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ON THE COVER



Fire Chief Eric Thompson leads a department of passionate firefighters.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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Editor's Note

Niña, Pinta, Santa Maria!

Can you imagine if No. 1 on your to-do list was "Discover New World"? Me neither. Some days my biggest accomplishment is getting my family fed, dressed and off to school and work. Never mind convincing the Spanish monarchy to pioneer a new sea route, I'm happy getting out the door on time with matching shoes.

This month in 1492, maritime entrepreneur Christopher Columbus reached land — the first European to explore the Americas since Vikings set up colonies in Greenland and Newfoundland in the 10th century. Interestingly, October is also when Henry Ford's first "universal car" went on sale, and the Space Age began as Russians launched the first satellite into orbit. In honor of pioneering spirit, let's challenge ourselves to explore something new ... even if only to enjoy a different route to school or work!

Angel

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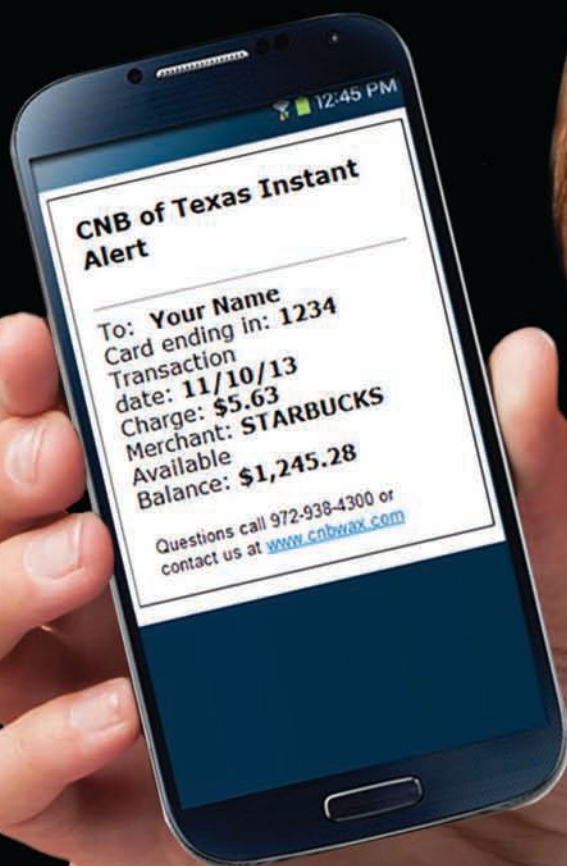
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STANDING THE HEAT

— By Callie Revell

If you were a witness at the scene of a structure fire in Red Oak 10 years ago, chances are you would have spotted Eric Thompson working as an assistant chief on the scene. A lot has changed in Eric's career since then. He now serves as fire chief of the Red Oak Fire Department, president of the Ellis County Fire Chiefs Association, North Region director of the Texas Fire Chiefs Association and is a member of the Ellis-Dallas Unified Cooperative Team, a group of fire departments in the region devoted to sharing resources and supporting each other. Despite having so many responsibilities, Eric's main focus remains on the safety and well-being of his community.



Reared in Ellis County, Eric has had strong ties to the Red Oak area for almost two decades. Unlike many others in the professional world, Eric discovered his true passion in high school and has pursued it ever since. “My venture in fire service started in 1995,” Eric said. “I started as a volunteer firefighter for the city of Ennis while I was still in high school. Immediately, firefighting got in my blood, and I developed a passion for it. So, I went to EMT school at night and went to fire school as soon I graduated from high school, and that’s pretty much all I’ve done since then.”

Eric began working with the ROFD part time in 1997. In 2003, he was promoted to full-time deputy chief. Two years later, he was selected as fire chief. Since then, he briefly served as the interim city manager and has overseen the transition of the fire department into the 21st century.

Over the past decade, ROFD has changed and improved in numerous ways. “It’s transitioned to a whole different level of organization,” Eric said. “We went from a small, volunteer, part-paid department to a 100-percent career professional department.” The department now has an expanded full-time

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staff with 27 employees, who staff two fire stations. A new rank structure encourages constant professional improvement. "I'm very proud we've started developing our firefighters to be driver engineers, our driver engineers to be captains, and our captains to be future chiefs. It's helped a lot, because everyone has an understanding of what's expected of them," Eric explained. "We're proud of the training and education our guys have." Their training includes technical rescue, emergency management planning and pre-incident planning. "We go out to all of our businesses now, and we train our firefighters on how to attack a fire if there's an incident there," Eric said. "Everything we're doing currently has increased from where we were before."

Along with increased training measures, the department has seen a huge improvement in its technology in the past decade. "Before, we would have a computer in the office. Now, we have multiple computers in each truck," Eric said. The computers help firefighters accomplish more than they ever could before through computer-aided dispatch and databases. "All the information is right there in the truck when we make



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the call. We have mapping, hazmat information and patient EMS reports.”

Not only does the new technology help on calls, it also allows the department to collect data and research trends. “We can see our response times, types of calls and the location of calls,” Eric said. “The data helps us with our risk-reduction plans.” Risk-reduction techniques include mapping out the location of fires and targeting high-risk neighborhoods with fire-prevention training. “We focus on continuous improvement,” Eric added. “We don’t change just to change. We change to improve and make things better.”

To continue to protect the community, Red Oak Fire Rescue has expanded its fire-education programs. In the past, the department focused only on school-aged children during the month of October, which is Fire Prevention Month. Under a new Community Risk Reduction plan, they have expanded to educate all ages and provide programs throughout the year on a variety of risk-reduction topics. Through these education initiatives, the department can focus on reducing preventable fires and protecting the community as a whole. Using Community Risk Reduction, the department also hopes to improve its relationship with Red Oak residents. “Our community must have trust and confidence in our abilities before they will allow us to offer education and trust the message,” Eric said. “We put a lot of effort into being transparent about our services and capabilities, and we continually involve our community.” Although Community Risk Reduction is targeted toward all citizens, special attention is still given to children and senior citizens who statistically pose a higher risk. Topics covered during fire-

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prevention education include: identifying fire hazards, developing escape plans, checking smoke detectors and making sure building projects are up to code.

Eric has also pushed for a cooperative effort between Red Oak and surrounding cities. "We have a good working relationship with them," he said.

"They trust us enough to lean on us, and we trust them." He also connects to other departments in the state through the Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS). "We deploy in a statewide system on wildfires, hurricanes and major disasters," Eric explained. The knowledge gained from TIFMAS training helped the ROFD combat the wildfire on the county line in 2011. "We were able to put some of those things in place and see the benefits," Eric said. However, emergency incidents are only a fraction of his daily routine. "We're involved with planning for growth, new development planning and fire code enforcement. We do a lot more than respond to fires and EMS incidents."

Eric's duties as fire chief keep him busy. On a daily basis, he seeks to educate the community, analyze the effectiveness of the department and mentor his staff. He makes sure firefighters are properly trained and manages emergency operations of large-scale incidents. "I'm the type of person who doesn't like the same old routine every day," he said. "Being out in the community, you get to talk to different people, and you never know what's going to come up." Eric enjoys working in Red Oak, because the department has a positive relationship with the community. "They allow us to do our job. They trust us, listen to us and support us," Eric said. "We're only as successful as they want us to be."

Despite the daily demands of the job, Eric knows he's right where he needs to be. "There are far more positives than negatives," he said. "I wouldn't do anything different. I love it, and I'm very blessed to have what I have." **NOW**

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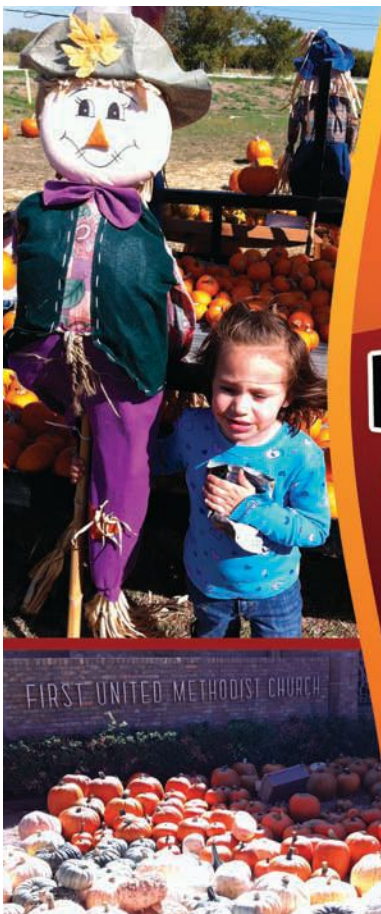
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WARM BY DES

— By Angel Morris



Building a home — inside and out — lights a fire in Darryl and Cynda Smith, who, ironically, make their living putting out fires. Employed as firefighters today, the couple met when Cynda was working as a librarian and Darryl as a fireman. A female friend who was a police officer suggested I become an EMT, then a firefighter, so I did,” Cynda explained. Darryl is now a captain with DeSoto Fire Department, and Cynda is a firefighter for DFW Airport.

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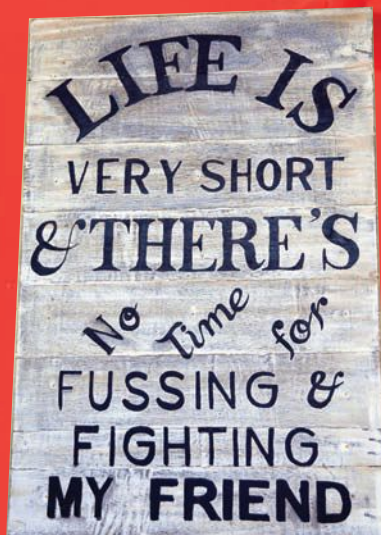
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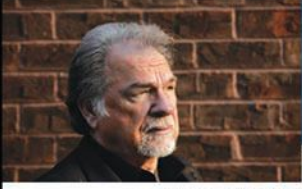
"I guess it's in our blood. My two sons are firefighters. Cynda's dad was a fireman," Darryl explained. Although he was born in California, Darryl was reared in Red Oak and graduated from Red Oak High. Cynda grew up in Cedar Hill and graduated there, but has made Ellis County home during their 15-year marriage.


"We like the small-town feel. Red Oak's changing, but it's still a small town to us," Darryl said. The down-home feeling is recreated in the Smiths' Ovilla home, which they describe as having a Texas Hill Country style.

Prior to building their four-bedroom, three-bath home, the Smiths' lived in Ovilla's Glen Eagles neighborhood. "We would pass this lot, and we always loved it. The trees and the creek were just beautiful," Cynda recalled. "When we saw the lot for sale, we had to have it."

The Smiths were not strangers to home building, a job Darryl has held on the side for many years. Prior to moving to Ovilla, he built the family home off Methodist Street in Red Oak, and he has built some 10 homes total.







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"We could have purchased the home for sale next door when we bought this lot, but we knew we wanted certain things in our home — like enough rooms for all four kids and bathrooms that would accommodate everyone," Cynda said.

As a result, the Smiths set out to build their 2,600-square-foot home on the 1.5 acre lot 10 years ago. Darryl began to clear the land, pour cement and bring in much-loved Austin stone for the front of the home.

"There was a lot of rain that year, and it turned the lot to mud. Plus, six of us were living in a duplex as we waited for this house to be ready," Darryl said. "You could say it was a challenge."



The end result is a home with a welcoming style. An eclectic mix of antiques and traditional furniture is found throughout, starting with a chest of drawers in the home's entry, facing the dining room and a recently purchased farm-style table, with mix-and-match chairs.

"I had lunch with our daughter at the Dove's Nest in Waxahachie, and we found the table. She loved it so much, she came home and did a PowerPoint presentation to convince her dad why it was worth the cost," Cynda said.

Thirteen-year-old Emily, the only child still at home, shares her parent's design flare. Her colorful style is showcased in her bedroom, where art pieces cover the walls, and treasured gymnastics awards are creatively displayed.

"Emily was very big into gymnastics, winning many awards. Now she's totally into club, school and beach volleyball, plus drill team and track," Cynda said. "She's always rearranging and redecorating her room. I guess she gets that from us."

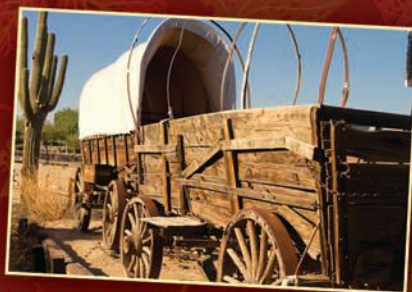
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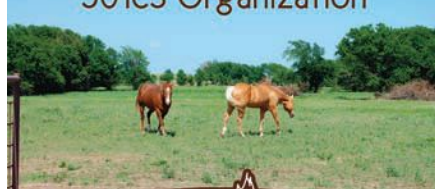
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the home's four bedrooms line one side of the house, including Emily's room, a guest room and a room turned into a crafting space. Floor-to-ceiling shelves hold fabrics, scrapbooking materials and supplies in the craft room, where Cynda's grandmother's dressing table lives, along with an armoire chalk-painted by Cynda.

"It is a great space for Emily when she has projects, and a place where I'd like to say I do scrapbooking. Right now, I am mostly just a collector of scrapbooking materials," Cynda joked.

Nevertheless, Cynda's unique design peppers the home with inspirational quotes on signs, one-of-a-kind picture frames and clever wall art, such as the giant spinning wheel over the dining room table. "I'd wanted a large clock there, but I'm a big fan of bargains," Cynda said, "When I came across that wheel, the price was right, and I knew exactly where it was going."

The Smiths' treasures fit in on walls featuring a skip trowel texture above tile and wooden floors throughout the home. The leather living room furniture is overstuffed and inviting, and the wooden Texas flag — custom made by son, Justin, — over the fireplace leaves no doubt about the family's roots.

The kitchen features granite countertops — a must-have when they built the home — custom cabinetry and expensive appliances found at closeout prices by shopping around. "The Great Indoors was going out of business, and we hit the jackpot on appliances, hardware and fixtures," Darryl recalled. "We've also found deals at many of the outlet stores," Cynda added.

Although they drove to Tyler to get a better price on a beloved front door, the Smiths didn't mind the expense of a swimming pool once Emily was older. Today, it's the showpiece of the backyard, which also features a covered patio, storage shed and a triple-car-sized



workshop for Darryl's tools and lawn equipment. "I'm always piddling with something in there or in the oversized garage where I'm learning to play the drums," Darryl admitted.

If constant improvements to their current home weren't enough, the Smiths also own and maintain three acres in Waxahachie. "It's near my mom, and it might be someplace we would consider building a smaller home when we are ready to downsize," Cynda said.

In the meantime, the Smiths enjoy hosting their three grown children and spouses — Brad and Bri, Justin and Jessica and Katelin and Casey — when they come home for family gatherings. Grandkids Brynlee and Carson round out the group.



"It wasn't a requirement but a coincidence that they all married spouses with names starting with the same letter or sound. Now Emily is worried she has to find someone with a cool name starting with E," Darryl joked.

The fun spirit of the Smith family is ingrained in their life, where a firefighter mom and dad know how to warm a house into a home. "Cynda always has a project that I somehow get involved in to the point it feels like it's my project," Darryl grinned.

"I can't help it," Cynda added.

"It's because of Pinterest. And, well, repurposing is fun!" **NOW**

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A collection of colorful autumn leaves in shades of red, orange, yellow, and green, scattered across the upper left portion of the page as if falling.

TO PRUNE OR NOT TO PRUNE



— By Randy Bigham

The onset of harvest time brings more than the turning of the leaves. For most of us, it means raking them up after their inevitable descent, transforming lawns and driveways everywhere into a crunchy nuisance. Autumn's inception also inspires well-meaning homeowners to prune branches and hedges while the weather is still nice. But increasingly, the word from lawn care specialists and gardeners is to hold off on pruning until winter. Resisting the urge to prune in the fall is the advice of



famous green thumb Paul James, host of HGTV's Gardening by the Yard. "The tender new growth that would result may not have a chance to harden sufficiently before cold weather arrives," Paul explained, "and that can lead to damage."

Horticulturalist Deborah Brown agreed. "Pruning in late winter, just before spring growth starts," she said, "leaves fresh wounds exposed for only a short time before new growth begins the wound-sealing process."

Gardening author Mike McGrath is more adamant in his advice. "The rules of fall pruning are simple," he maintained. "Prune nothing in the fall! Nada! Zilch! Ladies, hide the pruners from helpful husbands!"

But we yard lovers needn't fret. There's plenty of lawn and garden maintenance for us to accomplish long before winter wields its icy claws.



Lawn cleanup and maintenance

Keeping lawns free of leaves is the main objective in the fall, so let the raking begin. And we may as well do it the right way. Yes, there's a method to leaf-free madness, as Barbara Pleasant outlines in her book *Compost Gardening*. She recommends raking with the wind (and downhill when possible). Matching your rake to the kind of leaves in your yard and to your body type is also suggested. Your favorite mom-and-pop garden

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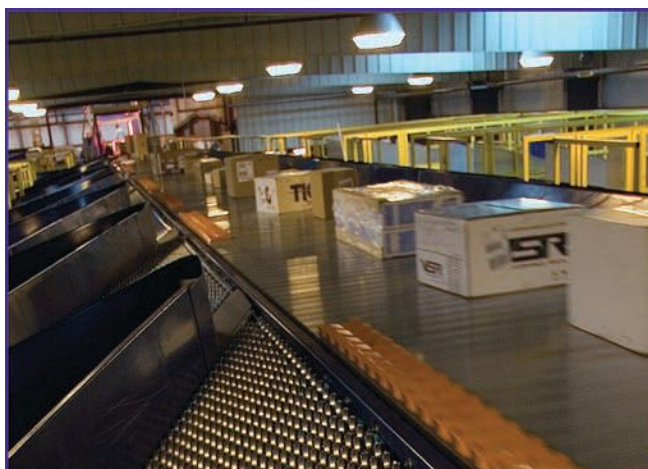


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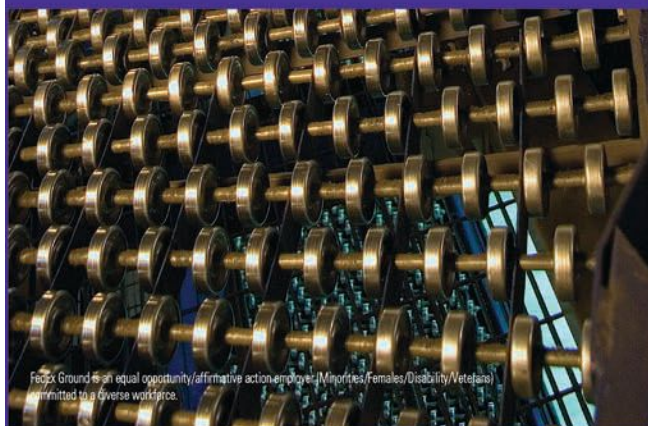
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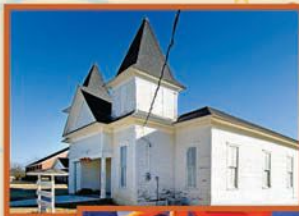
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centers, as well as your local big box stores, offer a range of sizes and weights.

Most importantly, use your shredded leaves as mulch. "Leaves contain some of the nutrients that trees and shrubs have taken out of the soil," Barbara wrote, "and it's in keeping with nature's plan that you should give back some of those purloined nutrients by mowing over part of your annual leaf fall, thus returning organic matter to the soil." Ellis County Master Gardeners are in favor of this form of organic recycling, advising a 3- to 6-inch layer of leaves as mulch in vegetable and flower beds and around trees and bushes.

Writer and avid gardener Lisa Kaplan Gordon suggests patching bare or thin spots of grass during the fall. Remove dead grass and replace with an inch of compost and an appropriate grass seed suited to shade or sun. "You'll want to keep the patch moist," Lisa said, "so lightly water once a day until the seed germinates, and the new grass gets about 1-inch tall."

Planting and transplanting

Fall is a good time for planting vines and ground covers from containers. Cool-season annuals like pansies, daffodils, dianthus and ornamental kale or cabbage are ripe for autumnal planting, as are leeks, garlic and onions, especially



those “from bulbs in soil enriched with organic matter.”

Paul James believes container plants deserve more attention from fall gardeners than they receive. “You can take cuttings of various annuals and root them in either water or a potting medium such as vermiculite, perlite or soil-less potting mix,” he instructed. Paul also recommends transplanting potted perennials into the garden.

Fertilizing

Roger Cook of *This Old House* magazine reminds his readers fall is the optimum time for fertilizing their lawns. “Taking the time to fertilize in the fall will strengthen your plants’ and lawn’s roots, giving them a strong base on which to thrive next spring,” he pointed out. He recommends a formula of 20-8-8 (nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium) for the best blade, foliage and root growth and trace element absorption. Check with your local Master Gardeners for the ideal time for lawn fertilization. Roger also suggests fertilizing shrubs and trees in the fall. “I recommend applying one to three

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pounds of slow-release nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of bed and cultivating lightly,” he shared.

Pruning


While fall pruning isn’t advocated by most professionals, there are some basics to remember and apply to the task when trimming is safer for the plants. Mike McGrath expounded on why it’s advisable not to prune until winter. “As I try to stress every year at this time, pruning now stimulates new growth just when the plants are trying to go dormant, and this severely weakens the plants.”

Once winter has arrived, pruning is recommended to promote overall plant health, encourage flower and fruit development, control size and eliminate broken, hazardous branches. For large, established trees, pruning is best left to qualified professionals. A number of knowledgeable, reputable tree trimming services provide care programs and fertilization. Some employ certified arborists to assist clients and offer tree trimming along with traditional lawn and garden packages.

Among shrubs to prune in winter are hydrangeas and camellias. Trees to be pruned at the same time include: juniper, spruce, Bradford pear, honey locust and poplar. Trees *not* to prune in winter are maple, birch, dogwood, walnut and elm.

Whether raking and mulching or planting and fertilizing, remember to pace yourself. As Barbara Pleasant wrote in *Compost Gardening*, “Leaf season will last for several weeks, so you have plenty of time to let yourself enjoy the weather and the work!” **NOW**

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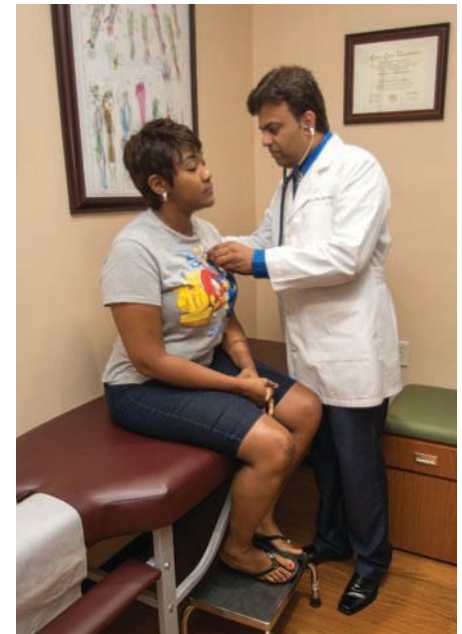


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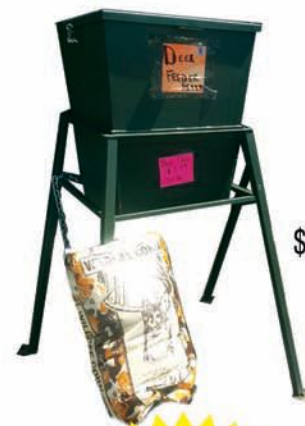
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Jami Navarro and her sons are happy to be Ovilla Christian School Eagles!



Red Oak High School Project Graduation 2015 group hosts a car wash fundraiser at Ace Hardware.



Participants in a recent Texas Master Naturalists Wildflower Walk wear pollinator glasses to help them see more like insects.



Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance presents a \$75,000 grant to Ellis County's Paws for Reflection Ranch providing free services for veterans and their dependents.



David Biegler prepares to seat guests at Moni's Pasta & Pizzeria in Glenn Heights.



The Lonestar Burger Bar boasts some of the best burgers made by grill cook Luis Perez.



Junior high volleyball students wrap up skills camp at Red Oak High School.



Chief Wolf (second from left) with Johnny Determan, Michael Fitzgerald and Gary McIntosh as they graduate from the Regional Police Academy North Texas Council of Governments in Arlington.



A young patron gets a new style at Hair Villa Salon on Ovilla Road.

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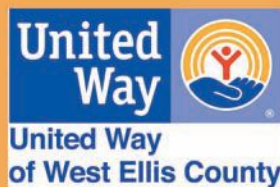
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October 4

Oak Leaf Clean Up Day: 8:00 a.m.-noon, City Hall, 301 Locust Dr., Oak Leaf. Visit www.oakleaftexas.org to learn more.

Pioneer Day: 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., historic downtown square, 100 Town Plaza, Ferris. Food, games, music and shopping plus a 10 a.m. parade on the square.

Annual Lord's Day Festival: 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Ferris Heights United Methodist, 108 Center St., Waxahachie. Live auction of handmade quilt set for 1:00 p.m. Tickets available in the church office for \$1 donation. Call (972) 937-2344 for more details.

October 4, 5

Annual Fall Festival: St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 1537 Rogers Ave., Lancaster. Bring family and friends to enjoy the festivities. For more information, e-mail stfran@swbell.net or call 972-227-4124.

October 7

342 Morning Networker: 7:30 a.m., Denny's Restaurant, 408 N. I35 Service Road, Red Oak. Breakfast and business owner networking. Business owners from all communities welcome. RSVP to (214) 244-2329.

National Night Out: 6:00-8:00 p.m., Mutz Park, 9th St. and Mabel St., Ferris. Police, fire, sheriff and CareFlight demos and displays will be available, as well as free food, games, giveaways and more.

October 11

Second Annual Red Oak Lion's Club Clay Shoot: 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Ellis County Sportsman's Club, 470 W. Sterrett Rd., Waxahachie. Up to five shooters per team, \$50 per shooter. For competition details, email panderson@petestires.com.

October 18

Ferris Trade Day: 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., historic downtown square pavilion, 100 Town Plaza, Ferris. Vendors welcome. Call (972) 544 2012 for more details.

Chamber Auction: 6:00-10:30 p.m., Red Oak Municipal Center, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. Tickets \$50. Email admin@redoakareachamber.org for details.

October 20

Book Club: 7:00-8:30 p.m., Red Oak Library, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. Email sandyg@aircanopy.net for this month's book selection.

October 22

Chamber Luncheon: 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., 200 Lakeview Pkwy. Networking opportunity for businesses. Members with reservations \$12; members without reservations \$15; non-members \$20. Contact chamberassist@redoakareachamber.org to learn more.


October 25

Miles for Missions 5K/1mile Fun Run: 8:00 a.m. (mile) and 8:30 a.m. (5K), Ovilla United Methodist Church, 1403 Red Oak Creek Rd. Proceeds go to mission work at church. Register at www.ovillaumc.org/5k or contact Claire at ckftaylor@gmail.com.

Red Oak Fall Festival: 4:00 -8:00 p.m., Watkins Park, Live Oak and Waller Streets. Family event including food, performances, bounce houses, games, haunted maze and hayride, trunk or treating, best decorated trunk contest, costume contest and more.


Bristol Opry: 7:00 p.m. Old Bristol Schoolhouse, Union Hill Road at Church Street. Call (972) 846-2211 for more details.

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



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In the Kitchen With Linda Gatlin

— *By Angel Morris*

Linda Gatlin enjoys cooking, because good food and fellowship go together. “We host the Bristol Opry where we enjoy great local musicians, as well as homemade sandwiches and cakes plus pies made by our dear friend, Paul the Pie Man!” Linda said.

The youngest girl of seven boys and three girls, Linda learned cooking basics from her sisters. Today she tries recipes from magazines, TV, friends, food packages, etc., but adds or subtracts ingredients for her own taste. “My husband, Jim, is a vegetarian, so I now cook with protein substitutes and vegetables, too.”

Linda is a fan of her mother-in-law’s baking, especially her homemade yeast rolls, chocolate pies and white vanilla cake. “I’ll share her chocolate pie recipe, but you must follow her directions to make it right!” **NOW**

Grandma Willie’s Chocolate Pie

- 1 cup sugar**
- 2 heaping Tbsp. flour**
- 2 heaping Tbsp. cocoa powder**
- 2 cups milk**
- 1 Tbsp. butter**
- 2 egg yolks, beaten**
- 1 baked pie crust**

Meringue:

- 2 egg whites**
- 1 tsp. vanilla**
- 4 Tbsp. sugar**

- 1.** Mix sugar, flour and cocoa together thoroughly.
- 2.** Stir together milk, butter and yolks; combine with dry mixture. Cook over medium heat until mixture thickens. Pour into baked pie crust.

- 3.** *For Meringue:* Beat egg whites until peaks start to form. Add vanilla and sugar, gradually, and beat until stiff peaks form. Spread atop pie and bake at 350 F until lightly browned.

Chicken Tetrizzini

Makes 6 1-cup servings.

- 8 oz. spaghetti**
- 1 Tbsp. butter**
- 1 Tbsp. corn oil**
- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast, cubed**
- 1/2 cup onion, chopped**
- 1 medium red pepper, chopped**
- 2 cups fresh mushrooms, sliced**
- 1/4 cup flour**
- 4 oz. cream cheese, cubed**
- 1 14-oz. can chicken broth**
- 3 Tbsp. Parmesan cheese, grated (divided use)**
- 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 350 F. Cook pasta per package directions.
- 2.** Melt butter and corn oil together in a large skillet on medium heat. Add chicken, onion, pepper and mushrooms; cook and stir 5 minutes, or until chicken is no longer pink. Remove from skillet and set aside.
- 3.** Put flour in skillet; stir and cook for 1 minute. Add cream cheese and broth, stirring with a wire whisk until mixture boils. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer 5 minutes, stirring frequently.
- 4.** Drain pasta and return to pan. Add cream cheese mixture, chicken mixture and 2 Tbsp. Parmesan cheese; mix well.
- 5.** Spoon into 2-qt. round casserole dish; cover with foil. Bake 25 minutes. Remove foil and top with mozzarella and remaining Parmesan cheese; continue baking, uncovered 2 minutes, or until mozzarella is melted.

Cheesy Squash Casserole

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil**
- 6 medium yellow summer squash, thinly sliced**
- 1 large Vidalia onion, thinly sliced**
- 1 Tbsp. butter**
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated**
- 1 cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded**
- 1/2 cup sour cream**
- Sea salt and pepper, to taste**
- 1 sleeve Ritz crackers, crushed medium to fine**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 350 F. Grease 2-quart casserole dish.
- 2.** Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté squash, onions and butter until soft.
- 3.** Transfer to a bowl and stir in Parmesan, cheddar and sour cream. Be careful not to break the squash up too much. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- 4.** Place mixture in prepared casserole dish and sprinkle cracker crumbs evenly over top.
- 5.** Bake for 20 minutes, or until the top is golden and bubbly.

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

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