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M A G A Z I N E

SEPTEMBER 2025

Grit and Growth

Mitch Willis' love for the game took him to the NFL.



In the Kitchen With Megan Walters

Also inside:

Scavenger Hunt

Crossword

Featured Business:

Atlas Foundation Co., Inc.

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Sandra

Sandra Walters
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Mansfield Family,

As the school year began, families and educators across Texas faced new education laws, including a widely discussed ban on student cell phone use during the day. For many kids, a phone feels like part of them, so the adjustment has brought stories ranging from funny to frustrating. Hopefully, routines are settling, learning is flowing and everyone's keeping their sanity through the modifications.

Almost in step with the first school bells, football season kicked off. In Texas, the sport is more than a game — it's tradition, community and, at times, a friendly battleground. From Friday night high school matchups to Saturday college rivalries and Sunday NFL action, football binds people together. This year's headlines include the Micah Parsons contract negotiations and the Cowboys debuting a new coach — now tasked with earning the trust of a passionate DFW fan base.

This summer's travels reminded me how much I love this area — its rich traditions, diverse voices and shared stories. That diversity continues to take center stage in September with Hispanic Heritage Month, celebrated from September 15 to October 15. It's an opportunity to honor the culture, history and contributions that have shaped not just our community, but the nation as a whole.

Enjoy the excitement of September!

September 2025
Volume 20, Issue 9

ON THE COVER



From hometown fields to the big league, Mitch Willis tells his NFL story.

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Better known as “Mitch,” Otis Mitchell Willis’ passion for sports sparked around 8 or 9 years old. “I played almost everything — football, basketball and baseball,” he said. “However, when I was in the first grade, I remember being asked, ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ And without hesitation, I replied, ‘An NFL football player.’” At the time, he had no idea how slim the odds were. According to Football Scoop, only 6-7 percent of high school players get the opportunity to play college football, and Gameday Culture stated that only 1.6 percent of NCAA football players are drafted into the NFL.

GRIT AND GROWTH

— By Sandra Walters

During his childhood, his family moved several times — Texas to Tennessee to Alabama — before finally settling back in Texas in 1976. Once they returned, his parents enrolled him at Shackelford Junior High in Arlington, where he played sports from seventh to ninth grade.

“Most of my life I was average size, never the smallest or tallest, and no one in my family was extremely tall. However, I had a growth spurt in ninth grade, and I grew to 5 feet 9 inches. Before heading to Lamar High School, by the time I was a sophomore, I was 6 feet 4 inches, and I continued to grow.” Eventually, he earned All-American honors and was named First Team All-State as a defensive lineman. By his junior year, he received multiple recruitment letters, drawing attention from top football programs, including the University of Michigan and Southern Methodist University.

Mitch selected SMU because he thought the campus was beautiful, and he knew he would receive a quality education. Also, his family and friends could come to his games since the school was local. When he arrived on campus, many people saw his towering frame and thought of him as only an athlete, but he was a double major in journalism and business. His senior year, he remembers reading “The Road Not Taken” while wearing his helmet as part of a theater assignment that revealed who he was. The message was clear: He had layers. Mitch displayed



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Mitch brought a commanding presence on the field. He towered over linemen, bringing the disciplined toughness expected of a true nose guard.

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his writing and acting skills. He wrote for the SMU newspaper during the day and practiced and played football in the evenings. So, Mitch was truly a “student” athlete.

He became a four-year letterman at SMU, where he earned Second-team All-SWC honors in 1983. His dominant presence at nose tackle cemented his status as an NFL prospect. “When I was drafted, it wasn’t a big deal — like it is now. The majority of the guys were free agents. Coaches from various teams called to speak to prospects, so while I hung out at my apartment with a few friends in Dallas, I spoke to numerous coaches. Eventually, I received a call from one of the Raiders’ coaches in 1984, following their Super Bowl victory. I was selected in the seventh round when the team traded up to select me.

His professional career began with

the Los Angeles Raiders, where he played from 1985 to 1988. Ironically, he was still growing at the ages of 23 and 24. His physical attributes — his height, power and physicality — gave him an advantage over his opponents. At 6 feet 9 inches tall, Mitch brought a commanding presence on the field. He towered over linemen, bringing the disciplined toughness expected of a true nose tackle. He later joined the Atlanta Falcons and the Indianapolis Colts. Finally, he retired in 1990 as a Dallas Cowboy — a team close to his heart. On average, athletes play for about three-and-a-half years, but Mitch played in the NFL for seven years. Last year, he was inducted in the Arlington Independent School District Athletic Hall of Fame.

Now settled down with his family in Mansfield, he focuses on life after retiring from football. Mitch channels his competitive drive and teamwork skills into leading a sales team, putting his business degree to work. He has been happily married to Cari Willis for 35 years, and they complete their family with three adult sons: Parker, Clay and

Preston. “They all participated in sports, but my sons didn’t have to be replicas of me. Some of my favorite memories were coaching my sons’ little-league teams. Now all I want is for them to live happy lives,” he acknowledged.

Today, Mitch looks at the game through a different lens. “The sport has changed. NIL deals and the transfer portal have turned college football into a business,” he said. When I think about the game and if someone asked me if I would do it again, I would say, “Yes, I have no regrets, not at all.” I’ve had 24 surgeries, and I played football for 28 to 30 years. Football taught me teamwork, how to develop relationships and discipline. The camaraderie of being a teammate is like being in the military. They become family,” he said.

“I discovered through sports that you can’t accomplish anything by yourself. To succeed, we all depend on one another!” Mitch said. By assisting others in achieving their goals, Mitch transformed his talent into a consistent professional presence on football’s largest stage, fulfilling the childhood dream that many people aspire to. **NOW**

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Drake Hanna is a stylish kindergartner.

Zoomed In:

By Sandra Walters

Isaiah Fontenette and Elijah Robinson

Isaiah Fontenette and Elijah Robinson partnered up to make a name for themselves detailing cars across the community. They were then joined by their friend, Sandrience Johnson. Their days were packed — cleaning vehicles, heading to football practice, then returning to finish more jobs. But they handled it with focus and energy. Customers described the Mansfield High School freshmen as friendly, focused and serious about quality.

Behind the scenes, Isaiah's mom, Keona Smith, played a key role in their success. Her support helped them treat this as more than just a summer side hustle — it was a lesson in discipline and drive, she said. "I drove them to every job, handled the schedule and even checked their work to make sure it's up to par."



Leia Miller learns to make her own latte.



Grayson and Rhett Phillips enjoy time with the family dog.



Teghan Anderson is always ready!



Adriel Amador smiles as he dines out.



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Focused on the Future: City Breaks Ground on New City Hall

The City of Mansfield broke ground on the new city hall on July 28. This new facility, located at Heritage and Regency Parkways, will anchor the civic presence within the upcoming The Canals development.

The existing city hall, completed in 2002, was designed to accommodate the city's next 20 years of growth, a milestone the city has surpassed. By 2027, the time has come for Mansfield's local government to move into a space that can house current and future staff while sustaining the level of service the community expects.

The new facility is approximately 68,000 square feet, which is an additional 28,000 square

feet larger than the existing building on East Broad Street.

This civic space will be more than just a city hall. It will serve as a vibrant gathering space for the community. Recent events at the current city hall have proven that the Mansfield community has outgrown the venue. The new city hall will feature an outdoor space called the Great Lawn that stretches more than 45,000 square feet to be home for many city events. Featuring a round drive with connections for food trucks will set this space up to hold better event experiences.

Mansfield City Council approved two construction contracts in April and June 2025. The April contract of

\$13.4 million covers the site work and related infrastructure. The June contract of \$17.8 million authorizes funds for phase 1.B, which accounts for long-lead items in the project, materials testing for those items and construction project controls. An additional construction contract is expected to come before the City Council in September for the remaining elements of the vertical construction.

Completion of construction is expected to take place in winter 2026/2027.

Updates and frequently asked questions on this project can be found on the city's website, [MansfieldTexas.gov](https://www.MansfieldTexas.gov).



Conceptual Image - City Hall



City Hall Groundbreaking - July 2025

Building Beyond Today: What's Coming at The Canals

The Canals, future home to the new city hall, will be an amenity-rich, mixed-use project featuring a series of one-of-a-kind water features such as a river canal loop, boardwalk plaza, and six-acre lake. With pedestrians in mind, the design is focused on providing a walkable environment, bringing together corporate and medical offices, single and multi-family

residences, and a variety of retail and restaurant spaces. The Canals will offer another vibrant destination in Mansfield to live, work, and play.

Want to learn more about projects like these? Make sure to sign up for the City's E-newsletter. Scan the QR code below.



Conceptual Image - The Canals



Conceptual Image - The Canals



Conceptual Image - The Canals



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Atlas Foundation Co., Inc.

— By Sandra Walters



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The Atlas Foundation Company, Inc. was established in 1958. “We are the fourth generation of this company, which was founded by our great-grandfather, Willard Murdock,” Lindsay Green and Kyler Ford said with pride. “This year, our fathers, Lonnie and Darrel Ford, are retiring and passing the business down to us. So we will be the new owners.”

“As a little girl, I remember going to Take Your Daughter to Work Day. After many years, I worked as an intern after college and became the office manager in 2021. I grew up around the business, so managing, marketing, overseeing

bookkeeping and scheduling projects is literally in my DNA,” Lindsay admitted.

“I rode the tracker in the back when the business operated from our grandparents’ house,” Kyler added. Now, he works along with some of the employees he knew as a kid. He oversees projects while managing the numbers. Lindsay and Kyler have enjoyed working with their family for more than 20 years. They look forward to sharing the business and teaching their own children a great work ethic as the business grows.

At Atlas Foundation, they don’t employ salespeople, and that’s what makes them unique. Only an owner or well-trained management staff will evaluate a home’s foundation. This policy ensures clients are dealing with someone who has firsthand knowledge of every aspect involved in foundation repair and who is considered an expert in the industry. They provide each customer with a dedicated on-site foreman to oversee the entire project from start to finish and stand behind every foundation repair with a transferable lifetime warranty.

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Sheet Pan Sausage and Veggies

CookingNOW

IN THE KITCHEN WITH

MEGAN WALTERS

— By Sandra Walters



“When my husband and I were dating, I tried to impress him by making a ‘healthy’ pizza crust. Well, it ended up tasting like cardboard, but he was sweet about it. That moment stuck with me and shaped my mission: Healthy food should never taste like a punishment. I knew I had some work to do! Cooking is where nourishment meets creativity. I love how it empowers you to care for your body while still enjoying your favorite foods,” Megan Walters said.

She is primarily self-taught, and her love for food started in both her mom and grandmother’s kitchens. She tweaks recipes to be quicker, more balanced and family-friendly. By emphasizing balance over restrictions, Megan lost 65 pounds. Here, she offers some of those recipes. **NOW**

Sheet Pan Sausage and Veggies

- 2 cups baby red potato
- 3 cups green beans
- 2 cups broccoli
- 2 cups of mini sweet peppers, chunked
- 13 oz. smoked sausage
- 6 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1/4 tsp. red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 Tbsp. dried oregano
- 1 Tbsp. dried parsley

Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 400 F. Line a 15x21-inch baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside.
2. Wash and chop the unpeeled baby red potatoes yielding 10-12 pieces per potato. Trim the green beans by cutting them in half. Cut the broccoli into florets. Chop the peppers into 1-inch pieces. Slice the sausage into 1/2-inch pieces.
3. Place the veggies and sausage on a baking sheet. Pour the olive oil and seasonings on top. Season to taste with salt

and pepper. Toss and evenly coat all the veggies and sausage with the seasonings. Space everything out to roast.

4. Bake for 15 minutes. Remove from the oven; flip/stir. Return to the oven; bake another 10-15 minutes, or until the vegetables are crisp-tender.

5. Garnish with parsley.

6. If desired, sprinkle freshly grated Parmesan cheese over the veggies and sausage immediately after removing from the oven.

7. Serve over cooked rice or quinoa.

Cookie Dough Overnight Oats

Wet ingredients:

1/4 cup peanut butter, unsalted

3 Tbsp. maple syrup

1/8 tsp. almond extract (optional)

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 1/2 cups almond milk, unsweetened

Dry ingredients:

1 cup old-fashioned rolled oats

2 Tbsp. chia seeds

1/2 tsp. cinnamon

1/8 tsp. sea salt

3 Tbsp. dairy-free dark chocolate chips

1. In a large bowl, add the peanut butter; maple syrup; almond extract (if using); and vanilla extract. Stir until a thick paste is formed.
2. Whisk in the almond milk until the paste is well dissolved and has a caramel-like color.
3. Stir in the oats, chia seeds, cinnamon, salt and chocolate chips.
4. Cover the bowl; refrigerate for 10 minutes. Stir quickly to prevent the chia seeds from sinking in the bowl.
5. Return to the refrigerator overnight or for at least 8 hours.
6. The next day, divide into four mason jars; serve with extra chocolate chips and peanut butter on top.



THE LOCAL TABLE

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- Virginia Woolf



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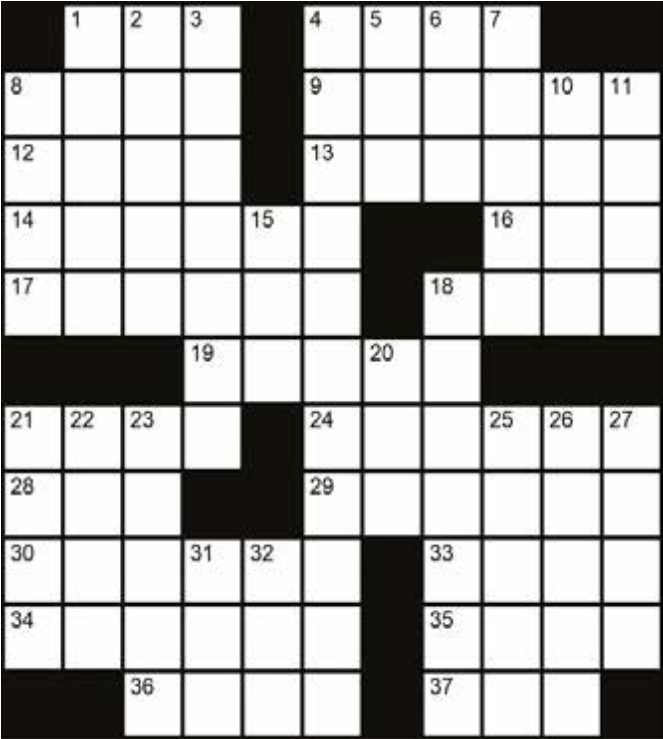
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Crossword Puzzle



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Across

- 1 Part of formerly Portuguese India
- 4 "Boy, it's hot!"
- 8 Ireland's --- Fein
- 9 Funeral speech
- 12 "--- calling!"
- 13 Texas border town
- 14 Bucks back
- 16 Teetotal
- 17 Adventurous expedition
- 18 In Norway, it used to be Christiania
- 19 Pressure-washer maker
- 21 Ormery guy
- 24 NYC
- 28 Exclamation of disgust
- 29 End of existence
- 30 It's in the blood
- 33 Omar --- of "House"
- 34 Sweet
- 35 Imitates
- 36 Corny or pony, maybe
- 37 Old horror actor --- Chaney

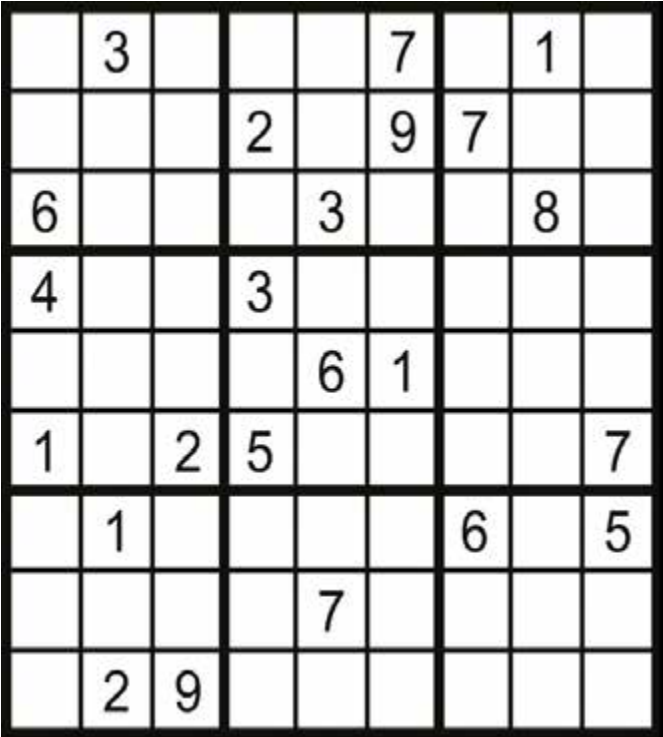
Down

- 1 "--- man a fish and you feed him for a day ..."
- 2 Kind of switch
- 3 Certain flowers
- 4 When single lives come to an end
- 5 Tint
- 6 90° bend
- 7 Bent sword leads to argument
- 8 COVID-19 predecessor
- 10 Peripatetic Ipanema resident?
- 11 Spool-like toy
- 15 F D R's short-lived Blue Eagle agency
- 18 Breakfast mush
- 20 She may be fawning
- 21 Stanley and Ryder
- 22 Ominous
- 23 Expert swindler
- 25 River horse
- 26 Trembling poplar
- 27 Military refectory
- 31 Not a good boy's name, according to Johnny Cash
- 32 Car economy statistic

Online versions and solutions available at www.nowmagazines.com. From our Homepage, click on the Features tab. Click on the Crossword-Sudoku tab. Click on a puzzle to view solutions.

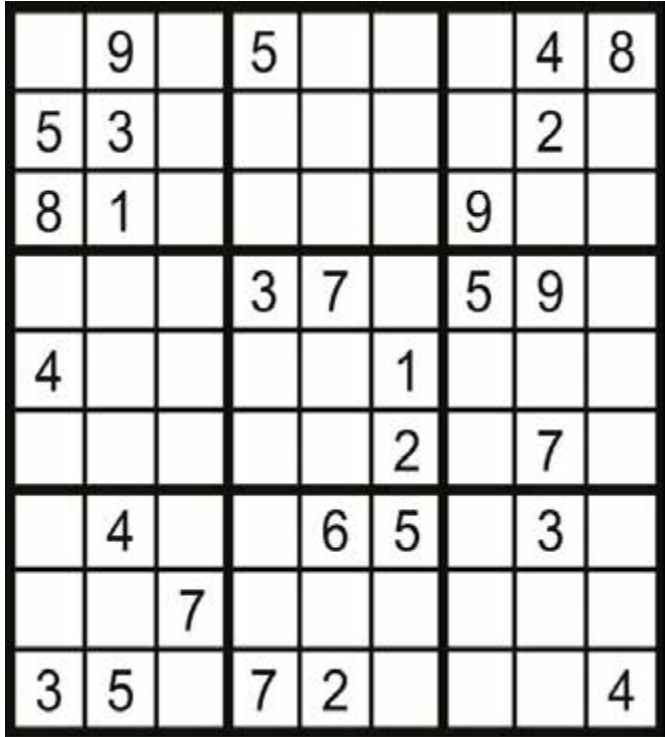
Sudoku Puzzle

Easy



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Medium



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✓ Prickling or tingling



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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.

SEPTEMBER

9/4

Fall Gardening Prep:

Discover how to prepare your garden for fall. Free. 6:00-7:00 p.m., Chris W. Burkett Service Center Training Room, 620 S. Wisteria St. <https://www.mansfieldtexas.gov/Calendar>.

9/6

Punt, Pass, Kick Clinic:

Get ready to show off your skills. Young athletes will practice for the competition in October! Whether you're launching long punts, pinpoint passes or powerful kicks, this is your chance to shine on the field. Don't miss out on the fun, excitement and friendly practice

session. Free. 9:00-11:00 a.m., Philip Thompson Soccer Complex, 1701 N. Holland Rd.

9/13

Fall Bash:

Listen to live music, shop local vendors and help celebrate the beginning of fall. Recognize the first responders who keep the city safe. First responders can receive a \$5 off coupon for a Market Vendor purchase during the month of September by stopping by in uniform or showing their identification.

Free. 8:00 a.m.-noon, Mansfield Farm & Cottage Market, 703 E. Broad St.

9/17

Bells Across America:

Presented by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution Quannah Parker Chapter. Help celebrate the signing of the U.S. Constitution on this date 238 years ago with a short ceremony and ringing of the bells. Free. 2:45 p.m., Never Forget Garden, Blessing Funeral Home, 410 Elm Street.

9/20

Splash and Dash Puppy Tri:

Run the bases, swim the lazy river and "bike" the doggy agility course with a shelter dog or your own pup in this unique blend of two popular events. Proceeds benefit Mansfield's animal shelter! \$20-\$30. 10:00

a.m.-1:00 p.m., Fields at Station 63, Hawaiian Falls, 500 Heritage Pkwy.

Viva Mexico, Que Viva Folklorico:

Come experience Mexico's beautiful culture and tradition through folklore dances from regions such as Jalisco, Chiapas and Veracruz. \$10-\$20. 2:00-5:00 p.m., Farr Best Theater, 109 N. Main St.

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

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