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SEPTEMBER 2025

Heartbeat of the School

Angela Thomas reaches her 20th year in education

Also inside:
Scavenger Hunt
In the Kitchen With
Leah Masters

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EDITOR'S NOTE

¡Celebremos!

With the largest demographic in Texas being the Hispanic and Latino population, it is fitting that the state celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15 each year. Beginning mid-month is significant as the 15th marks the anniversary of independence day for five Latin American countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

Our national observation began as Hispanic Heritage Week in 1968, but was expanded in 1988 to recognize the Hispanic culture's influence on U.S. history. Today, the Hispanic and Latino community has reached more than 12 million, or about 40 percent of the total population. Despite an increasing percentage of Hispanic, Latina and Latino students, studies suggest their history is widely overlooked in U.S. textbooks.

Highlighting the rich histories, colorful cultures and significant contributions of this diverse community, Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to learn more, and www.hispanicheritagemonth.gov is a place to start. At this site, you can visit virtual exhibits about Civil Rights activists, Hispanic American veterans, significant artists, historical achievements and more. This month is an opportunity to appreciate how Hispanic history and the state's history are intertwined, and celebrate where we go from here ...

Todos juntos.

September 2025
Volume 20, Issue 9

ON THE COVER



Angela Thomas wants every student to have something to look forward to at Red Oak High School.

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HEARTBEAT of the SCHOOL

— By Angel Morris

Entering her 20th year in education, Angela Thomas has made her mark on Red Oak High School. The AP Psychology teacher and Student Council advisor has impacted students inside and outside of the classroom.

Her career began after graduation from Baylor University in 2003. “I was barely 22 and had so much energy and excitement! I taught social studies at Ferris High School for seven years, and that’s also where I got my start as a Student Council advisor,” Angela recalled.

In 2010, Angela was recognized as Ferris ISD Teacher of the Year. “I left the following fall when my daughter was born. She surprised me and was born 10 weeks early as a 2-pound preemie. I took three years off to focus on her,” Angela explained.

When ready to teach again, Red Oak High School caught Angela’s eye. “I was drawn to their Little Hawks child care program for teachers and staff, and they also had an opening for a psychology teacher,” she shared.

The Student Council advisor role opened up shortly after. “Administrators have often described Student Council as the ‘heartbeat of our school,’ and its members are leaders in setting the tone for campus culture.”

Under Angela’s guidance, the council is responsible for a number of events, including freshman orientation, homecoming, pep rally themes, Toys for Tots collection,

teacher appreciation projects, blood drives, veteran recognition events and many more. This year, the council was able to collect and donate almost \$40,000 of donated goods to the local community, and members served over 4,000 community service hours.

Partnering with American Red Cross, Student Council recruits about 100 donors for each of three yearly drives. “Last year, we collected 256 units of blood, which is the equivalent to 768 lives saved. This year and last year, we were awarded the Silver Award from the Red Cross for collecting so much,” Angela said. “And we were ranked seventh in the nation for the number of units of blood collected that could be used for sickle cell patients.” Most students are first-time donors, and helping them have a positive experience and becoming lifelong donors is very important to Angela and her council.

In her classroom, Angela’s students are able to connect lessons with personal thoughts, feelings and interactions. “I tell my students that no one in our classroom, including myself, is qualified to diagnose anyone, but they will find new levels of introspection for themselves and understanding of those around them,” Angela noted. “Another thing I have begun to share with students is my own struggle with anxiety. I’m proud to show that despite my worries and anxieties, I’ve been able to lead a happy, successful life.”

That includes being named the 2024-25 Texas Association of Student Councils State Advisor of the Year and District 3 TASC Advisor of the Year. “This past year, we served as the D3 President School for TASC. My student, Lauryn Smith, and I served on the Executive Board.”



Angela has been recognized as a Star Teacher nine of her 11 years at ROHS. The program allows 25 graduating seniors to pick a teacher who has impacted them for recognition by the Education Foundation.

Angela comes from a family of educators. "My mom was a teacher in the Philippines, and I'm honored to follow her example. When I was in college, we had to write out our teaching philosophy, and mine had to do with wanting to help students find value in what I was teaching them beyond the walls of my classroom. I think my 'why' for teaching has always included this 'beyond' element."

A standout lesson from Angela's classroom is one she calls, "Does Pavlov Make You Drool?" The experiment has students put lemonade powder on their tongue each time she says a key word, eventually conditioning them to salivate at the sound of her voice without the powder. "I love it when I see a kid in the hall later that day, and I yell out 'Pavlov,' and they go, 'Oh my gosh, I'm salivating!'"

Priceless!" Angela described.

Angela is proud to have had students go on to be fully licensed professional therapists after taking her class. "I've had multiple students return to visit my class and share about their experiences working in the mental health field. It is a full-circle moment for me to see students who sat in my desks now inspiring a new generation of my students!"

Angela and her husband, Justin, have a daughter, Gwendolyn, who is a sophomore at ROHS. "This past school year was the first year I got to have my daughter on campus with me. She is very active in band, FFA, and of course Student Council! We are proud to be part of the Hawk family!"

Having her daughter join her only adds to Angela's dedication. "I want students not just in my classroom, but in my whole school, to have something to look forward to," she noted. "Student Council creates and continues campus traditions ... from big events to all the little things we do to help students feel seen and heard." **NOW**





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DID YOU KNOW ...

JOHN WAYNE IS AN HONORARY TEXAN?

— By Angel Morris

Although born in Iowa and raised in California, many consider actor John Wayne the quintessential Texas cowboy. Fittingly, Texan Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick honored him as an honorary Texan in 2015. Texas House Concurrent Resolution 130 reads, WHEREAS, John Wayne is the prototypical American hero, symbolizing such traits as self-reliance, grace under pressure, resolve, and patriotism ... the State of Texas hereby resolves May 26th as John Wayne Day.

The resolution marked what would have been John's 108th birthday. Born Marion Robert Morrison in 1907, the boy who would become John Wayne was first nicknamed "Duke" because of his loyal relationship with a dog of that name. He was given his screen name after several years as a prop man and extra with Fox Film Corporation when director Raoul Walsh gave him his first leading role. The western flopped at the box office, but the new moniker stuck.

In almost a decade of B-movie roles, many portraying a Texan, John developed his on-screen persona as a man of action, which served him well in his first noteworthy film, *Stagecoach*, in 1939. The film earned seven Academy Award nominations and led John to a series of well-received film roles.

While John also began producing films in the late 1940s, his acting received recognition, as he tackled more challenging roles, and earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor in *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Through the years, he had a mixture of on-screen and directorial wins and losses.

Texans may favor John's 1960 directorial debut, *The Alamo*, in which he portrayed Davy Crockett. The film was reportedly dear to John, who seemed to hone a Texan mindset after starring in many Texas-set (although rarely locally filmed) movies.

Almost a decade later, in 1969, John earned his first



Academy Award for Best Actor in *True Grit*. In 1976, John played an aging gunfighter dying of cancer in his last film, *The Shootist*.

Diagnosed with stomach cancer two years later, John passed on June 11, 1979. Known for his conservative political efforts as well as charitable work fighting cancer, John received a Congressional Gold Medal from the U.S. Congress and the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously. The Orange County Airport was renamed in his honor the month he died.

Established by his children in 1985, the John Wayne Cancer Foundation supports cancer-related programs, including those at the John Wayne Cancer Institute at Saint John's Health Center in California.

In 1990 and 2004, John was featured on a postage stamp, and in 2007, he was inducted into the California Hall of Fame. The John Wayne Film Festival began in 2011 in Snyder, Texas, benefiting the John Wayne Cancer Foundation. It moved to Dallas in 2014 but returned to Snyder in 2018. NOW

Sources:

1. www.texasstandard.org.
2. www.keranews.org.
3. www.biography.com/actor/john-wayne.

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Zoomed In: Lacie Hamm

By Angel Morris

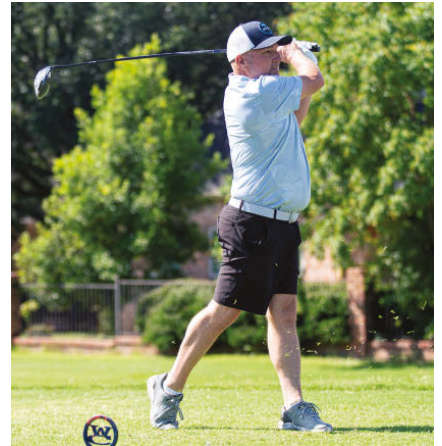
Ovilla welcomes new Animal Control/Code Enforcement Officer Lacie Hamm. “When I applied to animal control, I saw it as an opportunity for a new direction — without fully realizing how dynamic and rewarding it would be,” she noted. “The moment I met my co-workers, I knew I was surrounded by a strong support system and an exciting work environment.”

“My husband encouraged me to apply for the position that started my journey in this field,” Officer Hamm, who came to Ovilla with five years of animal control experience, continued. “He’s also been incredibly understanding — whether I’m bringing home temporary visitors or permanent additions to our family.”

In her free time, Officer Hamm enjoys camping and spending time outdoors. “I love staying active,” she admitted, “and rarely like sitting still for too long.”



Red Oak Fire and Rescue presents Firetruck 181 to children at the Oaks Learning Center.



The Life School Education Foundation annual golf tournament raises \$70,000 for grants, scholarships, mentorship programs and more.



Ovilla Service League delivers back-to-school supplies for distribution by North Ellis County Outreach.



Glinda Felty helps a young Farm Heritage Day visitor work on a treadle sewing machine.

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Robin Jo Smith and Beira Ruiz share treats created for a family night jazz party at Arabella of Red Oak.



Mirek.EL & The Collective perform at the Glenn Heights Summer Concert Series.



Kay Reynolds creates button art with the Senior Citizen Center of Red Oak.



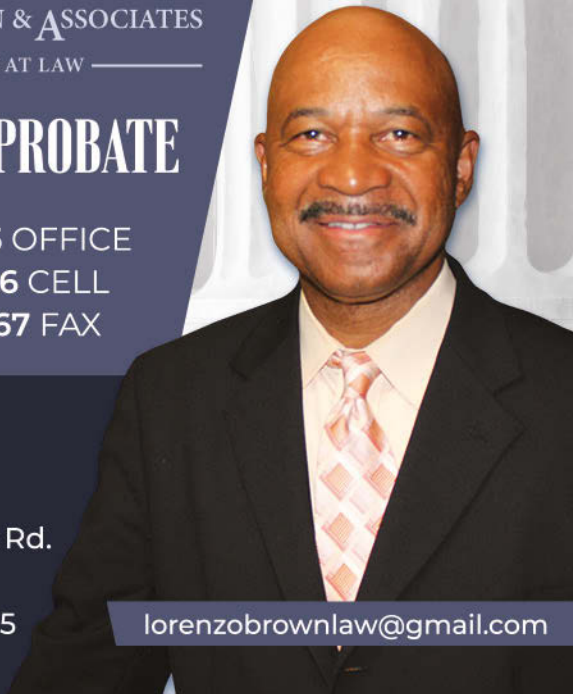
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Greek Meatballs

CookingNOW

IN THE KITCHEN WITH

LEAH MASTERS

— By Angel Morris



Photo by Lauren Zoucha.

In August 2022, Leah Masters and her family moved to Ovilla for a slower-paced lifestyle. “I began teaching third grade at Ovilla Christian School in 2023, where my daughters also attend,” she shared.

Leah’s passion for cooking began in childhood, while watching her grandma prepare delicious homemade Mexican dishes. “I truly learned to cook after college, when I moved to the Dominican Republic, where restaurants and fast food were few and far between,” she noted. “I discovered a love for trying new foods and gained an appreciation for cuisines from around the world.”

Leah’s family includes husband, Aaron, and daughters, Hazel and June. “Together, we love enjoying good food, playing games, going camping and traveling. Our most recent adventure was a trip to Germany this past summer.” **NOW**

Tzatziki Sauce

1 cup cucumber, shredded or finely diced with seeds removed
1 1/2 cups plain Greek yogurt
2 Tbsp. fresh dill
Juice of 1 lemon, plus 2 tsp. lemon zest
1 Tbsp. olive oil
1 tsp. minced garlic
Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste

1. Combine all ingredients; mix until well combined.
2. Let sit in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour for better flavor.

Greek Meatballs

Adapted from Fed and Fit.

2 lbs. ground beef
1 cup Panko breadcrumbs

2 eggs
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1/2 onion, grated or finely diced
3/4 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
1/3 cup fresh mint or cilantro
2 tsp. cumin
1 tsp. dried basil
1 tsp. dried parsley
1/2 tsp. dried dill

1. Preheat the oven to 400 F.
2. Add all of the ingredients to a bowl; mix by hand.
3. Roll 1-inch meatballs; place the meatballs on a rimmed baking sheet. (This works best when hands are wet or covered with olive oil.) Bake 20-25 minutes until fully cooked (165 F).
4. Serve with orzo or quinoa, and top with fresh veggies like cucumbers, tomatoes, bell peppers, red onion, arugula or chopped romaine, feta and a big scoop of tzatziki sauce!

Iced Oatmeal Bars

From Defined Dish.

Bars:

1 cup quick-cooking rolled oats
1 cup almond flour
1/4 cup tapioca flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. kosher salt
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1/4 tsp. allspice or nutmeg
1 egg, room temperature
1/2 cup avocado oil
3/4 cup coconut sugar
2 tsp. vanilla extract

Optional Glaze:

1 cup powdered sugar
1 Tbsp. unsweetened almond milk or regular milk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
Pinch of kosher salt

1. For the bars: Preheat the oven to 350 F. Line a 9x9-inch baking pan with a parchment sling. Coat the edges with avocado oil cooking spray; set aside.
2. In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together first 8 ingredients. Set aside.
3. In a large mixing bowl, whisk the egg about 1 minute until light and frothy. Whisk in the avocado oil, coconut sugar and vanilla extract until smooth.
4. Using a wooden spoon or rubber spatula, fold in the dry ingredients. Mix until just combined. The dough should be thick and sticky, similar to a cookie dough.
5. Transfer to the prepared pan. Using a rubber spatula or the back of a spoon, smooth the dough into an even layer.
6. Transfer the pan to the middle rack of the oven; bake 20-25 minutes, or until the dough is golden and a toothpick comes out clean. Cool entirely in the pan.
7. For the glaze: In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together all ingredients. Pour over the bars. Using the back of a spoon, smooth the icing into an even layer. Allow to set at room temperature for about 20 minutes.
8. With the parchment sling, lift the bars from the pan. Transfer to a cutting board; slice into 9-16 squares, using a sharp knife and cleaning it between cuts. Bars are best stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator. They will last for 3 days.



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