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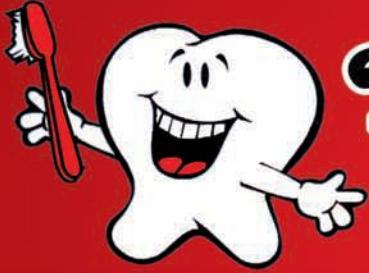
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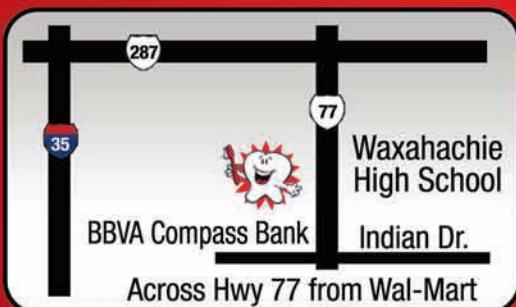
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ON THE COVER



The Cooke Brothers Bluegrass Band has a long and lasting musical history.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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Editor's Note

Happy August!

As we begin another school year, let's be mindful of the school zones and crossings throughout our fair city. For two months, they've been void of crossing guards and children. Please adhere to the slower speed limits found in the school zones as you make your way around town early in the morning and during mid-afternoon.

What about the school crossing guards? When you take time to think about them, you will soon realize just how important their Monday through Friday job is. What is their main goal and responsibility? To make sure students get from one side of the street to the other safely, without incident. And it's up to us, the people behind the wheel, to help them be successful at their job. Anytime you can give them a wave or a smile, I encourage you to do so. I guarantee your kindness will not go unnoticed.

Sandra

Sandra Strong
WaxahachieNOW Editor
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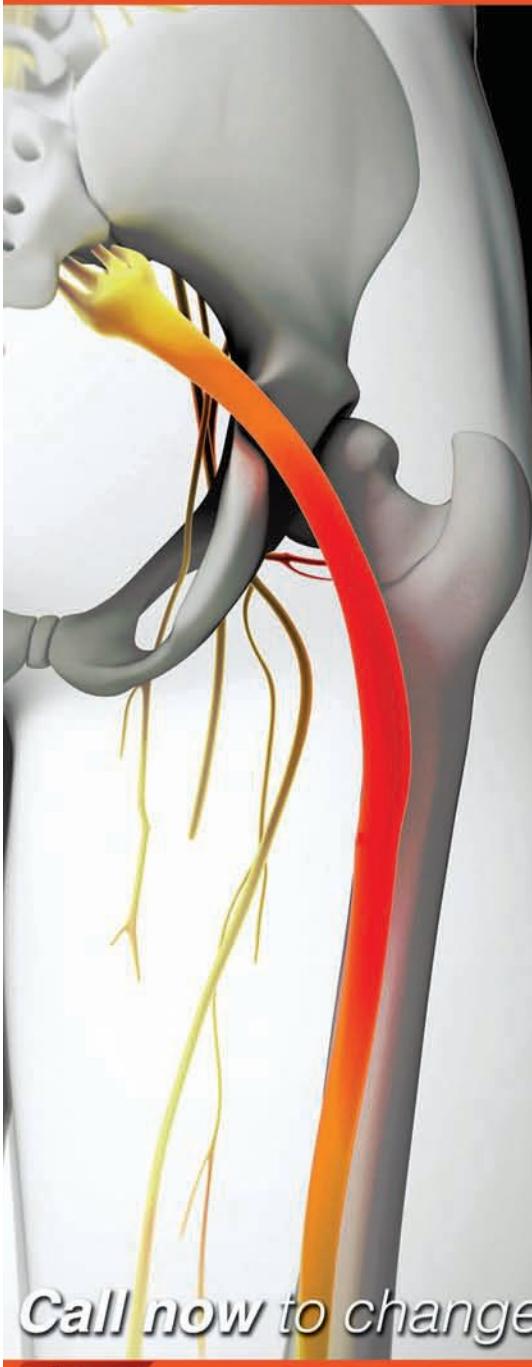
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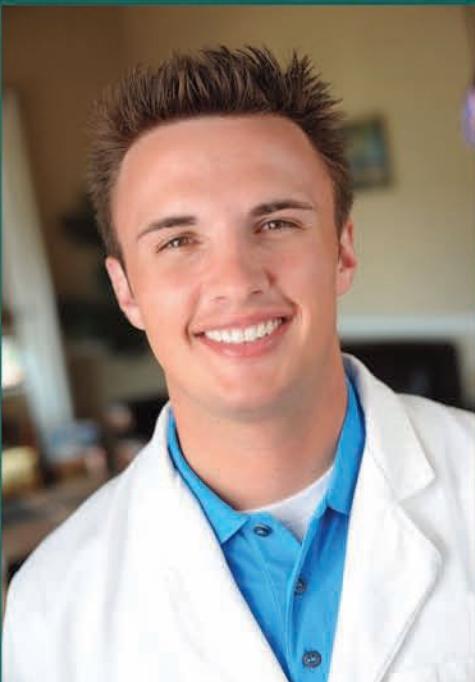
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Left to right: Wendell Cooke, Larry Cooke, Randall Dyess and Billy Joe Cooke.



FAIR

— By Carolyn Wills



Wendell and Billy Joe Cooke grew up on a farm between Ennis and Waxahachie at a time when families tended to be big and life was about churchgoing, farm chores, schoolwork and family. Their father, Benjamin Franklin Cooke, loved to play the fiddle. "He did it for fun," Wendell smiled. "We were five boys and seven girls, and music was always a part of our lives."

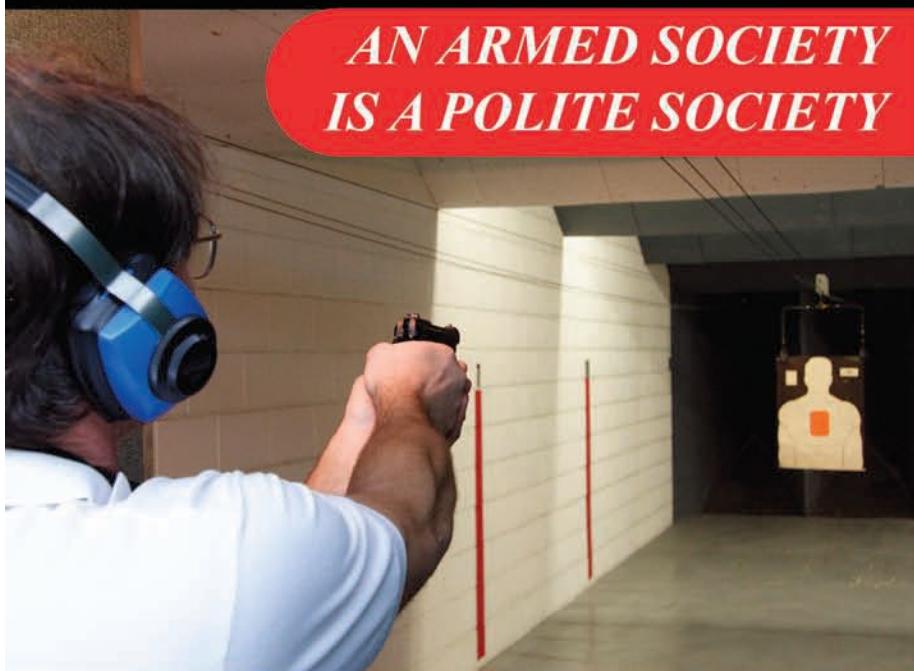
Music, particularly bluegrass music, became lifelong passions for Wendell and Billy Joe. Like their father, they played for fun, but to the delight of audiences, they have performed publicly for many years and show no signs of stopping. "We started playing old country music and some gospel," Wendell explained. By the time the brothers reached high school, though, they had found their "voice" in the relatively new music genre known as "bluegrass."

The year was 1946. Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys had gained national popularity and were heard regularly on the radio. Back home in Waxahachie, a singer-comedian from the popular WFAA radio *Early Bird Show* came to Chautauqua Auditorium to do a live broadcast. "His name was Bob Shelton, and he invited us to play on the show," Wendell said. That performance led to an invitation to appear at school programs. "Bob would pick us up on the weekends, and we would play bluegrass music programs at small country schools."





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Bluegrass music is played on traditional instruments like the mandolin, banjo, fiddle, bass and Dobro. Bluegrass can trace its roots to the English, Irish and Scottish tunes that migrated to America as early as the 1600s, as well as to American string band, old mountain and country music, gospel and blues. “Bluegrass music doesn’t date back much further than the Cookes,” explained Randall Dyess, band member and announcer. “Wendell and Billy Joe are the real deal. They are natural musicians who play for the sake of enjoyment and family.”



Bluegrass musicians and historians tend to embrace this music as a pure art and among the most difficult to perform. With lightning-fast tempos, soulful waltzes, sweet earthy harmonies, pure acoustics and storytelling at its best, the musical depth and range is staggering. “Every song has a story, and they are usually sung in harmony,” Randall said. “Everyone in our band sings, so we can mix it up, and people don’t get tired. Mostly, we sing in three-part harmony and, sometimes, in four-part.”



"This is a highly sophisticated form of 'mimicking music,'" youngest band member, Reggie Cook, explained. "That's how it's passed down. Musicians listen, as others play, and then they copy as best they can, while adding their own style."

Bluegrass music doesn't need a big stage. It can be shared in spaces as small as a living room or at major concert venues and, importantly, at bluegrass festivals. "There's no over-amplification," Randall said. In the '70s and early '80s, the Cooke Brothers Bluegrass Band traveled in a van to festivals in Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas. "If ever a dollar was made from our music, we spent it on gas," Randall grinned. Often, though, they earned gas money by placing first in the festival band contest.

Beyond the fun and inspired entertainment, bluegrass festivals are like college campuses for musicians. "They come to listen to what others are doing," Reggie explained. "Jam sessions are like composition classes. Musicians hear a melody and are expected to play it back when it is their 'break,' and they're either able to do it or not. I've learned more attending festivals than in any classroom or private lesson, because bluegrass music must be learned by doing."

The Cooke Brothers have been instrumental in helping musicians start careers. One of those is fiddler George Giddens. "George is a symphony musician whose rendition of 'Orange Blossom Special' includes a few long-haired classical licks," Randall smiled. "We met him at a festival. He joined our band and went on to become a professional musician in Nashville."



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Through the years, the Cookes have performed with such greats as: Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt, Ricky Skaggs, Grandpa Jones, Marty Stuart, Vince Gill, Chubby Wise and Mac Wiseman. “We’ve also played political rallies,” Wendell said. He recalls performing at an event with President Ronald Reagan, as the guest speaker.



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Today, the Cooke Brothers Bluegrass Band features Wendell on guitar and lead vocal; Billy Joe on mandolin and high tenor vocal; Larry Cooke (Billy Joe’s son) on banjo and vocal; Reggie Cook on banjo, guitar, occasionally on upright bass and baritone and lead vocal; and Randall Dyess (Wendell and Billy Joe’s nephew) on upright bass and vocal. “We do six to eight programs a year and still practice a lot,” Randall said. “We’ll meet during the week and play for about 45 minutes to an hour.”

The band clearly has a long history. “We did take a 15-year break while everyone was getting married, having families and building businesses or careers,” Wendell said. Billy Joe and Randall each own companies in the refrigeration industry. Larry works with his father, Billy Joe. “Wendell has retired four times,” Randall laughed.

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"He was a highway engineer for the Texas Department of Transportation for over 35 years, returned to design for another four years and later became a property manager."

The newest and youngest member is Reggie Cook, band director at Howard Junior High School. "His Cook is missing an e," Randall grinned. "As soon as he finds that e, he'll be kin."

Amazingly, the Cooke Brothers have been an endearing source of top-notch entertainment in Ellis County and surrounding areas for the past 65 years. They've played festivals, rallies, concerts and all types of family gatherings, including: Golden Agers at Nay Barn Party, Waxahachie's Optimist Carnival on the Square, back in 1948, and multiple radio appearances. They are devoted Christians and, in addition to bluegrass music, have captured hearts and offered praise with beautiful a cappella gospels.

Last April 4, at the annual fundraiser for the Waxahachie Community Theatre, a special tribute was dedicated to Wendell and Billy Joe for their lifetime contributions in the world of bluegrass music and as lifelong residents of Waxahachie. "My daughter, Kelly Pieterse, organizes the annual fundraiser," Randall said. "It was the perfect time and place to honor these great men. It was also great fun. There were probably 50 kinfolks in the audience, and our good friend, George Giddens — one of the finest fiddle players alive — came in from North Carolina."

Bluegrass music reflects connection, family and fun. To love this music is to be part of a community, and to play in a band like the Cooke Brothers Bluegrass Band is to be part of a very special family. "We have fun," Wendell smiled. **NOW**

Editor's Note: For more information, call Randall Dyess at (972) 467-5121.

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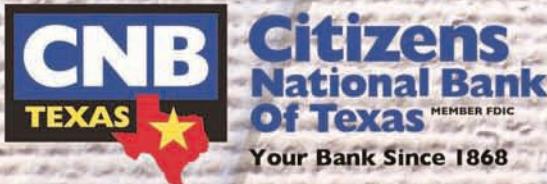
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Left to right: Emily, Natalie, Trang and Sy.

Seeing Perseverance Through Helps Ophthalmologist Focus on Successfully Serving the Community

— By Hope Oriabure

Dr. Trang Le is a board-certified ophthalmologist who specializes in the treatment of glaucoma and cataracts. But before she was a doctor, she was a 10-year-old girl who emigrated from Vietnam. Dr. Le, her mother, grandmother and two sisters were all sponsored by a Lutheran Church in Baytown, Texas. Later, Dr. Le and her family would be joined by her father. When Dr. Le arrived in Baytown, she was met with several challenges and admits while it was a difficult process to learn the language and adapt to a new way of life, these challenges helped build her character.

"In my situation, I had to grow up faster (than other 10-year-olds), but it helped me be self-sufficient and adaptable," Dr. Le said. "When I left Vietnam, I had to leave friends behind, so when I made new friendships here, I appreciated them more."

Eventually, Dr. Le and her family left Baytown and moved to Massachusetts. Both Dr. Le and her sister graduated valedictorian of their high school classes. Their success was not a surprise but a destination, with a road paved by education and the belief that self-motivation determines one's future in life. As a family practitioner and surgeon in Vietnam, her father, Dr. Lan Le, provided a wide range of medical services. With Vietnam's doctor shortage, he worked very long hours ending with rounds at the hospital seven days a week. Upon coming to

America, Dr. Lan Le was unable to practice medicine here and made the challenging decision to continue his profession in the United States. Despite his medical experience and background, this decision required Dr. Le's father to complete a medical residency. She was inspired by her father's dedication and knew she wanted to be a doctor, too. Both Dr. Le and one of her sisters are medical doctors today. Her husband, Sy Le, is also a physician.

Dr. Le attended Rice University for her undergraduate degree, then Baylor University for medical school and completed her residency in Arizona. Dr. Le then completed a fellowship or training in a medical specialty at UT Southwestern in glaucoma. She started working at EyeCare Associates of Texas and has been with the practice ever since. Here, Dr. Le continues her belief in the vital role education plays in our lives by educating patients to ensure that they understand their conditions, as well as the risks and benefits of treatment options. She continues to instill in her children the value of education. "We encourage our children to take their education seriously, because it's valuable and can never be taken away." Dr. Le said. These are not just feel-good words but a legacy that helped a little girl from a war-torn country navigate her path to success.



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An Education Destination

— By Melissa Swedoski

Summer is often about the destination. Whether it's vacation across the country or across the state, day camp or sleepaway camp, it's about the landing place. The same can be said for Waxahachie ISD and its future: it's all about the objective. Riding a wave of momentum at the end of last school year, the district is poised to reach groundbreaking achievements as it aims to become the premiere education destination in Ellis County and beyond.

have quality our aching staff."

As the last school year wound down in June, Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Glenn was doing a lot of traveling. In addition to awards nights, athletic events, high school musicals, galas, board meetings and more, Dr. Glenn stayed busy trying to secure the financial resources that enable these student achievements and make WISD an education destination.

"It was certainly a big year for the district," Dr. Glenn recalled. "We started September with passage of the TRE (tax ratification election), and that definitely energized us." With voter approval of 98 percent, the district shifted its tax burden, increasing the maintenance and operations portion while lowering interest and sinking. "With this one accounting switch, we raised \$4.5 million," Dr. Glenn explained. "We still have debt payments

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of \$3.2 million, but that leaves \$1.3 million for this year and every year going forward." The district increased teacher salaries, becoming the highest paid in Ellis County. Paraprofessionals received a 5-percent, across-the-board pay increase, and the district hired a security officer for every campus.

The momentum galvanized the Long Range Planning Committee, a group of 60 individuals tasked with considering the goals and needs of the district. After months of meetings, the LRPC sent five resolutions to the school board: expand to full-day pre-Kindergarten; begin dual-language academies for two elementary schools and consider magnet schools at the elementary level; enhance safety for students; put forth a bond election for facilities; and purchase land for a new high school, using existing funds. "The final resolution was key," Dr. Glenn said, "because it showed the board's commitment to the district's future. Even if the bond had failed, the board wanted to have the land for the future. It was a gutsy decision."

With 3-to-1 voter approval, the \$125 million bond is the largest ever in Ellis County. The ripple effect of the financial changes means the LRPC's ideas have a solid foundation, which includes community support, and Dr. Glenn said he is grateful for how much WISD received. "The state doesn't make it easy," he said. "We were asking the community to trust us and let us make



these decisions.” By getting out in front of the voters with the best information, Dr. Glenn said the public gave the district their confidence. “People know that we will do what we say we’re going to do, and we’ll work to over-deliver.”

In 2014-15, the options for WISD students included such alternatives as: robotics, fine arts, athletics, Career-Technology clubs, volunteering, academics competitions, clubs and numerous classroom choices. “Academics are always our priority,” Dr. Glenn said. “But one thing that makes a school system great is the diversity for the kids, and we want to be great in all of it.” Students received district, region and state awards in numerous pursuits. The district received the Best Community for Music Education award for the second year in a row, recognizing the WHS music programs, while the high school’s

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One Act Play team made it to state, and the FFA swept contests all year. Global High was named one of the best in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report* for a second time. High school, junior high and elementary students won UIL competitions, setting the stage for district awards for years to come.

The Career and Technical Education program continues to grow, as money for new facilities is included in the bond package. "These are innovative programs," Dr. Glenn explained. "Yes, we'll still have the traditional ag classes, but now we'll have an expanded criminal justice program, with an instructor that was a local police officer and one that was in the FBI." The district is working to meet the needs of the workforce, including robotics, drafting, engineering, computer science and architecture.

Dr. Glenn attributes all the successes to WISD instructors. "We have such quality in our teaching staff," he said. "They've raised the level of programs to the point that all people want to be involved. John F. Kennedy said, 'A rising tide raises all boats.' That's who these teachers are."

That sentiment extends to athletics, which underwent big changes this year, including the hiring of new Head Football Coach Jon Kitna. As a nationally recognized talent and proven winner, Coach Kitna increases WISD's profile, but he brings more than that. "The exciting thing about Jon Kitna is that he is committed to academics first," Dr. Glenn said. "This is a guy who believes in building young men above winning games. He's investing and building. His passion is football, but he believes in

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teaching a child to be a good citizen and steward in the community."

As for new Athletic Director Greg Reed, Dr. Glenn said, "We made a great internal hire. Coach Reed graduated from WHS and brings a continued dedication to our district, as well as a diverse coaching background. He is a man of high moral character and will continue our rich tradition of excellence."

The theme for this school year is "Waxahachie ISD is Home," focusing on the heritage and tradition of WISD. The goal is for families to see the choices in the county and determine that WISD is the best place for their future. "We've laid the foundation, changed the course and are being more innovative," Dr. Glenn said. "We had a goal of raising academics and student performance, and we are meeting those needs."

Although new facilities from the bond election won't be available until fall 2018, that doesn't mean there won't already be changes in the district. Wedgeworth and Dunaway elementary schools will be dual-language campuses, with total immersion from kindergarten through fifth grade, so when students move to sixth grade, they will be bilingual. There is now a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) district coordinator training teachers in project-based learning and evaluating what magnet schools will work best at the elementary level. The journey to make WISD an education destination won't end once those goals are achieved, Dr. Glenn noted. "We will always be pushing forward and bringing the best people," he said. "We are developing leadership and teacher-leaders, all to benefit every student in our classrooms." **NOW**



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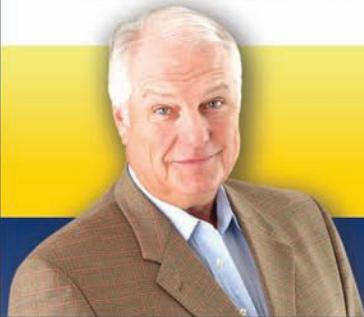
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Inspirational Fingerprints

— By Virginia Riddle



Seven years ago when Chris and Robbyn Hensley were looking for their Waxahachie home, it was Robbyn who first discerned its potential. "We love projects, and I could see the bones — the canvas. I knew we could handle everything that had to be done to make it ours," Robbyn remembered.



At Home With Chris & Robbyn Hensley

Chris, a true artist, recalled the buying experience. "Robbyn had to talk me into it." However, the couple has since turned the home they share with their daughter, Zoey, who is also a talented artist, into an eclectic, bright and beautiful haven. Their dogs, Doodlez and Mr. Wilson, and cat, Skittles, enjoy the run of a large backyard, complete with a swimming pool and decking, which Chris installed.

"Team Hensley," as Chris and Robbyn have come to be known, met while Robbyn was a scholarship student studying singing at Jacksonville Baptist College. "A girlfriend across the hall had a boyfriend who was Chris' friend," Robbyn said. The couple dated and discovered they had known each other earlier. Chris is a native of Duncanville and Robbyn is a native of Dallas, just at the edge of Duncanville.

"We had known each other when we still had 'cooties,'" Chris joked.

"We had dated, then parted, then dated again. It was me that had to grow up," Robbyn said.

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When Chris and Robbyn decided to move here from Lake Whitney, they were looking for a home located near Waxahachie but not in the city. "There are too many city sounds in town," Robbyn said. "We like the quiet here."

Their immediate families live nearby. Robbyn's mother moved closer, after Robbyn's dad passed away, and Chris' parents have Alzheimer's, so Chris and Robbyn oversee their care at nearby facilities. "We are now the sandwich generation, and we love sharing the care of family," Robbyn said.

The gym in their home reflects not only Robbyn's work in nutrition and

exercise with Johnson County Concierge Medicine located in Burleson but also Chris and Zoey's artistic talents. Chris has custom-designed and -painted a collection of skateboards that hangs on a wall, and Zoey has a painting displayed along with a collection of baseball memorabilia. "We are Cubs fans. I would love to see the Cubs and the Rangers in the World Series," Chris remarked.

Since Chris works at Oncor's network operations center and Robbyn substitute teaches at Ovilla Christian School, where Zoey is a second-grader and the couple are involved parents, they have accomplished the remodeling of their



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home in surprisingly short order. It only took a weekend for the kitchen to be transformed into a cook's delight, where Chris' collection of *The Three Stooges* plates provides color and humor. "Robbyn's been nice enough to let me put them up. They show our quirks, and Zoey loves *The Three Stooges*," Chris said. A breakfast bar and the dining room provide comfortable seating that looks out to the pool.

The study is painted in the bright colors of sunrise and sunset. Robbyn uses a buffet for storage. It was the first piece of furniture her dad bought for her mom. A curio cabinet Robbyn received from her parents holds family memories, and family photos decorate walls along with a collection of crosses. "We like family and friends' history," Robbyn stated.

A love of different cultures is shown through decorative objects from Africa and India that are displayed in the living room along with family antiques. A painting created by Chris hangs over the mantel. "It's an eclectic mix and match. We like antiques, but we want the family history of the pieces," Robbyn explained.

The hallway is brightened with Chris' painting of flowers that he gave to Robbyn for Valentine's Day. Another bright spot in the hallway is the "My Growing Years" measuring stick that also includes Zoey's year-by-year photos.

The retro green walls of the master bedroom were also a gift from Chris to Robbyn, while she and Zoey were on a mother/daughter outing. "He painted it as a surprise for me," Robbyn said. The cedar chest, a high school graduation gift for Robbyn, complements the French doors that lead to the patio and pool.

Zoey, who loves volleyball, tennis and baseball, also has a bedroom fit for a princess. It's full of pillows, stuffed animals, dolls and her bright drawings.





Across the hallway is her playroom. Her paintings and sculptures are on display along with the usual toys. Zoey has won ribbons at school for her speaking and artistic abilities, and she will have one of her works of art entered at the State Fair of Texas this fall. Letters spelling her name, a project Robbyn completed while pregnant with Zoey, decorate the wall. Robbyn's dad's globe and a collection of dolls are displayed in a cabinet that is also a family heirloom. The room is complete with a huge stuffed bear, which occupies a chair, and a gumball machine. Angels and butterflies decorate Zoey's bathroom.

"Our best memories are made by having Zoey with us," Robbyn said. "It deepens our love for each other. We grow closer watching her grow up."

The pool area is decorated with wagon wheels made by Robbyn's grandfather. Zoey enjoys the trampoline and pool. "She swims like a fish," Chris said.

The couple's current project is landscaping the area with tropical and succulent plants. A fire pit warms chilly nights by the pool. "Life is better poolside," Robbyn stated.

This family also loves to travel. Chris and Robbyn went to Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico, for their fifth wedding anniversary and have also been to Mexico, Chicago, Las Vegas and Florida. This past summer, they went to the beach at Port Aransas. Robbyn has been sky diving, and the couple enjoys music and concerts. They are also active members at the Waxahachie Bible Church. "We have such fun times together," Robbyn stated.

"We are just two normal people living our version of life, and as Team Hensley, we have put our fingerprints on our home one room at a time," Robbyn said. This daughter of a minister added, "We love the Lord and cherish our family and life. God is good. *Life is good.*" **NOW**

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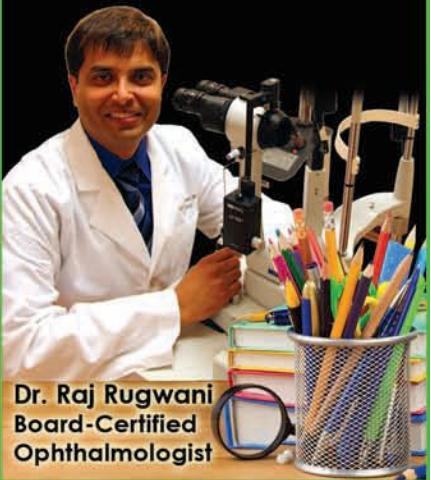
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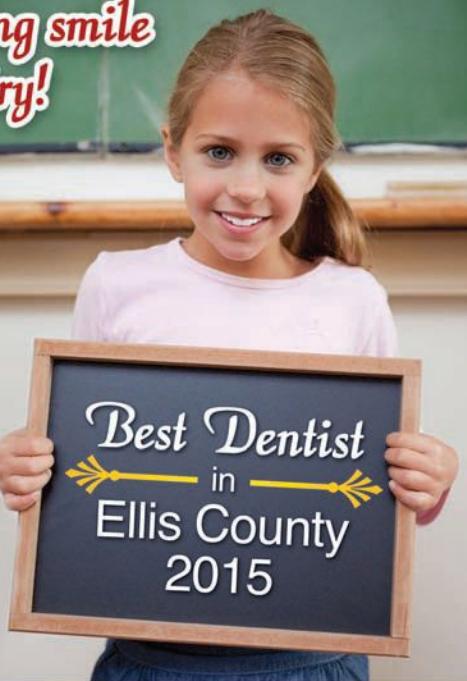
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Turning Heads

—By Sandra Strong

Each piece of artwork James Mills creates evokes some type of raw emotion — for him as the artist, as well as for those who enjoy viewing and learning more about the unique, one-of-a-kind pieces he constructs. The artwork James painstakingly produces is not happenstance. There is purpose and meaning in each book.

“Everything I do is thematically done to evoke emotion,” James reiterated. “My artwork is an example of my personal life journey.”

The artistic journey for James actually began when he was a college student at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. He graduated in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in history and a minor in art history.

"The idea of burying my artwork started in college," James explained, "but it went by the wayside as I gained more experience in ceramics." Fort Hays State University in Kansas was the only school that offered a master's program fitting James' busy teaching schedule here in Waxahachie, so he enrolled, and as they say, the rest is history. He was able to take classes online and be in attendance on campus a couple days per month to earn the 18 graduate ceramic hours he needed to move forward with his dream of becoming an artist.

To continually further his experience, James has taught Ceramics I and II and Art Appreciation at Navarro College at Waxahachie since 2007. He has been the Art 1, 2 and 3 teacher, as well as the dual-credit ceramics instructor at Waxahachie Global High School, also since 2007. "I have been teaching some form of art for the past 20 years," he stated. "It's been interesting, to say the least."

Once he realized the ideas and emotions inside him needed to be released, he thought back on the artwork in college that initially brought his inner feelings to life. He refers to each completed piece as a "book." "A book doesn't have to be pages of paper within a binding," he said. "Books are guardians of raw information. Books just need to tell a story." And the books that James creates not only tell a personal story for him, they also cause the imaginations of others to take flight, giving new meaning to the words "in the eye of the beholder." "Art turns heads," he added, "and I love turning heads."

His artwork, that started taking shape with a vengeance in 2010, can be described in one word — deep. The process behind each book completion is lengthy and can easily take up to six months, from start to finish. James makes his vessels from regionally dug raw clays that he fills with information and tightly binds. He takes these books and buries them with ceremony throughout Texas. He's buried books

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from Sherman to Zapata and then Grand Saline to Del Rio. "The process is solitary and ritualistic," he confessed. "The books are made of earth-safe, biodegradable substances that start to break down immediately once they are placed in the ground. These books do take time to create, but the process of letting them go is cathartic."

Some of the sculptural pieces are created only to be buried, while others are pieces to be viewed confrontationally. "My stand alone sculptures and wall hangings are based upon future archeologists finding the areas where I buried my books, digging them up and then incorrectly reconstructing and displaying them," James said. "I keep general notes on the burial sites, but the books, once buried, are never meant to be excavated or exhumed. The books are physically or metaphorically tightly





bound to remind viewers that a world of information is held captive within, never to be cashed or deployed."

His "incorrect" reconstructions of what might be displayed if his books were found at a later date are amazing to look at, and they represent something different for each person who views them. One buried book can inspire several pieces of artwork for James. The book he created using soil from Ellis County is named "A Good Night Out." The items he included in the vessel before binding it tightly into a book were a rose, several pieces of spaghetti, some wine, a poem he penned, a few thorns and a gallery card. A lot of thought goes

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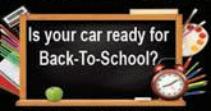


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into each item James includes in a book, and each item holds personal meaning to him as a person, as well as an artist.

James is no different than any other artist, when it comes to sharing his artistic talent.

He wants art lovers and critics alike to view his artwork and give him their true and honest feedback. His main goal this past year was to find gallery representation for his work. He did what everyone tells you *not* to do. He took a few pieces of his artwork and hit the Oak Cliff art district in person. The first gallery owner liked his work but said it would be at least two years before he could even be worked onto their



waiting list. The second gallery proved to be his saving grace. “Four hours of conversation later,” James admitted, “my artwork had a home. I left the Haley-Henman Gallery 442 in Oak Cliff that day with a signed contract.” James finally had gallery representation, and that was a big deal!

John Marcucci, the gallery owner, realizes that art *is* the process. “The object of James’ art was great,” John shared, “but it was the deeper meaning that interested me the most.” Although each piece is unique unto itself, James is readily found in the detail of each one. The symbolism and



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attention to detail are what make his artwork so special. The details evoke deeper feelings than what the eye can see. These feelings promote conversation, and John believes every gallery should boast of conversation. "By no means is his work simplistic," John added.

James' mediums include primitive, elemental products that help him create items depicting the rawness of life. Raw or pit-fired clay, rusted cut steel, bone and natural rope are used as containers and bindings. An assortment of other mixed media, such as grasses, coffee, poetry and short stories, create the softer, protected part of his pieces. "There is definitely a life process found in each one of my books and sculptures," James explained. "I work on some form of the process on a daily basis. I'm either sketching or planning. I'm always physically or mentally working."

There is something simply human about the artwork James creates. Two people will gaze at one particular wall hanging. One will see a tribal bow and arrow, while the other visualizes a musical cleft note. These same two people can study a table sculpture. One will see something peaceful and calming, while the other will come away feeling just the opposite. Art truly is in the eye of the beholder. **NOW**

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Back to School

— By Melissa Swedoski

Summertime in Texas means outdoor fun, vacation or camps. It also means back-to-school time, right in the dog days of August. From new outfits and haircuts to new schedules and freedom never before had, there are plenty of challenges to be handled. While you remember the true investment of education, it's best to prepare ahead for both expenses and changes.

Shopping Season Helpful Hints

The long-standing tradition of back-to-school shopping means new clothes and shoes, braces and glasses, pencils and paper. Whether there's one student in the family or many, budgeting for expenses is imperative, and research is necessary when purchases are technology-related. According to the National Retail Federation, families spent approximately \$670 on back-to-school items in 2014. This year's numbers will likely increase, as electronic items continue to be part of the supply list.

Summer style will still be in before fall fashion takes over, but as most parents are aware, today's students live in the digital age, so they will be watching retailer websites and social media to see what's trending, what's out of style and what's fresh this fall.





Tips for back-to-school shopping:

- **Start early and pace yourself.** Since certain items will always be on the list, parents can buy over time and spend less.
- **Use shopping apps and websites.** Most retailers, both large and small, have websites or are on social media, and they send out notifications when they have sales. Using retail and coupon apps can help parents stay abreast of the sales.
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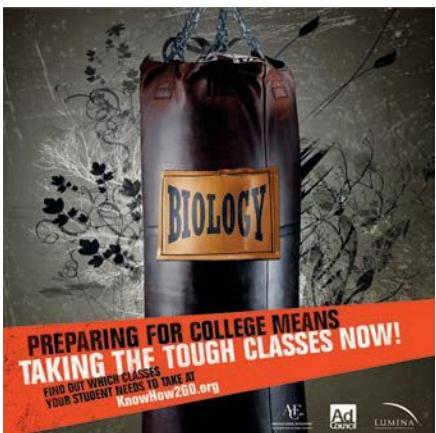
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to that. Other students may prefer dressier school clothes over casual, and there are wonderful boutiques available. Almost every local store and national retailer also knows to have uniform pieces in stock.

- Remember drug stores. These stores may be overlooked, but when it comes to makeup, hair care, personal grooming items and more, drug stores can provide some great finds.





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- **Vaccinations.** Although age determines what vaccinations your child will need, all students must be up-to-date on their shots, with complete records filed at the school.
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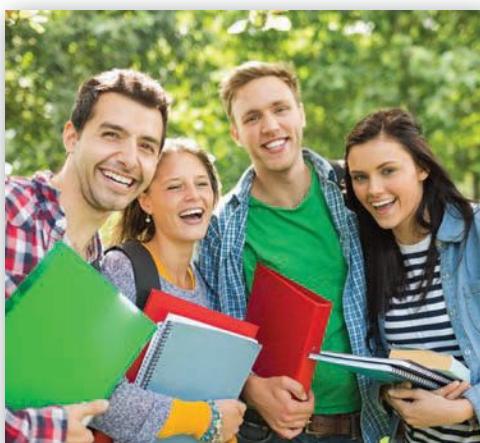
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There's also the need to have dorm furniture to make living a little more comfortable, as well as personal grooming items, since many students will likely be sharing bathroom space for the first time. Try not to fall into the temptation of taking too many keepsakes from home, since there will be a limit on the amount of storage available, as well as display space.

Finally, some students may be considering getting their first credit/debit card or parents may be providing them with an emergency credit card. Parents should be sure to have a healthy conversation with them about spending habits and what constitutes a moment of real need, which would necessitate its use.

From transitioning grade levels to new schedules and time management, going back to school presents many new challenges. Be sure to talk about handling emotions that come with tougher coursework, along with changes in friendships and relationships. Finding new bus routes or walking to school can be intimidating for young children, so parental support is paramount. Be involved with your child's decisions, and he or she will be more willing to share the journey with you. **NOW**

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Jeff and Carri Wilson, along with staff member, Lexi Aucoin, look forward to helping their customers as they choose toppings that make them merry.

Customer's Choice

Merry Toppins serves up frozen yogurt that's practically perfect in every way!

— By Sandra Strong

The leap of faith Jeff and Carri Wilson took four years ago this past May has definitely been worth it. "We have made a whole lot of new friends," Carri shared. "In fact, the friends we've made while in business have become our family."

Jeff and Carri look at Merry Toppins as a personal ministry. The shop allows them the freedom to visit with customers in a relaxed atmosphere. Merry Toppins has many customers who are expecting little ones. While pregnant, they frequent the shop for the nutritional value the yogurt offers them. They come back after the babies have been born because a bond was created during their pregnancy. "Our yogurt has grown some really cute babies," Carri said with a smile. "The atmosphere at Merry

Toppins is conducive to fun, laughter and special times shared with family and friends."

As the yogurt shop has grown, so has its offerings. Merry Toppins still has 12 flavors of yogurt available daily, as well as seasonal flavors that have quickly become favorites during the holidays. The topping choices are many — 50 varieties in all that include fresh fruit, nuts and a large assortment of candies. Customers are in charge of their own bowls. They choose how much or how little they want. One customer may fill a bowl with chocolate yogurt and top it off with a little crushed Butterfinger and a squirt or two of chocolate syrup. Another may like to mix vanilla with cheesecake and sprinkle a few crushed nuts on top.

The choices are limitless. The tag line for Merry Toppins explains the process in a simple manner. Customers “fill it, top it, weigh it, pay it and then enjoy it.”

Jeff and Carri have made many memories over the years as they've opened the shop up for parties of all types and sizes. They've hosted baby, engagement and wedding showers, as

“The atmosphere at Merry Toppins is conducive to fun, laughter and special times shared with family and friends.”

well as birthday parties for young and old alike. Space within the shop is reserved for those attending the parties. They serve themselves at a discounted rate. Carri remembers one very special birthday party. “One customer was celebrating a milestone birthday,” Carri remembered. “The theme was *The Amazing Race*.” One stop on the course was Merry Toppins. They had to fill their cup with exactly one ounce of yogurt before leaving and moving on to their next stop. “If they got the amount wrong, they had to eat what was in the cup and try again,” Carri said. “They ate lots of yogurt that day before they got the exact amount in their cups!” The goal at Merry Toppins is to accommodate as many requests that come their way as possible.

Healthy shakes, made with fresh fruits, have become a summer favorite. Coffees and hot drinks are now being offered throughout the year. Merry Toppins has a signature drink called a Froyoccino, a coffee-blended drink made with frozen yogurt. It's a fine mix with flavor options of caramel, vanilla or mocha. Customers have tagged the new drink as “amazing.”

Merry Toppins still offers gift cards that are great for all ages. “Adding gift cards to Easter baskets, birthday cards and Christmas stockings gives those on the receiving end the opportunity to have a new, yummy experience that's also healthy and good for them,” Carri explained. “And we still give a 15-percent discount to students, teachers and those in the military.” **NOW**

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Around TownNOW



Waxahachie Autoplex breaks ground on their exciting new Ford facility.



Beth Boles-Terminella, Cindy Hess, Kristi Back and Jeanie Blake share a few smiles during a break in their golf game during the Gingerbread Classic.



Lacy Weaver, 5, and Emma Jean Reeder, 4, wave their American flags as they wait patiently for the annual Fourth of July Parade to begin.



Ron and Ruth Rothermel share lunch at the Cotton Patch restaurant.



Angela Long's buggy is filled with Fourth of July items for children of all ages.



The City of Waxahachie team comes out in full force during the Annual Gingerbread Classic Golf Tournament.



Debbie Willingham and Virginia Hoops take Maggie and Dash on an outing to Lowe's.



After craft time at Granny's, Easton McIntosh plays with Alex the Donkey, his sack puppet.



The Spirit of Waxahachie Band starts the annual Fourth of July Parade with a bang of patriotic color.

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Critical Choices Precede Retirement

As retirement looms, crucial financial and lifestyle decisions you may have put off for years suddenly assume more importance. You no longer have decades to decide whether you'll keep a large house with its upkeep costs, whether your current level of debt is appropriate or whether to pay off your mortgage.

Before you actually hang up your career, it's time to do some real planning. You might begin with lifestyle decisions, although these, to a large extent, depend on the financial foundation you've built. While these are personal decisions, successful retirements share at least one common element — they are rooted in reality, not fantasy.

Consider some possibilities. Will you plan to relocate? Or do developing family or financial considerations make that idea less attractive? Do you need to maintain and insure more than one vehicle? Do you expect to travel extensively in your early years of retirement, when you may be healthier and more likely to accept the rigors of travel?

Finally, can your lifestyle plans be supported by your portfolio? If not, now is the time to make adjustments rather than later. Anecdotal evidence shows that retirees who scale back their expectations are far happier in retirement than those who wake up already retired and find they can't really do all that they had planned.

Retirement Bottom Line

You've been marshalling your finances for years, and while you may have had intermediate goals, funding a pleasing retirement lifestyle has probably been a long-term objective. As you near your last day on the job, it's time to make adjustments.

First, you may want to realign your portfolio's asset allocation, especially if you've been an aggressive investor with a high

tolerance for risk. In retirement, your time horizon is shorter, recovering from major market downturns is more difficult — and you'll probably want a regular income stream to pay your bills.

Your retirement could be lengthy, so if your wealth is sufficient, you may consider dividing your portfolio into two parts. One would be devoted to producing a regular income, while the other would be allocated for growth. Ideally, this part of your portfolio would help you overcome the effects of inflation, which, historically, at least, has moved along at approximately 3.1 percent per year.

As you calculate how much you'll need, keep in mind that retirement specialists suggest drawing down no more than 4 or 5 percent of your portfolio each year, to give it the best chance of supporting a long retirement. Remember, part of your annual income will come from any required minimum distributions (RMDs) the IRS requires you to take from your traditional IRA assets.

No matter what your decisions, the time to work toward them is before your retirement party. Call your financial advisor if you have questions or need assistance in your planning. **NOW**

Asset allocation does not ensure a profit or protect against a loss. Material prepared by Raymond James for use by its financial advisors.

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Jonathan Pope is a Raymond James Financial Advisor based in Duncanville.

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Thrill Seekers Discover Las Vegas' Wild Side

When you're not winning in the casino, lounging by the pool or savoring delicious cuisine, you'll find that Las Vegas has a variety of must-see attractions and entertainment options to keep you and the whole family occupied. Discover another wild side of Las Vegas at a variety of attractions for animal lovers and car enthusiasts.

The Wildlife Habitat at Flamingo Las Vegas gives nature lovers the chance to see Chilean flamingos, swans, ducks, koi, goldfish and turtles. Venture over to The Mirage for Siegfried & Roy's Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat. The Secret Garden is home to royal white tigers, white lions, black panthers, a snow leopard and golden tigers. The Dolphin Habitat, adjacent to the Secret Garden, houses an extended family of bottlenose dolphins. Get up close and personal with endangered and unusual aquatic animals at Mandalay Bay's Shark Reef Aquarium. Visitors journey through a replica of an ancient temple ruin and a sunken galleon ship surrounded by several varieties of sharks and other predatory creatures.

Downtown's famous, casino-lined Fremont Street has been converted into a 175,700-square-foot pedestrian area covered by a continuous canopy studded with more than 14 million lights. Called the Fremont Street Experience, this canopy showcases spectacular light-and-sound shows every hour on the hour during the evenings. If you're looking for thrills of a different nature, visitors to the Fremont Street Experience can ride "SlotZilla," a zip line tower that looks like a giant slot machine. Thrill-seekers will soon be able to experience the top lines of the experience with the world's first power-launched zip line down the entire length of the Fremont Street Experience.

Stratosphere has four of the world's highest rides located 100 stories above the ground: SkyJump is a "controlled free-fall" in which participants plummet 855 feet at a speed of up to 40 miles per hour; X-Scream teeters riders over the

edge of the tower 900 feet above the ground; Big Shot is a thrill ride that shoots adrenaline-seekers 160 feet into the air at a force of 4Gs before letting them free-fall back to the launching pad; and Insanity is an appropriately named, dizzying, spinning ride that dangles passengers over the edge of the tower before whirling them around at speeds approaching 40 miles per hour. The Big Apple Roller Coaster at New York-New York is an exciting roller coaster with twists, loops and dives around the resort. Rising 203 feet, the coaster features the first-ever heartline roll, which provides a sensation similar to that felt by a pilot during a barrel roll in an airplane. Additional coasters and rides can be found at America's largest indoor theme park, The Adventuredome at Circus Circus, offers more than 25 attractions, including the newest roller coaster, El Loco.

If your Las Vegas dream vacation involves fast cars, you'll have plenty to brag about to your friends back home. Check out the multimillion dollar Auto Collections at The Quad, one of the world's largest selections of antique, classic, muscle and special-interest automobiles available for sale. The 250 automobiles span a century and range in price from \$20,000 to \$3 million. Then, check out Penske Wynn Ferrari Maserati showroom at Wynn Las Vegas, Nevada's first and only factory-authorized Ferrari and Maserati dealership, offering the finest in new and preowned cars.

From thrilling roller coasters to virtual-reality simulator rides and erupting volcanoes to wax museums, Las Vegas' attractions appeal to people of all ages, interests and budgets. For more information, call (877) VISITLV or (877) 847-4858. **NOW**

Photos courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau.

Calendar

AUGUST 2015

August 1

Dodge for a Cause, Dodgeball for a Cause Benefiting Big Brothers Big Sisters, First Annual Dodgeball Tournament: 8:00 a.m., Ellis County Expo Center, 2300 W. Hwy 287, Waxahachie. Contact Jaime Green at (469) 248-4512 for more information.

Life School Waxahachie Community Open House: 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

107 W. Butcher Rd., Waxahachie. Come out and visit the new campus! It will be a come and go event and light refreshments will be served. For more information, visit www.lifeschools.net or call (972) 937-0715.

August 4

Teen Movie Night: 5:15-7:15 p.m., Sims Library. The movie selected is rated PG-13. Event is for ages 12-18. Enjoy popcorn, snacks and a fun time. Call (972) 973-2671 or stop by the library for the movie title.

August 7

Trucks 'N Tunes: 5:00-9:00 p.m., downtown Waxahachie. Enjoy an evening of karaoke and food trucks.

August 8, 11, 17

Back to School Immunization Clinics: **Aug. 8** and **11**, Red Oak Middle School, 154 Louise Ritter Blvd., Red Oak; **Aug. 17**, provided by the Care Van at Felty Elementary, 231 Park Place Blvd., Waxahachie. Visit redoakisd.org/ Health Services page for additional details or call Sue Brown, Coordinator of Health Services, at (972) 617-4708.

August 15

Adult Computer Class: MS Excel Basics: 10:00 a.m.-noon, reference department, Sims Library. Adults will need to register for the free class, as well as have a current Sims Library card for computer access. Attendees will learn the basics of the Microsoft Excel program and how to create and use a spreadsheet.

September 20

12th Annual Bridal Extravaganza: Noon-4:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center. Currently accepting vendor applications. The event will also feature a trunk show and sale. For more information, call (469) 309-4040 or email DSmith@waxahachie.com.

Ongoing:

First Mondays

Friends of Sims Library meeting: 10:00-11:00 a.m., library meeting room, 515 W. Main St. Newcomers are always welcome.

Fourth Mondays

Creative Quilters Guild of Ellis County meeting: 6:30-8:30 p.m., Waxahachie Bible Church, 621 Grand Ave.

Mondays and Thursdays

Fitness Revolution: 6:30 p.m., Salvation Army, 620 Farley St. Work out to fun aerobics choreographed to upbeat Christian and wholesome music. \$15 per month. Call (214) 477-1164 for more information.

Fourth Tuesdays

Ellis County Technology (ECT) meeting: 6:30 p.m., LaQuinta. For more information, call Wendy Merritt at (469) 256-8989.

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



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Dental Anxiety Can Be Controlled

It is unfortunate that many people each year do not obtain needed dental treatment because of a dental phobic condition. Thousands of teeth that can be saved are extracted each year because they become non-salvageable. People seek care only when the pain from a tooth or gum infection is literally intolerable. The tooth is extracted. The pain goes away, and the cycle starts over again. At one time, dentistry simply was not modernized, and, yes, pain was involved with treatment. However, a visit to the dentist today is virtually a painless experience. Many things are available now, including better topical anesthetics, better local anesthetics, medications available for sedation, nitrous oxide and various other comforting and distraction techniques. There really is no reason to be phobic about a dental appointment anymore.

Many people say that because they have experienced severe pain due to a tooth infection, they relate this pain to all potential dental treatment as well. Nothing could be further from the truth! Most dental conditions, if attended to early enough, are easy to take care of, and they are painless. The fact remains though, that if a cavity or a gum condition is allowed to progress without treatment, it will become painful at some point in time.

The No. 1 tool that the dentist owns to make your visits comfortable is local

anesthetics. If used properly and in a gentle fashion, with adequate amounts of topical anesthetic as well, dental injections are easy and painless. The topical anesthetic is placed on the gums before the injection, and is vital to a comfortable procedure. Nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, along with other available oral medications, can be a fantastic relaxer for someone scared of a dental appointment. Oral medications are given before an appointment, and work extremely well to control anxiety.

One often overlooked way of controlling anxiety is to bring a friend to the appointment with you. A good friend can do wonders to relax you and talk you through an appointment. Don't be embarrassed! That's what friends are for. Another great technique is to tell kids that they will be rewarded for great behavior by getting to visit the dentist. This does wonders to establish in kids that the dentist is not such a bad thing.

All of these techniques and methods apply to kids, as well as adults. Healthy teeth truly are an integral part of overall health. That appointment that you have been putting off is probably a lot easier than you think it is. A dentist will be happy to discuss this or any other dental questions you might have. Healthy smiles are for a lifetime! **NOW**

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In the Kitchen With Amanda Frayre

— By Sandra Strong

Growing up, Amanda Frayre's family would get together every Wednesday for dinner at her grandparents' home. "While I wasn't much help then, I do remember how much Momo loved cooking for us," Amanda said, referring to her grandmother, Josefa Hernandez. "I still make her recipes today, but they're difficult to share since the measurements were all based on taste and experience, not exact amounts."

As the owner of Cookie Love, Amanda's real passion is found in baking. But, she does enjoy taking a break to prepare what she refers to as "real food" for family and friends. "I'll experiment with classic recipes, handed down to me from my mom, Lupe Frayre," she shared, "but with baking, it's not quite as easy to experiment because the ingredients usually need to be more precise." **NOW**

Greek Rice Casserole

I box Uncle Ben's Long Grain & Wild Rice, Original Recipe
1 lb. sausage
1 onion, minced
1 lb. mushrooms, sliced
1/3 cup half-and-half
1 1/3 cups chicken broth
3 Tbsp. flour

1. Cook rice according to the directions on the box. While the rice is cooking, brown the sausage and onions; about 30 minutes.
2. Add mushrooms to the sausage and onion and cook for an additional 5 minutes.
3. In a separate bowl, mix together half-and-half and broth; set aside.
4. Add cooked rice and flour to the sausage mixture; add the liquid.
5. Bake at 350 F in a greased 2 1/2 qt. casserole dish for 30 minutes.

Louisiana Swamp Cake

Cake:

1 box yellow cake mix
1 large box instant vanilla pudding
1 cup vegetable oil
1 cup water
5 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
1 tsp. butter flavoring
Brown sugar, to taste
Cinnamon, to taste

Glaze:

1 1/2 cups powdered sugar
1/2 tsp. vanilla
1/2 tsp. butter flavoring
1/2 cup pecans, chopped
1/2 cup water

1. For cake: Mix all ingredients together, except the brown sugar and cinnamon. Pour

half the batter into a greased 13x9-inch baking pan.

2. Sprinkle with brown sugar and cinnamon, enough to cover all the cake mix. Pour the remaining batter over the sugar and cinnamon.
3. Bake at 350 F for 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean.
4. For glaze: Mix all ingredients together with enough water to make a thin glaze.
5. As soon as the cake is removed from the oven, use a fork to pierce the cake all over. Immediately pour glaze on the cake while it is still hot.

Mostaccioli

1/2 1-lb. box mostaccioli noodles
1 lb. lean ground beef
1 30-oz. jar favorite spaghetti sauce
1 8-oz. bag mozzarella cheese, shredded

1. Cook noodles as instructed on the box; drain. Cook beef; drain.
2. Add sauce to the meat; mixing well. Add noodles.
3. Pour half of the mixture into a greased 13x9-inch baking dish. Sprinkle with half the cheese.
4. Add the remaining noodle mixture; sprinkle the remaining cheese on top.
5. Heat in oven at 350 F for 30 minutes, or until cheese melts completely.

German Cheesecake

1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened
2 1/2 cups sugar (divided use)
4 tsp. vanilla (divided use)
6 eggs
1 qt. sour cream

1. Cream the cheese until smooth. Add 1 1/2 cups sugar; beat well. Add 2 tsp. of vanilla.
2. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Bake in a greased 13x9-inch glass baking dish at 300 F for 1 hour. After removing, let cool 10 minutes.
3. Combine the sour cream with the remaining sugar and vanilla; mix well. Pour mixture over cake and bake for 10 more minutes. Chill before serving.

To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit www.nowmagazines.com.

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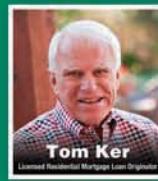
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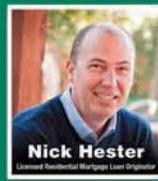
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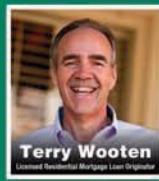
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