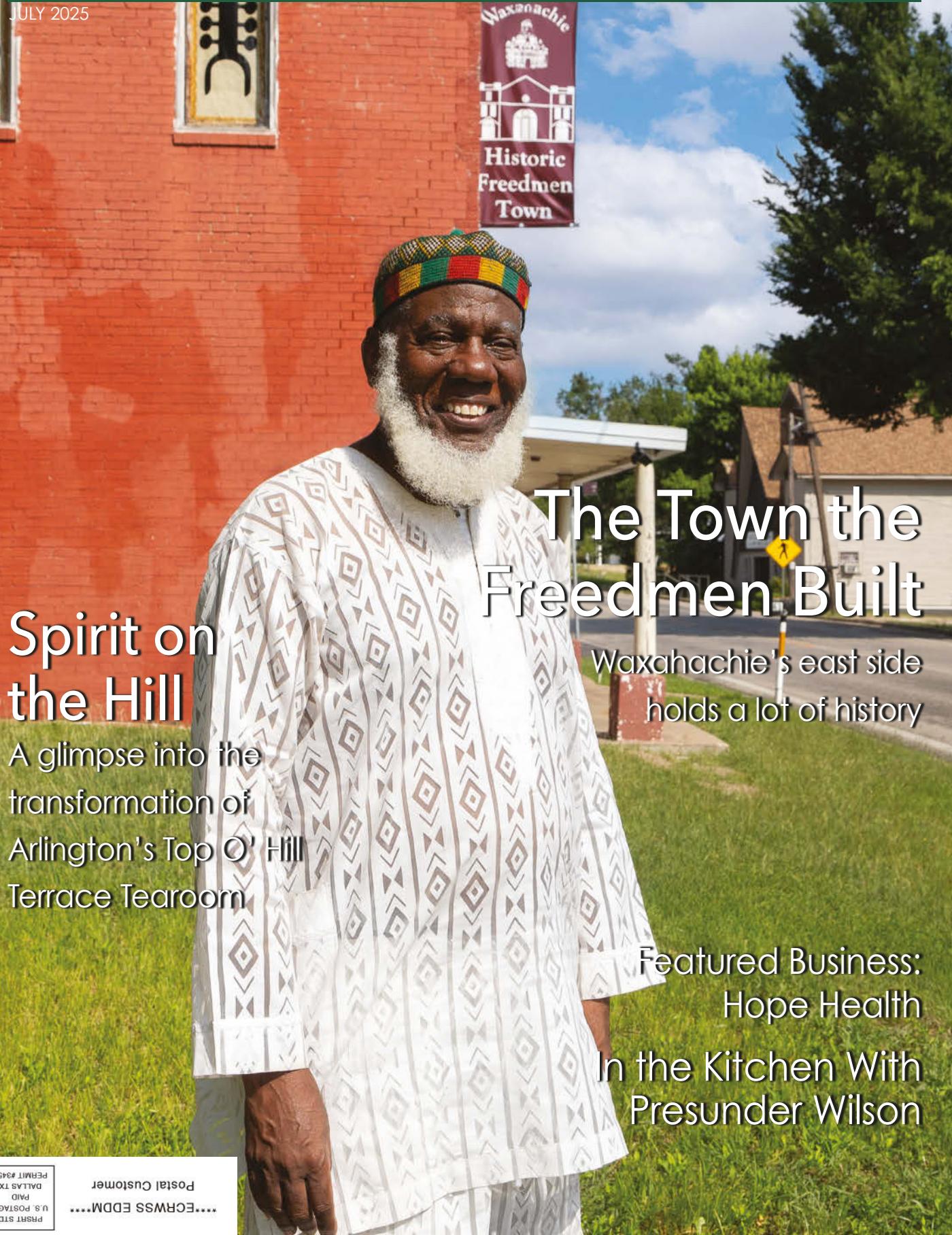


# WaxahachieNOW

MAGAZINE

JULY 2025



## Spirit on the Hill

A glimpse into the transformation of Arlington's Top O' Hill Terrace Tearoom

## The Town the Freedmen Built

Waxahachie's east side holds a lot of history

Featured Business:  
Hope Health

In the Kitchen With  
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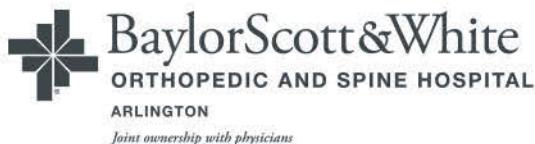


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# EDITOR'S NOTE

Vacation time ...

When I was a kid, most of our vacations were to Colorado to see Nannie, our mother's mother. She lived in the San Luis Valley for several years. One year, she was living at South Fork, where her husband was working on a ranch. Their house was right on the Rio Grande. At that place, it was a clear, cold stream.

We went wading and pulled several small granite boulders from the riverbed. One was a roundish, drab purple chunk, with a more vibrant purple stripe. Another was a smaller, lumpy yellow and brown stone. My sister and I named them. The purple one was Tina. The yellow one was George. We had those rocks for decades. We may still have them somewhere.

While we were there, the owner of the ranch slaughtered a buffalo. Nannie cooked a delicious hump roast. I don't remember any of the other meals. We spent time with our aunt and uncle, Mom's younger siblings. We sang songs and listened to funny stories full of lies, exaggeration and silliness.

Before we left, some of the other Dallas relatives also showed up. It turned into a sort of impromptu family reunion.

Rock on!

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July 2025  
Volume 22, Issue 7

## ON THE COVER



Dr. Rasheed works to preserve the vanishing history of Freedmen's Town.

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Subscriptions are available at the rate of \$35 per year or \$3.50 per issue. Subscriptions should be sent to: NOW Magazines, P.O. Box 1071, Waxahachie, TX 75168. For advertising rates or editorial correspondence, call (972) 937-8447 or visit [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).

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Meredith A.  
Radiology/MRI Tech

# HEALING.

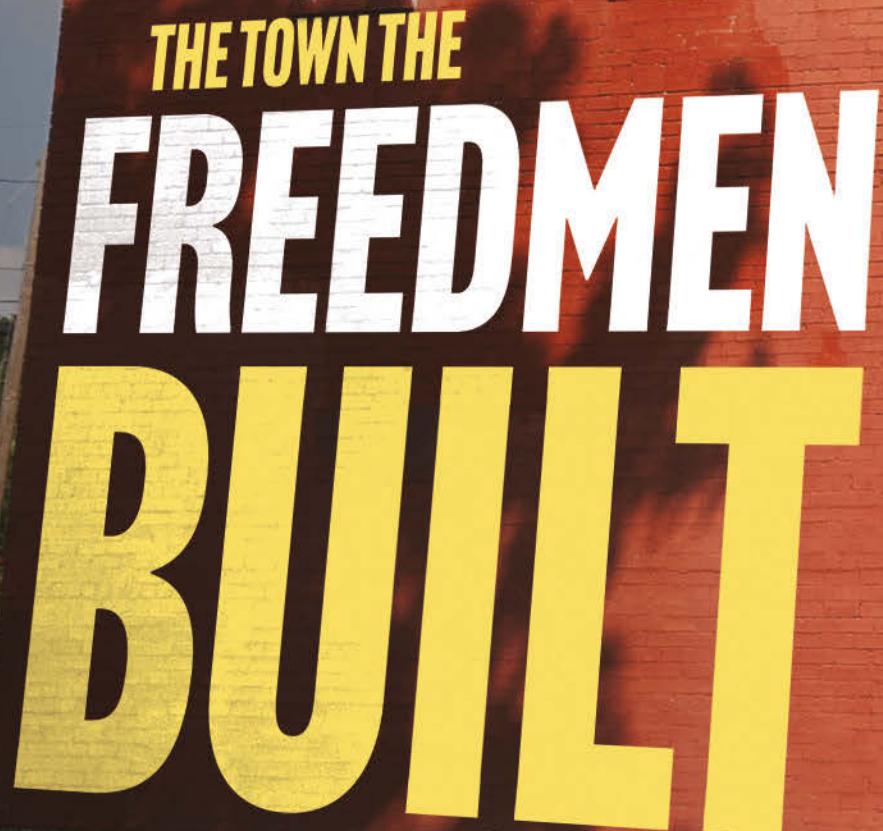
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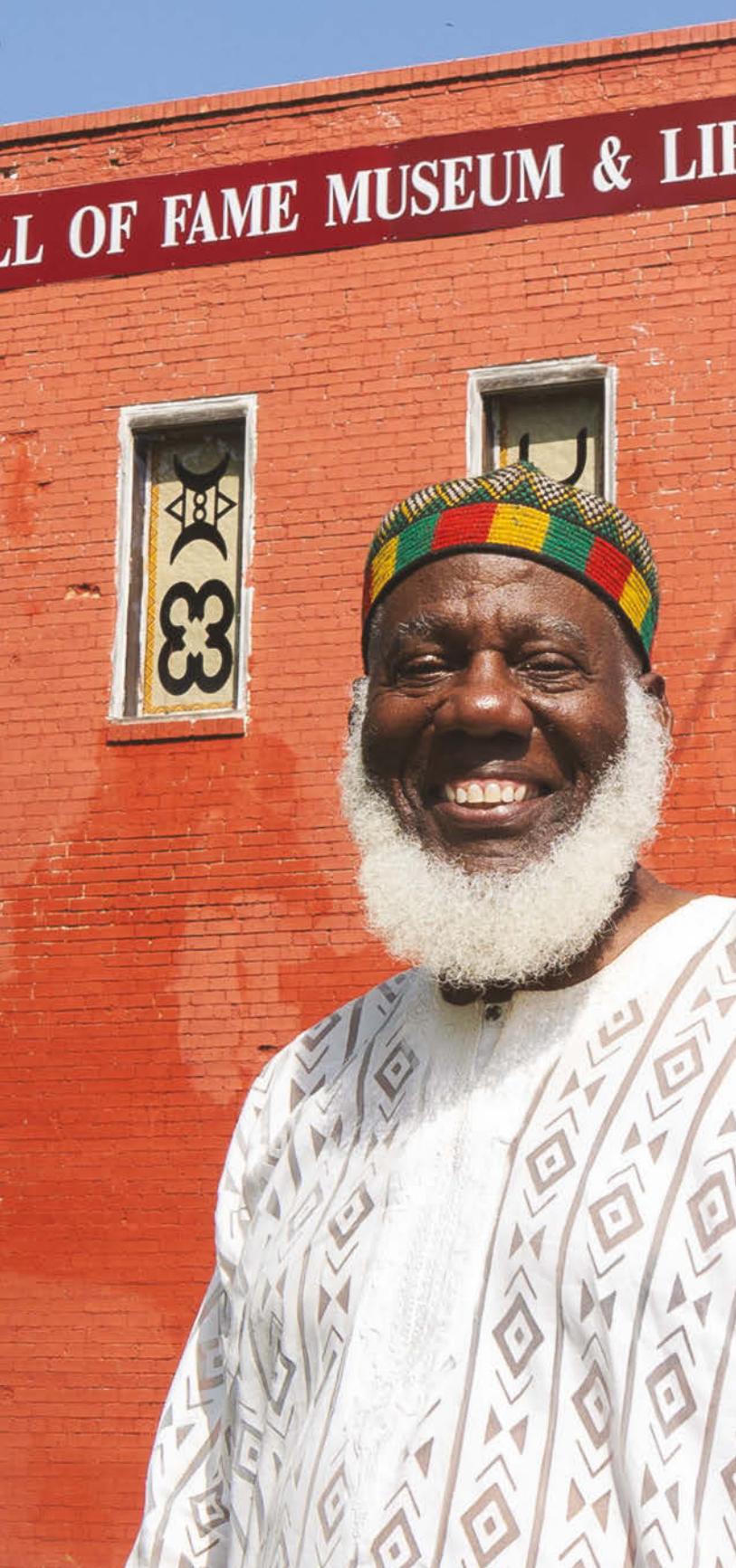
*Old East Main Street, what is now Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., was long the heart of the Black community in Waxahachie. In the days before Emancipation, this area was called Negro Town on old maps. But after news reached Texas that the slaves were free, this area was renamed. Abraham Lincoln established the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865, to help the newly freed former slaves establish new lives for themselves. Like many other similar communities, the east side of Waxahachie became known as Freedmen's Town.*

This is an area rich in history, but many of the physical markers have already disappeared, and many more are under threat from time and its effects. Dr. Jamal Rasheed of the Ellis County African American Hall of Fame Museum and Library is working hard to see that this history is not forgotten. "East Main, MLK, from the 200 block to the 600 block, was the Black business district. This was Freedmen's Town. On the other side of the railroad tracks was New Town, where the more affluent Blacks lived. Freedmen's Town had its own school, Oak Lawn. There were cafes, a blacksmith, churches, the Gem Theater and a hospital. Edna Black's boarding house was listed in the Green Book of Safe Travel. Leonard Carol Davis built most of the houses on this side of town."



# THE TOWN THE **FREEDMEN BUILT**

— By Adam Walker



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Unfortunately, much of the land Freedmen's Town was built on is in the floodplain. So it's difficult to repair, maintain and preserve these structures. Many of them are already gone. The two-room hospital that stood on the lot across from the Masonic lodge building, which now houses the museum, is only preserved by the outline of its foundations and the monument that nearly fills the space of the former building. This hospital was the only access to health care the residents of Freedmen's Town had for many years. Now it is a memory.

Next to Samaria Baptist Church, there used to stand a cafe and several houses. Those are long gone. The other major church in Freedmen's Town was Joshua's Chapel. Two adjoining cemeteries on East Jefferson served the African American community. "At first it was just called Colored Cemetery. Prince Hall Fraternal Cemetery is the area inside the fence. There are burials dating back to the early 1800s. There's one grave I'm aware of dating to 1821. Wakefield is the cemetery west of the fence. There used to be an old community of wooden houses there. Mr. Tatum tore them all down. It was outside the city limits. Some people say there are unmarked Indian burials there. Wakefield is almost full now. Prince Hall still has space. It's still an active cemetery. But you have to be careful. "There are over 3,000 burials marked with headstones and another maybe 29 percent are photographed and marked with blank headstones," according to Dr. Rasheed who keeps the historical burial records.

Dr. Rasheed has been active in getting historical markers for some of the remaining buildings in Freedmen's Town and for several of those long





gone, so this history will be preserved for future generations. One of the remaining houses is known as the Sweatt house, where the first African American to attend law school in Texas once lived. There is a marker across the street from the house, explaining its significance.

The lodge building was an active center of social life. The room upstairs was rented for parties and weddings and graduations. Dr. Rasheed has restored the room, so it's once again usable. "This building was in bad shape when I bought it in 2006," he remembered. "There were leaks. The city fixed the roof." The downstairs now contains the museum tracing the history of the African American experience in the U.S. and here in Ellis County. One room has a wall dedicated to the Hall of Fame, where leaders like the first Black city counselors and mayors of various Ellis County towns are remembered, along with educators, artists, doctors, lawyers and other community leaders. The same room houses the growing collection of books on and by Black Americans. It's a large building, but not large enough to contain so much history. Too much is still in storage, awaiting its turn in the light. "We're attempting to purchase land and build an annex onto the back to allow more room for more exhibits. We also have plans for murals on the outside of the building's east and west sides to depict life in Ellis County and honor Waxahachie's own Bessie Coleman. We have pages on GoFundMe and Givelify to raise money for the annex, for the building and for parking."

This part of Waxahachie's heritage is slipping away. But people like Dr. Rasheed are working to preserve what's left, so future generations can remember where we came from, how far we've come and how far there is yet to go. **NOW**

An advertisement for Tire Town. The top half features a photograph of a gas station with a sign that says 'HAPPY 4TH OF JULY' and 'TIRE TOWN'. The bottom half features a red Corvette Stingray. Text on the right side reads: 'TIRE TOWN', 'FAMILY OWNED & OPERATED SINCE 1980', '300 WATER ST., WAXAHACHIE', 'Tire Sales and Repair', 'Come see why we've been in business over 45 years!', '972.937.1100', and 'www.tiretownwaxa.com'.



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# TALES OF TEXAS SPIRIT ON THE HILL

— By Emma McKay



*With a century separating us from the days of Prohibition, the age of speakeasies seems like a distant, almost fictional moment in history. However, history may be closer than you think. Located in Arlington, Top O' Hill Terrace, served as a gambling den to some of American history's favorite celebrities for nearly 30 years.*

In 1921, Beulah Adams Marshall, a former culinary writer for the *Dallas Journal*, saw the need for an eatery along the newly constructed cross-continental Bankhead Highway. She and her husband, Thomas, purchased a hill on the edge of Arlington and constructed a sandstone house to host Beulah's vision. The tearoom became a hit amongst residents of the DFW area. People traveled from all over to try her famous chicken fried steaks or attend events hosted at the tearoom.

Upon visiting Beulah's Top O' Hill Terrace tearoom, Fred and Mary Browning found potential in its location to create a highly profitable gambling hotspot right off the popular thoroughfare. In 1930, the Brownings bought the property from the Marshalls and converted it into a destination for illicit activities such as drinking, gambling, prostitution and horse betting. Fred Browning already owned clubs in Richmond, Texas, and near Tulsa, Oklahoma, so establishing a location in Arlington wouldn't be a troublesome pursuit. After all, he'd built up a reputation in the gambling world and had connections he could use to fill Top O' Hill with dealers, dancers and moonshine. This also meant he knew what precautions he'd need to take in ensuring his business would survive police raids.

Fred began to make renovations to the land to keep his staff, patrons and business safe from "Johnny Law." A sandstone wall was erected around the property with guards posted at its iron gate entrance. At the guard towers, warning buzzers were installed, which, when pressed, alerted those in the main house that the cops were on their way, giving them time to hide the evidence or escape.

As the gambling den's popularity grew, Fred expanded his operation. He dug a two-story basement underneath the house, designating it as the base of illegal operations. He also created a labyrinth of escape tunnels, should the need for a quick exit arise. Some of these tunnels spilled out into the nearby woods or circled back to the tearoom's garden, allowing guests to pretend they were merely enjoying the flowers and teacakes. Although many of these tunnels have been found over the years, historians believe there may have been many more which were lost to time.

In the height of its success, gamblers traveled far and wide to spend the evening at Top O' Hill, including celebrities such as John Wayne, Frank Sinatra, Ginger Rogers and the infamous Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. To ensure these visitors weren't cops in disguise, the Brownings created a series of checkpoints patrons had to pass through before reaching the main attraction.

Thanks to Fred's precautions, in the nearly 30 years of its operation, his gambling club survived several police raids. However, that all changed on August 10, 1947. Led by M.T. "Lone Wolf" Gonzaullas, a small team of Texas Rangers crawled through the woods, effectively giving Fred's guards the slip. The men snuck through a back door, catching patrons by surprise. The rangers arrested eight employees and 50 patrons and confiscated \$25,000 worth of equipment, which, according to Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis' inflation calculator would equate to over \$352,000 in 2024. This raid marked the end of an era for the tearoom.



Photo by David Pillow | Dreamstime.com.

Top O' Hill gambling parlor never regained the same number of patrons as it did in its heyday. Founder of Bible Baptist Seminary, Frank J. Norris had been one of Top O' Hill's biggest opposers during its operation, and had vowed to one day own the land and shut down the gambling parlor. In 1956, four years after Pastor Norris passed, Bible Baptist Seminary, now known as Arlington Baptist University, purchased the property. In 2003, the Texas Historical Commission named the tearoom as a historical landmark. These days, visitors can donate \$10 to schedule a tour of the tearoom to learn about its history and see surviving memorabilia collected by Vickie Bryant, wife of former university president, David Bryant. **NOW**

*Photos, unless otherwise noted, by George Moreno from the Top O'Hill Terrace Collection, courtesy of Arlington Baptist University.*

#### Sources:

1. Barker, E. and Bryant, V. (2012). *Top O' Hill Terrace*. Arcadia Publishing.
2. [hmdb.org/m.asp?m=245089](http://hmdb.org/m.asp?m=245089).
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## Zoomed In: Myla and Ethan Combs

By Adam Walker

Myla Combs and her big brother, Ethan, who does not like to smile, came to see the Creature Teacher and her assistant, Carley, the handler, present some exotic animals including a skink, a chinchilla, toucans, a python and a baby red kangaroo. "The animals were cool," Ethan declared. "I like the snake best," speaking of the albino reticulated python.

"I liked them all," Myla added, not wanting to play favorites.

Both siblings declared Angus, the red kangaroo, to be "cool," and Myla noted how soft he was. The kangaroo, who wore a diaper for the occasion, remained safely swaddled in the arms of Carley while all the children and parents stood in a line halfway around the Lyceum for their turns to pet the animals.



Astrid Chavez and Lanie Gillen share a dessert and catch up after not seeing each other for a long time... a week-and-a-half.



GrandC (Carolyn Campbell), helps Emersyn Simmons (center) celebrate her 4th birthday with Bella Barnch, London Dowell and Drew Simmons at Waxahachie Urban Air.



Railport Brewing Co. celebrates their seventh anniversary with a ribbon cutting.

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# BusinessNOW

# Hope Health

— By Adam Walker

**Hope Health**  
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(972) 923-2440  
[hopehealthtx.org](http://hopehealthtx.org)  
Facebook: Hope Health Ellis County  
Instagram: @hopehealthelliscounty

**Hours:** Monday-Thursday: 7:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.  
Friday: 7:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Hope Health is an affordable option for health care in Ellis County. They have two locations, the main one here in Waxahachie and a second location in Ennis. They're a federally qualified community health center set up to provide affordable health care to the region. "We use a sliding fee scale based on your income and family size if you don't have insurance, or if your insurance has a high deductible or co-pay," Angie Gann, their revenue cycle manager, explained. "We take most forms of insurance, including PPOs, HMOs, Medicare and Medicaid. If your insurance



provider isn't in our system, we look to see if we're in network. And anyone is welcome to apply for our sliding fee discount program."

"We offer primary care services, like annual checkups, sick visits and monitoring chronic conditions," Kevin Crouch, the outreach coordinator, explained. "We have labs on-site for doing blood work. We also offer pediatrics, women's health, behavioral health and dental care, all under one roof. If your primary care provider needs to refer you to another department, they don't give you a card and tell you to call someone. They walk you across the hall and introduce you. Our behavioral health services include counseling and a nurse practitioner who can prescribe medications. Behavioral health and dental services are available to established patients."

If you're interested in becoming a patient at Hope Health, you need to fill out the registration forms on their website or in their office, and submit them with any required documentation. Then, they'll call to set up your first

appointment. After that, you are eligible for other services, like sick visits, or some procedures. "There are some medical issues that we are not able to treat, such as a broken bone. For those types of conditions, you will need to go to urgent care or the ER. However, we are able to refer out to many specialists, if needed" Angie explained.

Another service they refer is mammography. "But several times a year Moncrief Cancer Institute brings their bus here to do mobile testing, and we can put you on the reservation list for that, if that's more convenient for you," Angie added.

## "WE ARE HERE TO TREAT THE WHOLE PERSON, NOT JUST ONE THING."

"One misconception people have is that we only take you if you don't have insurance," Kevin explained. "Some of our patients have very good insurance, but choose to come here because of the quality of care they receive and because we have multiple wellness services all in one location. Wait times for initial appointments are not nearly as long here as at some other providers. We have a number of providers, so you're not waiting on just one person to have time in their schedule. Our providers like to be able to refer on-site, and they don't feel as constrained by insurance companies here, so they feel like they're able to provide better care."

"We are here to treat the whole person, not just one thing," Angie added. Their outreach and enrollment specialists help patients and other members of the community access other services such as government programs like pregnancy Medicaid, food banks, rent assistance and employment services. "If you can't eat well and take care of your basic needs, medical treatment is not going to be as effective. We're all about affordable, accessible health care." Their new location off of Farley Road is designed for easy access and comfort. **NOW**

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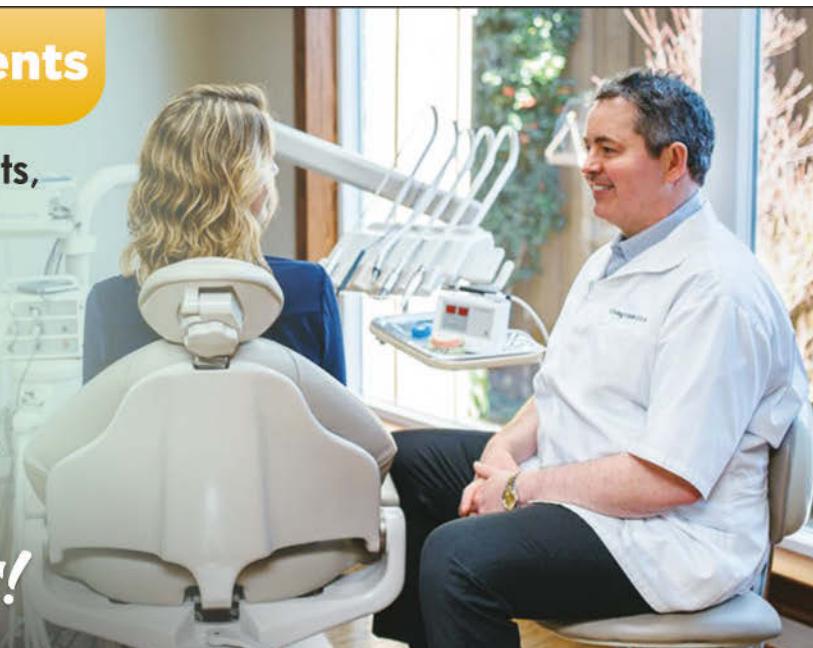
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Baked Pork Chops

## CookingNOW

# IN THE KITCHEN WITH PRESUNDER WILSON

— By Adam Walker



Waxahachie's Presunder Wilson enjoys cooking, which she learned from her mother. "She started teaching me when I was probably 12 or 13," Presunder said. She doesn't really have a favorite spice or cooking technique, but she grew up in Louisiana and says that experience influenced how she cooks. "I have some holiday recipes that I inherited from my mom and other relatives. I mostly cook for my family. If somebody wants to learn, I'll teach them, like I'm teaching my grandkids now. They watch me in the kitchen, while I cook."

She doesn't claim to have a lot of hobbies, but in her free time, when she isn't cooking, Presunder likes to read and watch TV. That's her way of relaxing after a long day at work. **NOW**

## Bean 'n' Wiener Boat

**1** loaf French bread  
**1/4** cup butter, softened  
**1** 21-oz. can Van Camp's Pork and Beans  
**1/2** lb. wieners, cut in chunks  
**1/4** cup brown sugar, packed  
**1** tsp. mustard  
**1** Tbsp. dry onion soup mix  
**3** slices American cheese, halved diagonally

1. Scoop out the inner part of the bread loaf, leaving 1/2-inch thickness along the bottom and sides. Spread the butter on the inside of the bread boat. Place on a cookie sheet; bake at 350 F for 15 minutes, until golden and crusty.
2. In a saucepan, combine the pork and

beans, wieners, brown sugar, mustard and soup mix. Heat thoroughly, stirring gently.  
3. Pour the heated ingredients into the bread boat. Top with cheese slices. Return to the oven; continue baking for an additional 10-15 minutes.

## Baked Pork Chops

**6** pork chops  
**Salt**, to taste  
**Pepper**, to taste  
**1** bell pepper, cut in rings  
**2** small onions, sliced thick  
**1** lemon, sliced thin  
**1** cup ketchup

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F
2. Place the chops in a casserole dish. Season with salt and pepper.

3. Place a pepper ring on each chop. Put an onion slice inside each pepper ring. Top with a lemon slice. Cover with ketchup.

4. Bake for 1 hour.

## Ham and Noodle Casserole

**2** tsp. vegetable oil  
**3/4** cup onion, diced  
**1/2** cup bell pepper, diced  
**1/2** lb. wide noodles  
**1 3/4** cups canned tomatoes  
**1** cup water  
**1 1/2** cups ham, diced  
**1** tsp. salt  
**1/4** tsp. pepper  
**1/2** tsp. paprika  
**1/2** lb. cheddar cheese, grated

1. In a saucepan, over low heat, add the oil; cook the onions and peppers until the onions are transparent. Add everything, except the cheese, and simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in the cheese.

2. Pour the mixture into a greased 2-qt. casserole dish. Bake at 350 F for 40-45 minutes.

## Potato Pancakes

**2** eggs  
**2** Tbsp. milk  
**2** Tbsp. melted butter  
**2** Tbsp. flour  
**3/4** tsp. salt  
**1/8** tsp. pepper  
**1/4** small onion, sliced  
**2** cups raw potatoes, peeled and diced

1. In a food processor or blender, add the first 7 ingredients and half of the potatoes. Mix for 5 seconds. Add the remaining potatoes; mix for another 8 seconds, until coarsely chopped.

2. Heat and grease your griddle or large frying pan.

3. For each pancake, pour about 1/4 cup of the mixture onto the griddle, and spread it into a 4-inch pancake. Brown on the first side. Turn and brown on the second side.



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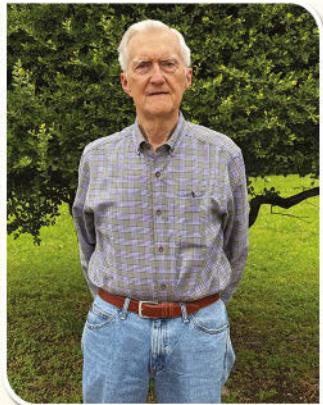
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### Love Your Neighbor

Love Your Neighbor supports community unity through service projects. Support may be shown through donations or purchases at the Love Your Neighbor Thrift Store. Dr. Jim Markle, 410 W. Madison St., Waxahachie, TX 75165, (214) 463-5519.

### FirstLook

FirstLook is a no-cost clinic providing sexual health and pregnancy services, education and support to help parents-to-be embrace life. Support may be given through friendsoffirstlook.org or by donating to or purchasing from The Thrifty Lark located at 1204 Ferris Ave. CEO Donna Young, 213 YMCA Dr., Waxahachie, TX 75165, firstlookcenter.org, (972) 938-7900.

### Waxahachie Symphony Association

The Waxahachie Symphony Association supports classical music in Ellis County by bringing world-class performers to Waxahachie for low-cost concerts, by providing scholarships for the next generation of musicians and free concerts for fifth-graders. President Melissa Baird Chapman, P.O. Box 405, Waxahachie, TX 75165, waxahachiesymphony.org, (210) 865-6185.

### Brave Like Ellie

Brave Like Ellie serves families affected by childhood cancer at any stage of their journey, by providing them with Brave Boxes. Founder Jennifer Johnson, 316 N. College St., #83, Waxahachie, TX 75165, bravelikeellie.org, (972) 896-8282.

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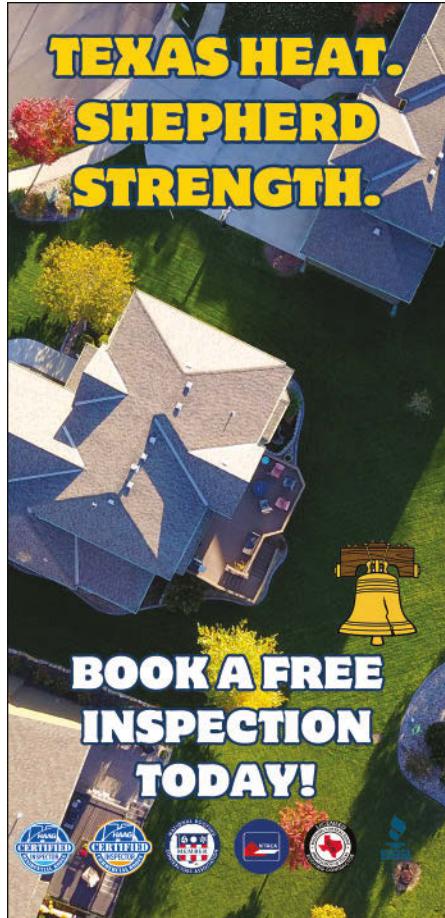
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Some events may have been cancelled or rescheduled while we were at press. Check with individual organizations or your city or Chamber websites to verify dates and times.

**7/1-7/7**

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Free. **Monday-Friday:** 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.; **Saturday:** 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Ennis Welcome Center, 201 NW Main St., Ennis. [www.elliscountyquilters.com](http://www.elliscountyquilters.com).

**7/3-7/4**

**Crape Myrtle Festival:**  
**Thursday:** Events begin: 6:00 p.m.; fireworks: 9:15 p.m., Waxahachie Sports Complex, 151 Broadhead Rd. **Friday:** Hometown Parade: 10:00 a.m., from Getzendander Park down Main Street to Downtown Waxahachie.

**7/4**

**VFW Fourth of July Lunch:**

Everyone is welcome for pulled pork sandwiches and sides. Free. Noon, VFW Post 3894, 1405 N. I-35 E.

**7/5**

**Summer Soul Affair:**

A celebration of soul, funk and R&B, food and good vibes. Free. 7:00-11:00 p.m., Railyard Park, 455 College St.

**7/8**

**Carter BloodCare**

**Blood Drive:**

Hosted by the Waxahachie Rotary Club. 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Sims Library, 515 W. Main St.

**7/12**

**Cars in the Park Car Show:**

9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Getzendander Park, 400 S. Grand Ave.

**7/18-7/19**

**Miss Nelson is Missing!:**

Presented by Ellis County Children's Theater. 2:00 p.m., Coleman Fine Arts Center, 1000 Hwy. 77 N. Ticket info: [general@ecctheater.org](mailto:general@ecctheater.org)

**7/25-7/27**

**Dare to Dream Jr.:**

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**Sunday:** 2:30 p.m., University Church, 221 Solon Rd.

Tickets: <https://www.waxahachiecommunitytheatre.com/>.

**7/26**

**Let's Go Girls – A Tribute to Country's Leading Ladies:**

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