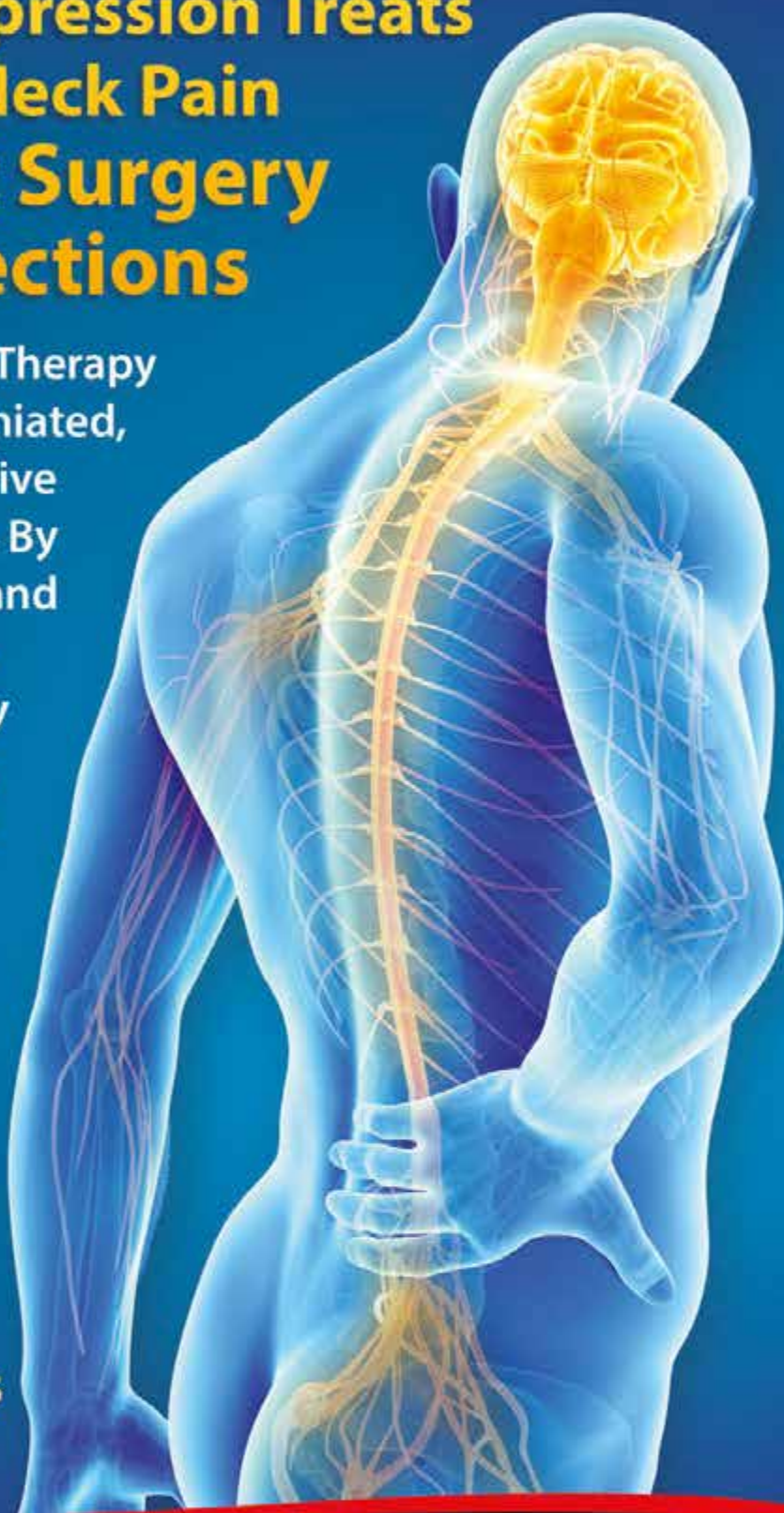
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MAKING HER MARK

— By Angel Morris

Sonja Brown is no stranger to being first at things, and a lifetime of milestones have paved the way for her role as Glenn Heights' first African American female mayor. "My parents instilled a strong sense of community and civic responsibility. I learned from an early age the importance of leaving a place better than when you found it," she explained. "I am proud to serve as an inspiration for future generations of leaders. But I also recognize that my journey is just one chapter in a larger story of resilience, perseverance and triumph."

Growing up in Dallas, Sonja was captain of her high school swim team and the first female percussion captain of the high school band. "With a focus on radio/TV in high school, I grew up wanting to be the next Lola Johnson," she recalled regarding Dallas's second black female TV news anchor. She graduated at just 16, and ultimately earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Business Management from Canterbury University.

Re-entering the workforce when her son was 5, Sonja began a career with Lancaster Independent School District as a substitute teacher. She transitioned to the communications department, where she rose through the ranks to lead communications coordinator. "Now, as the government affairs coordinator for the district, I serve as a liaison between the district and local, state and federal elected officials," Sonja said. "I advocate for the district's interests, monitor legislative developments and collaborate with external partners to advance policies and initiatives that support our students, educators and families."

Skills honed throughout her life made Sonja a fit for local government. "In college, I helped register my peers to vote. Later, I became a volunteer deputy registrar, furthering my efforts to empower my community and amplify their voices in local governance," she noted.

Driven by a desire to effect positive change, Sonja ran for Glenn Heights City Council Place 1 in 2018. Despite being a newcomer to politics, Sonja resonated with voters, and she was elected. "I championed initiatives to improve infrastructure, enhance public safety and promote economic development," she outlined.

In 2021, Sonja ran unopposed for re-election and later announced her candidacy for mayor in 2022. "One of my proudest achievements as



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mayor has been building bridges and forging relationships with other elected officials and governmental entities,” she said.

Sonja’s favorite aspects of Glenn Heights include close-knit neighborhoods where residents look out for one another and a growing downtown area. “I envision charming boutiques, cozy cafes and family-owned businesses near the new city center,” she expressed.

Sonja said she is aware of challenges facing the city but is buoyed by projects such as the expansion of East Bear Creek Road, which has been driven by County Commissioner John Wiley Price. She said the support of Ellis County Judge Todd Little has also been essential toward growing Glenn Heights. Additionally, she credits Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett for

championing the interests of the city at the federal level. “I look forward to continued collaboration with these and other partners to ensure a brighter future for those who call Glenn Heights home,” Sonja promised.

Sonja remembers that future generations have those of the past to thank for progress. “My mother faced discrimination and injustice regularly, yet refused to compromise her dignity or self-respect. I vividly remember stories where she would go hungry rather than enter through the back door of restaurants, refusing to accept anything less than equal treatment,” she noted, calling her mother her biggest role model. “I also draw inspiration from trailblazers like Shirley Chisholm, whose groundbreaking 1972 candidacy for president of the United States paved the way for women and people of color in politics,” Sonja continued.

In her milestone role as Glenn Heights mayor, Sonja offers advice to others, particularly women of color. “Remember that your voice is your most powerful tool for effecting change, so use it boldly and unapologetically to advocate for the issues that matter most to you and to uplift the voices of those who have been marginalized or silenced,” she advised.

While raising her daughter and son remains Sonja’s proudest accomplishment, publishing the book, *Twenty-one to Life*, is another point of pride. The book outlines her experience on a fasting diet in relation to the Bible’s Book of Daniel.

From writing to reflecting on her time as a high school athlete and musician, to her career with Lancaster ISD, and now as a politician, Sonja reiterates that each step one takes can lead one toward changing the future. “My personal and professional goals are deeply intertwined, driven by a commitment to creating a fair and equitable society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive,” she stated. “Central to this mission is my dedication to being the voice of the voiceless, championing causes that promote access to essential resources and opportunities — including education, health care and broadband, which has become increasingly essential for participation in modern society.

“My journey from a passionate advocate for community involvement to the highest office in the city is a testament to the power of leadership, the importance of civic engagement and the enduring impact of leaving a place better than when you found it.” **NOW**



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— By Angel Morris

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Papa Joes BBQ Pro Shop was born in the retirement of Joe Tucker, who sold his previous business after four decades. Joe opened the barbecue supply business with his wife, Leslie, in Red Oak in November 2023. “This new business resulted out of the joy of cooking for family and friends, as well as participating in cook-off competition,” Joe explained. “I discovered a variety of good rubs,



seasoning and sauces made by local people through the competitions, which allowed me to be able to not only sample these products but test prep several of them, as well.”

Recreating those flavors was challenging, as finding local retailers carrying a large selection of barbecue cooking and grilling supplies was difficult. “This difficulty caused me to have to purchase most of these products online or travel to locations sometimes hundreds of miles away,” Joe calculated.

Now, Papa Joes BBQ Pro Shop carries a large, award-winning selection of flavorful rubs, sauces, injections and brines, as well as various seasonings and glazes to add great taste to all kinds of meats, vegetables and more. “We can even add flavor to your desserts,” Leslie shared. “Plus, we offer pellets, wood, grills, smokers and other barbecue supplies and accessories.”

Most Papa Joes BBQ Pro Shop products are one of a kind, crafted and made by local people. Some of them are even utilized by local restaurants. Depending on container size, individual prices for rubs, seasonings, sauces and glazes range from \$7.95 to \$21.99. "The goal is to be your one-stop shop for barbecue and grilling needs and help everyone add a great, mouthwatering taste to whatever they are cooking — that taste that keeps them coming back for more," Joe expressed.

Some popular product lines include Big Wick's, Crazy T's, Gulf Coast Smoke, Heath Riles, BPOS Seasonings, Schmitt's Twisted Throttle BBQ Sauce, Uncle Steve's Shake, Meat Church, Texas Pepper Jelly, Texas Oil Dust, Smokey Woods and Curt Special Almighty Seasoning. "I can't say there's just one favorite. It depends on every individual's taste and what you're cooking!" Joe admitted.

Papa Joes BBQ Pro Shop even stocks boutique wares, like cups, T-shirts, socks, earrings and hats; spa items, like body scrub and bath bombs; sports-themed paraphernalia; home decor; and seasonal gift baskets for men and women. Lastly, Joe is always happy to give customers cooking advice and tips that he has discovered through competition and cooking classes at no charge. "I opened the retail shop because I wanted to provide a business that meets the needs for both the local backyard cooks and grillers and the ones who love to compete in cook-off competitions," Joe explained.

Joe is no stranger to customer service, coming out of retirement from another successful business. "I owned a wrecker and towing business for 41-and-a-half years in Duncanville, where we towed all kinds of vehicles for not only individual people but many automotive repair shops, dealerships, several local cities and law enforcement departments," he outlined.

Joe moved to Red Oak after marrying Leslie, who had raised her own children in the community. "We've had so much support," Joe noted. "And we're just really proud to be here. Come by and let us show you how we can make your barbecue the best it's ever been." **NOW**

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Zoomed In: Natali Moreno

By Angel Morris

After graduating from Red Oak High School in 2018, Natali Moreno enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. Today, the 24-year-old's military occupational specialty is aviation ordnance, and she was pinned as sergeant in less than three years. "I graduated from drill instructor school at Marine Corps Recruit Depot in September of 2023, which was a goal I set for myself the day I graduated boot camp in South Carolina," Natali recalled.

Natali has traveled to Japan twice with the USMC and has enlisted for a second time. "I'm proud of the goals I've achieved so far," Natali, pictured here with her niece, shared. "And I plan on continuing to serve full-time as a career until retirement."



Gravy and More co-owners Phillip Hughes and Michelle Bezanilla mark the restaurant's one-year anniversary with a classic car cruise-in event.



Annalaura Nail Lounge owner Piper White celebrates her birthday and the salon's one-year anniversary.



Red Oak Police Department hosts its monthly Coffee with Command Staff at Chick-fil-A.



Class of 2025 Varsity Cheerleaders attend their last high school cheer camp.



City of Glenn Heights Animal Control Officers Monica Salmeron and Matthew Lopez, and DeSoto ACO Noah Cherry, teach the community about reptiles.



A volunteer prepares the cannon for Will Turner, Baylor Scott & White Medical Center representative, during the Red Oak Area Chamber Annual Golf Tournament.

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CookingNOW In the Kitchen With

MARIA GILL

— By Angel Morris



As a teenager, Maria Gill learned to cook during a mission trip with few utensils, ingredients or spices. Since moving from Brazil to Glenn Heights almost five years ago, she has expanded her cooking skills. “In my first month of marriage, my husband and I lived with his brother, and my sister-in-law taught me tricks to baking bread,” Maria recalled. “When we got our own place, I became really good at making my own. I used to dislike making it, but now bread is my favorite thing to make!”

Maria enjoys cooking and baking when she’s not working as a real estate agent. “I especially like hosting friends and family,” she said, “and always creating a beautiful tablescape!” **NOW**

Pão de Queijo (Cheese Bread)

- 4 cups tapioca flour**
- 1 cup milk**
- 2/3 cup oil**
- 1 cup water**
- 1/2 tsp. salt**
- 3 large eggs**
- 2 cups Parmesan cheese, grated**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 375 F. In a large bowl, add the tapioca flour; set aside.
- 2.** In a large pan, place the milk, oil, water and salt; bring to a boil. Pour into the

tapioca; stir until combined. Cool.

3. Add the egg; stir until combined. Add the cheese; stir until incorporated and a sticky dough forms.

4. Shape into balls; place on a parchment-lined baking tray. Bake 15-20 minutes, until lightly golden and puffed. Eat warm or cool.

Brazilian Carrot Cake

- Cake:**
- 2 cups all-purpose flour**
 - 2 tsp. baking powder**
 - Pinch salt**

2 large carrots, peeled and cut into chunks (enough to fill a liquid 1-cup measurer to the top)

- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar**
- 3/4 cup vegetable or canola oil**
- 3 large eggs**
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract**

Frosting:

- 1 14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk**
- 100 g. milk chocolate chips**
- 100 g. heavy whipping cream**

- 1. For cake:** Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease and flour a Bundt or sheet pan.
- 2.** Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a large bowl, whisking to combine; set aside.
- 3.** Crush the carrots in a large bowl. Add the sugar; blend until creamy. Add the oil; blend until smooth.
- 4.** Crack the eggs into a small bowl; add the vanilla. Whisk until combined. Pour the egg mixture into a blender, pulsing 2-3 times. (Do not overmix.)
- 5.** Pour the egg mixture into the bowl with the carrot mixture; fold until well combined. Pour into the prepared pan; bake until a cake tester/toothpick inserted into the middle comes out slightly crumbly

to clean (about 35-40 minutes).

6. Move the cake pan to a rack to cool for about 10 minutes. Remove the cake from the pan; let it cool on the rack.

7. For frosting: Add all the ingredients to a nonstick saucepan; stir over medium to high heat. Stir about 10 minutes, scraping the sides of the pan with a rubber spatula to avoid burning. Cook until the mixture reaches 185-195 F, using a candy thermometer or regular food thermometer to check. Cool to room temperature before frosting the cake.

No-Bake Raspberry Cheesecake

Base:

250 g. shortbread biscuits
80 g. unsalted butter, melted

Filling:

500 g. full-fat cream cheese
100 g. icing sugar
350 ml. double cream
250 g. white chocolate
250 g. fresh raspberries

Garnish:

500 g. raspberries

1. For base: Blitz the biscuits in a food processor or crush them in a Ziploc bag with a rolling pin. Add the butter; pulse until combined, or mix together in a bowl.

2. Add the mixture to an 8-inch-deep springform pan. Press firmly into an even layer.

3. For filling: In a stand mixer with a whisk attachment or in a large bowl, whisk the cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Pour in the cream; whisk until thick.

4. Melt the chocolate in a bowl over a pan of simmering water, or in a microwave for 15 seconds at a time, stirring in intervals until fully melted; cool. Gently mix in the raspberries with a spatula.

5. Combine the chocolate/raspberry mixture with the cream cheese mixture. Spread the mix evenly over the biscuit base. Chill in the refrigerator at least 5-6 hours, or preferably overnight.

6. Top with garnish. Run a knife around the edges and carefully remove from the pan to serve.

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JULY

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.

7/3

Patriotic Palooza:

Kids story and craft time. 10:30-11:30 a.m., Red Oak Library, 101 S. Live Oak St.

7/15

Move and Shake:

A professional instructor leads an introductory dance class. 11:00 a.m.-noon, Red Oak Library, 101 S. Live Oak St.

7/8-7/10

Kids Summer Bash:

Recreation and services for kids culminating in a block party for the whole family.

Monday-Wednesday: 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; **Wednesday:** 6:45-8:15 p.m., Oaks Church, 777 S. I-35E. Learn more at oakskids.com.

7/27

Lemonade Lessons:

Students engage in financial literacy lessons by learning to run a lemonade stand. 1:30-2:30 p.m., Red Oak Library, 101 S. Live Oak St.

Wednesdays

The Chosen Viewing: Wednesdays through August 28. 6:30-7:30 p.m., First United Methodist Church

Red Oak, 600 Daubitz Dr.

Summer Cinema:

Free family-friendly event showing the movie, *Migration* (July 10), *Wonka* (July 17), *Strange World* (July 24) and *Kung Fu Panda 4* (July 31). Drinks and snacks provided while supplies last. 12:30-2:00 p.m., Red Oak Community Room, 101 S. Live Oak.

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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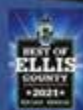
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