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ON THE COVER



Firefighters use humor to teach about fire safety.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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Editor's Note

Be happy!

I wake up each morning making the first of many choices. I hit the alarm and listen to the joints in my knees and feet snap, crackle and pop as I jump out of bed. As soon as I've made the bed and I'm ready for the day, I grab my morning smoothie and sit down on the couch to do my daily devotion. Only then, is it OK for me to turn the TV on to see what choices others are making as I watch the news.

Most of the choices we have in this life are ones we make for ourselves. Other choices are made for

us by family members, co-workers and friends. Either way, each and every choice has a consequence. My goal as I get older is to make good choices that have positive outcomes. Positive outcomes make me happy, and happy is a good thing!

Sandra

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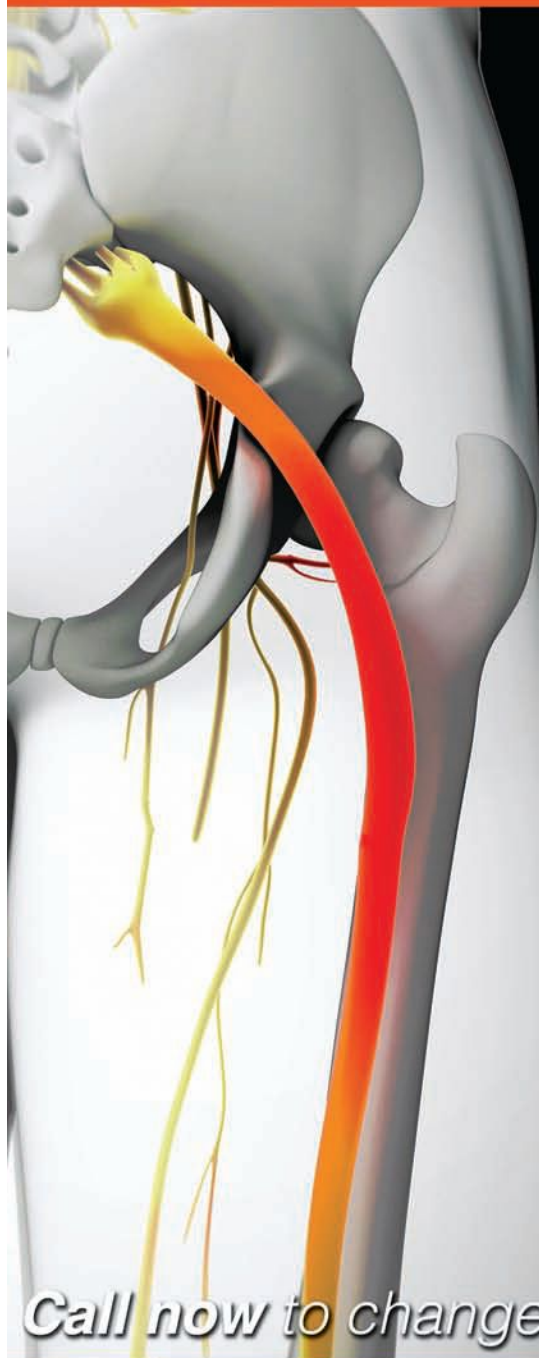
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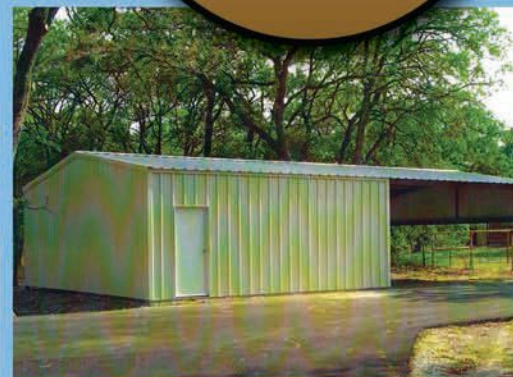
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Entertaining Education

— By Chelsie Sanders



October is Fire Prevention Month. Waxahachie Fire Rescue uses the month to teach elementary children about fire safety. In days gone by, you might see a fireman next to a fire truck showing a group of kids all the safety equipment and stating the famous Don't Play With Fire lecture, but for the past few years, the Waxahachie firefighters have approached the subject in a unique way.

Candon Birdwell, a fire prevention division lieutenant and fire inspector with Waxahachie Fire Rescue, is in charge of scheduling these safety presentations at the elementary schools, and he takes the task seriously. Statistics alone show the need for fire safety and prevention lessons for younger children. "I can show you a lot of numbers that will help show why we do this. Even with fire prevention month, there are still kids who will accidentally set fires to houses, or kids who will get too close to a fire and get burned," Candon said. "The number of household fires started from children playing is over 100 per year. Our goal is to bring that number and other statistics down."

Before the implementation of the clown program, it was typical to send a rookie firefighter to give a tour of the fire truck, discuss the importance of not playing with fire and then leave until the following year. But the fire department and firefighters needed a change.

Lieutenant Trey Moon and Engineer J Martin discussed this need often, and in 2007, they seriously began working to find a solution. "The kids loved seeing the fire truck, but we could tell something needed to change," Trey said. They were aware of the clown programs other fire departments used. They soon became interested. "We got together with some guys from Plano who had been doing the clown program for a while. They told us about Bullhead in Arizona, which is basically a clown school," J recalled. They quickly realized this was just what their fire prevention program



needed, and the fire chief at the time, David Hudgins, wasted no time sending a group of firefighters to Arizona.

Trey remembers the long hours they put in for the class. "It was a 50-hour class that took place over a week. It covered everything. We learned how to put on the makeup correctly and how to take on a character to really reach the kids in our shows," Trey said.

The firefighters were able to learn why their previous program was not as effective as they would have hoped. "We had a fireman lighting a lighter next to a fire detector. We didn't realize that kids might think, *That fireman lit the lighter, and it's not hurting him, so why can't we do it?*" Trey recalled.

They were also able to learn the importance of the person running sound and how the set and the created atmosphere were essential in gaining the children's attention. They realized they needed a team of other volunteers to contribute behind the scenes, as well. Once they returned home and were able to get the team ready, the clowns, Spanner and Zippy, were born. They were ready to tackle their yearly fire prevention talk with the elementary students in a totally new and different way.

After the first year, it was clear this was the change the fire department needed. "Our chief was signing us up for every parade and function he could once he saw how the kids responded. It was great," Trey said with a smile.

Not only were the kids impressed, but the teachers were as well and began requesting the clowns on a regular basis. "To see 300 kids' eyes not leave you for 30-45 minutes is amazing," J recalled. From there, the program has provided an effective and entertaining way of teaching children about safety.





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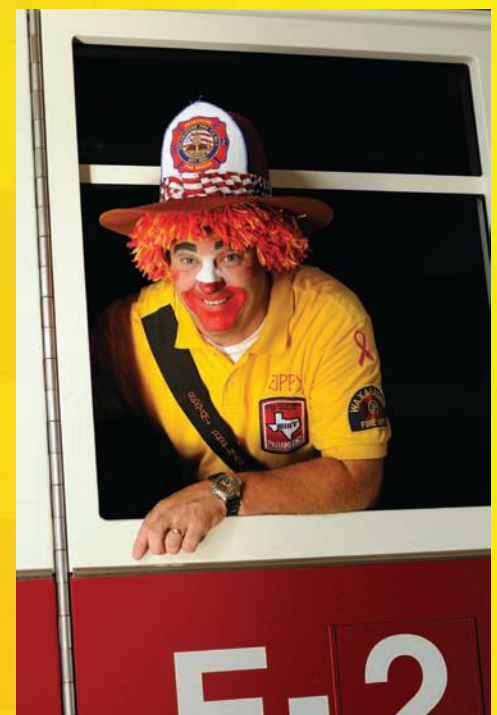
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Top row: Firefighter John Seaberry, Engineer Tony Townley, Administration Battalion Chief Gary Myers, Shift Battalion Chief Randy Muirhead, Captain Jeff Marrs, Lieutenant Candon Birdwell.
Bottom Row: Engineer J Martin, Lieutenant Trey Moon.


**“The number of
household fires
started from children
playing is over 100
per year. Our goal
is to bring that
number and other
statistics down.”**





They present shows, which run 30-45 minutes, for children in kindergarten through fifth grades in Waxahachie elementary schools. "We teach stop, drop and roll, as well as E.D.I.T.H. (Exit Drills In The Home) and other fire prevention and safety measures," J stated.

They are also able to incorporate other issues of safety. "We are firemen, so there is obviously an emphasis on fire prevention and safety, but we also like to incorporate other issues in the show, as well," Trey explained.

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Some issues they also cover are bullying, texting while driving and even what to do when you find an empty pill bottle. "We are a part of LAFS, which stands for Life and Fire Safety, a Metroplex-wide program designed to teach children about a lot of areas of safety, instead of just fire safety. That gives us a lot of material to cover while we have the children's attention," J emphasized. They easily keep the kids entertained, while also teaching them so many important things that could save their lives. They are able to use the teachers as a good source for feedback, and most of it, if not all, is positive.

While there are so many topics they could cover while they have the kids' attention, they don't want to overload them. Trey and J even have plans and goals for the program to expand to twice a year. "Future endeavors would include a second show right before summer to talk about helmet and swimming safety, as well as firework safety," J explained.



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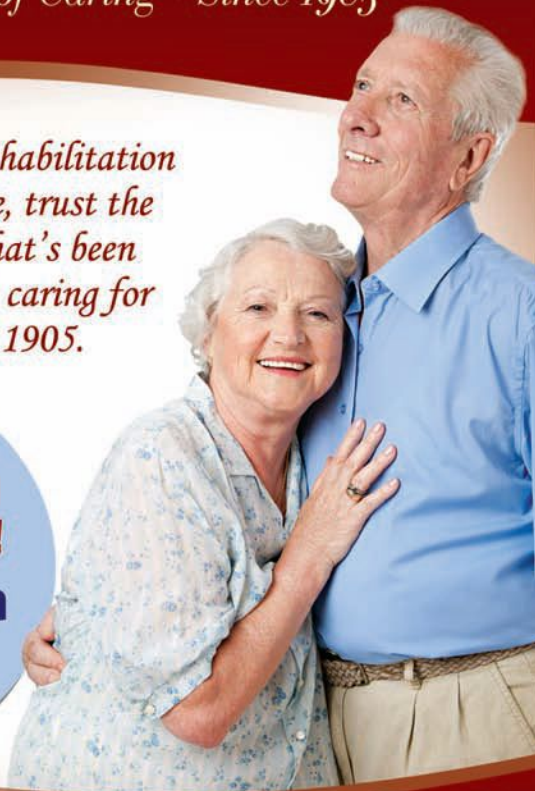
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Their new fire chief, Ricky Boyd, is just as supportive of the program as Chief Hudgins was, and seven years later, the program is still going strong. "When we are on a call soon after a show, I always ask the kids I see if they like the fire prevention show, and I always get a big yes," J said with pride.

"I always like to ask the kids I see which clown they liked better, and amazingly, it always seems the answer is Zippy," Trey said with a smile and a laugh. Either way, it's easy to see the program has been accepted by the department and the community.

It's no secret the clown program is effective. The teachers look forward to it as much as the children do. And it's safe to say the clowns love it, too. "The clown program really gets the kids' attention, with antics and everything else," Candon explained, "but at the same time, we are using that avenue to really teach them the importance of fire prevention. That has always been the main goal." **NOW**

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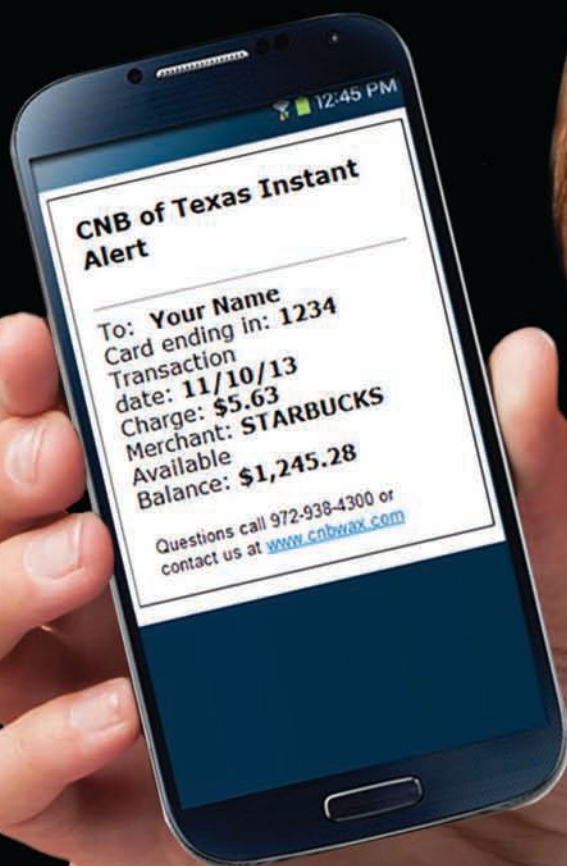
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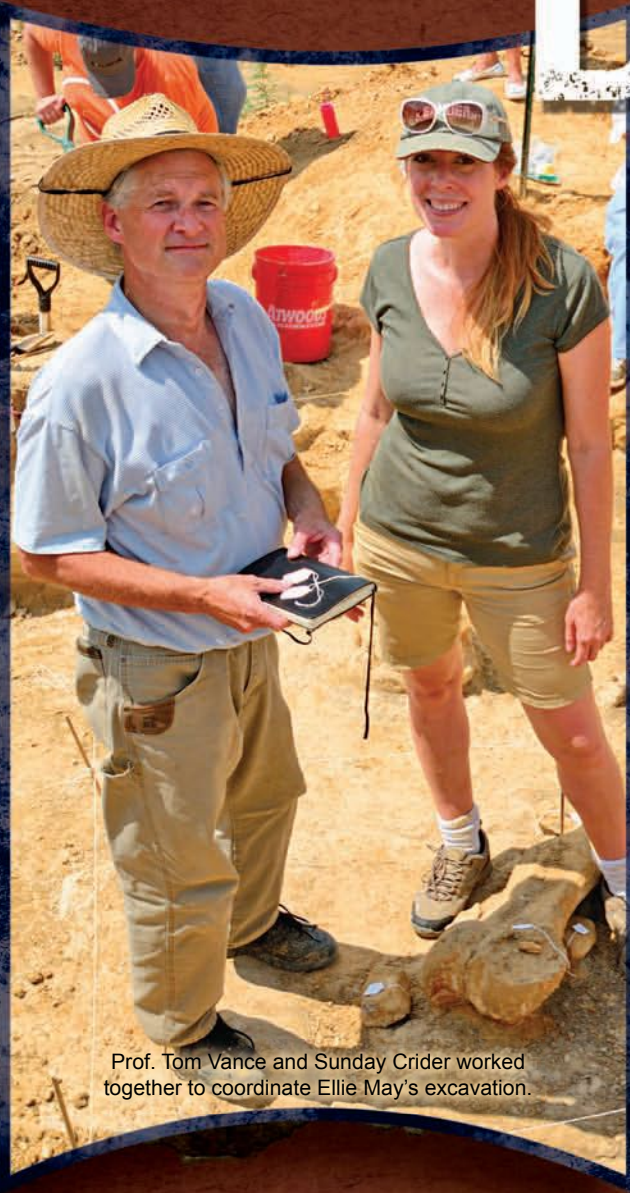
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— By Virginia Riddle



Prof. Tom Vance and Sunday Crider worked together to coordinate Ellie May's excavation.



It was an otherwise ordinary day for Ellis County gravel pit owner Marty McEwen. But while using a backhoe to remove sand and gravel for sale this past May, he became aware of bits of bone in the mix. Wisely halting his work, he discovered a partially buried prehistoric bone and tusk. Marty contacted a friend, Ken Wolaver, who then consulted with Prof. Tom Vance, his former biology professor at Navarro College-Corsicana. A visit to the site prompted Tom to put his love of paleontological research to work by organizing a controlled excavation of the ancient skeletal remains.

During this past summer, Sunday Crider of Midlothian, having met Tom on a previous dig in Limestone County, worked as liaison between Tom and groups of five to eight volunteers at a time, who gathered at the excavation site each weekend. Communication was through a Facebook page that Sunday created. Following their paleontology passion, volunteers traveled from the Metroplex, Waco, Limestone County and from all over Ellis County, to work in the hot temperatures. Volunteers had to be at least 16 years old and sign a nondisclosure agreement as to the location, since it was a goal of the group to protect the remains from harm. "When Tom invited me to dig with him, I had no idea what to expect," Sunday admitted. "Once we gridded off the area, we began the systematic digging. As we exposed the second tusk, skull and intact neck vertebrae, I just knew that we had an intact specimen."

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With dental picks, trowels and brushes, volunteers painstakingly uncovered what is believed to be an 18- to 20-year-old female Columbian mammoth. These mammoths date back to the Ice Age and probably resembled today's elephants with a shoulder height of 12-15 feet. Named temporarily for Ellis County and the month of May in which she was found, Ellie May's story may become clearer from lab results that are yet to come. The bones have been protectively wrapped in a way similar to the casting of a broken arm and have been sent to the Perot Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas.

Unlike the Waco Mammoth Site in which a herd of mammoths died trapped in a ravine during a flood, as of yet, there is no indication, such as mollusks or other fossils to indicate that Ellie May died in a flood. Shark teeth have been found, because at one time, this area was completely underwater. The theory that predators killed her seems unlikely since there are no indentations on the bones. Mammoths were herd animals, and yet Ellie May probably died alone. As the first humans to see Ellie May, the volunteers could only speculate on her life and death during the excavation.

"Her death was probably very quick," Tom said. He has also estimated her age based on Ellie May's four sets of molars. "A lot of people are curious about what walked through their backyards," Tom commented. "So I can't place a value on



Marty McEwen and his dad, Wayne McEwen, were thrilled with the discovery made on their property.

the work done by these volunteers. The gravel pit is kind of a time trip, so a find like this sparks the imagination.”

Stacie Rios, also a Midlothian volunteer, enjoyed making her work on Ellie May a family event, since her husband, Gene, and sons Chase, Chandler and Chad joined her. “This was the most amazing thing I have ever been a part of,” Stacie said. “My husband and sons would dig all day, every day, if they could. Working on Ellie’s tusk was memorable. Just exposing it to the elements and literally having it change color before my eyes was an unforgettable experience.”

Three generations of the Atchley family of Ennis were represented among the volunteers, as Mandi Atchley had her mother and father and her daughter, Paige, working alongside her. They were disappointed at first by being rained out twice, but were finally rewarded. “It was amazing to look down into the pit and

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see Ellie May laying there. Really, it was almost startling,” Mandi recalled. “This whole experience goes beyond a cash value, since Ellie May was found right here at home. Hopefully, years from now, my daughter can take her children to see Ellie May on exhibit and be able to say, ‘Mom helped dig her out.’”

Excited about the dig, Mandi mentioned it to Cassie Ortiz, a drill team director she knew in Waxahachie, who became another volunteer. “It was an amazing experience that I got to share with Mandi and her family outside of school,” Cassie remembered. “I learned that it was hard, hot work. We dug out dirt and sand so others could get in farther, but it was great to learn and listen to the experts. Ellie May brought everyone together. That was really special.”

One of those experts was Bill Abbott of Waxahachie. Retired now, Bill has a Ph.D. in paleontology and taught biology and paleontology on the college level. “I



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came into the dig late in the game when all the bones were totally exposed," he said. Bill concurred with Tom in that Ellie May's death was probably sudden. Bill has taken samples of micro fossils in hopes of learning more. "Paleontology is a combination of history and science," he revealed. "There is a value in knowing more about the geological environment, the history of the area and about these animals." Besides his interest in paleontology, Bill had another compelling reason to volunteer his time and expertise. "My late wife was named Ellie May, so I *had* to work on this dig," he shared.

Sunday was especially happy to have generations of families volunteering to work together. "I have to attribute my love of discovery to my parents, who instilled in me, as a child, a sense of wonderment and curiosity," she explained. Her dad, Bob Crider of Mexia, also assisted in this dig.

"This has been a very addictive experience," Tom said. "Every time we have moved the dirt or scratched the surface, we have seen something that no one else has ever seen." Like her past, Ellie May's future isn't known at this time. For Tom and others, she will be the topic of scientific papers, but as he remarked, "I want to see the conclusion to Ellie May's story." **NOW**

Editor's Note: The Perot Museum of Nature and Science will be in charge of bringing Ellie May's story to light, so people for generations to come will be able to enjoy learning about the past.

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Courageous, Contagious, Creative

— By Carolyn Wills

AT HOME WITH Claudia McMichael

Waxahachie resident, veteran teacher, loving wife, mother, grandmother and newly published author Claudia McMichael is one courageous, contagious and creative woman. She's courageous for having restructured her life after the sudden loss of her husband. She's contagious as a result of her endearing wit, generosity and love for family and friends. She's creative when it comes to her lovely home, celebratory traditions and gifts for writing and public speaking.


"I've lived a very colorful life," Claudia smiled. One glance at her stunning home reveals that she and her late husband, Dr. Ricky McMichael, enjoyed a productive and happy 40-year marriage. "We had a lot of fun together," she said. She was 23 when they married in their hometown of Tyler, Texas. "We moved to Waxahachie for our jobs, and then, into this wonderful home in 2001."

The 3,300-plus-square-foot brick traditional, beautifully suited for its neighborhood of fine custom-built homes, was about two-years-old when the McMichaels bought it. "It has truly been a special home, and I can't say enough about how great and caring the neighbors are," Claudia added.

The core of the three-bedroom, three-bath home is an open-concept kitchen, breakfast area and living room. The spacious light-filled living room is welcoming and elegant with its comfortable furnishings and a grand fireplace. The state-of-the-art kitchen is breathtaking, with a granite-topped island, large peninsula, gorgeous wood-stained cabinetry and a striking backsplash inset with decorative tiles.

"I think the kitchen is my favorite room," Claudia said. While the kitchen is where she has baked dozens of her famous "secret sugar cookies" over the years, her affinity actually goes beyond cooking. "What I love most about this house is that it is 'party-friendly,'" she admitted. "Everyone who knows me knows I love to decorate and celebrate the holidays, especially Halloween, Christmas and the Fourth of July, and much of that activity is centered in the kitchen."



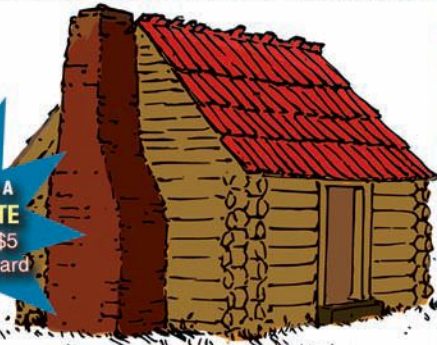


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Claudia grew up in Tyler, Texas, where her mother always decorated for Christmas in a big way. "It was all I ever knew," she said. "Later, when I taught at Northside Elementary, the room mothers would decorate the halls for the Halloween Carnival. Our daughter, Courtney, and Ricky and I loved the decorations so much we started the same tradition at home. We didn't want scary or grotesque, so we looked for whimsical, fun things." As they added and added, their home became the place to be on Halloween. Claudia became known as

"Mrs. Halloween," and the occasion evolved into an annual Halloween party. "We moved the furniture out of the living room to set up dinner tables," she said. As many as 60 people have shown up to share a potluck, enjoy the decorations and take their kids into the neighborhood for trick-or-treating.

Decorations in orange, purple and black; little Studio 56 Halloween villages and figurines that make noise; fall foliage; black table clothes; pumpkins and canisters stocked with homemade candies fill every space. "We grow a patch

of potato vines in the backyard," Claudia said. "It becomes the 'pumpkin patch,' and a favorite place for taking photos."

With the sudden loss of her husband on April 1, 2012, Claudia's world turned upside down. "It was devastating," she said. Not only had she lost her best friend, but she faced a labyrinth of responsibilities for which she had no knowledge or experience. "It was the most difficult time of my life," she said. "Ricky had handled so many things."

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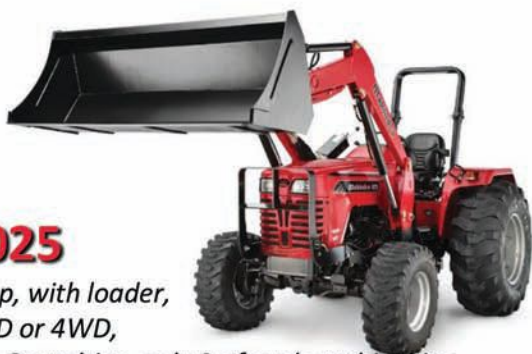
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list of questions,” Claudia said. “Then I decided if there’s something I cannot manage, and if it’s not absolutely necessary, it has to go.” Through it all, she decided to continue the Halloween and Christmas traditions, so with the help of her daughter and son-in-law, decorations were transferred from the attic into big crates now stored on shelving units in the garage.

Today, Claudia enjoys spending time with her two grandsons, 2-year-old Chase and 1-year-old Hayes. She has converted the bedroom that previously doubled as a TV room into a playroom for the boys, and her beautiful and spacious master suite now includes a baby bed for Hayes. Also, while the boys are too young for their family’s rambunctious 6-year-old Jack Russell Terrier named Bailey, Claudia and Bailey have become housemates. “She’s good company,” Claudia said.

In addition to a formal dining room with a lovely chandelier and display of wedding china plus a stately office showcasing her husband’s many awards, Claudia’s home features a laundry the size of a bedroom. “It’s so enormous, so of course, I decorate it for the holidays,” she said. Magnetic boards on one wall display magnets collected on Ricky and Claudia’s many travels.

During his tenure as vocational director for Waxahachie High School, Claudia’s husband earned many awards. He was especially proud, though, when their yard was named Yard of the Month. “He took great care of the yard,” Claudia said. Today, her home’s exterior remains a showplace. “I don’t know how many



trees and shrubs were removed so I could handle the maintenance,” she smiled. “I don’t mow, but I do everything else.” With colorful flowers and healthy plants bordering a sparkling swimming pool and flagstone-stamped concrete patio, the backyard looks like a fine painting. In the adjacent gated playground with a lawn that looks like a carpet, Claudia has added a waterslide for her grandsons.

Claudia taught elementary school for 32 years and has now been retired for 14 years. She is blessed with having had a loving marriage, a wonderful daughter and son-in-law, two very special grandsons and one rambunctious four-legged housemate. Her home continues to be a center of celebration for her friends and neighbors. Now, her life is slowly taking on new dimensions.

Her list of questions and answers following Rickey’s passing turned into a book for five of her closest friends in the event they might face the same issues. “I call it *The Ignorant Widow*,” Claudia grinned. “It’s a spoof about me, but it also has important information.” She had so many requests for the book that she ultimately self-published the information and has recently been contacted by a publishing company interested in expanding and re-issuing it. “I’ve also been invited to speak to groups,” she said.

When it comes to the powers of perseverance, celebration, fellowship and faith, Claudia sets the standards. Her home, still the place for parties, has also become a foundation for building new dreams. “I love this house,” she said. “There’s nothing I would change. It’s perfect.” **NOW**



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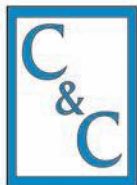
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Riding High

— By Callie Revell

Campfire Creek Therapeutic Riding Center sits nestled on the land of Bobby and Emily Oliver in Waxahachie's countryside. Rocking chairs sway peacefully in the breeze on a porch overlooking the barn. Inside, the barn is full to capacity every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Here, over 30 volunteers work with a team of horses to rehabilitate 50 children and adults with special needs.

The riding center began nine years ago when Emily and her family realized Ellis County lacked a therapeutic riding center. They began building one from the ground up. "We had no fence, no barn, no horse — nothing," Emily remembered. Together, Emily and Bobby set out to create a riding center and soon received donations of equipment, horses and money. "One thing came after another, but it's obviously been God saying, 'I'll equip you as we go along,' and that's what He's done," Emily said.

Therapeutic riding helps those with special needs build muscle tone and improve fine motor skills. While on the horse, a rider can work on balance, stretching and grip. Some riders with delayed mental development practice colors and numbers, while other riders, like stroke victims, gain coordination by directing the horse or brushing it after a ride. Therapeutic riding also improves emotional and social functions. For safety reasons, volunteers at the facility lead the horses and walk beside riders.



Judi Hammock, a special education teacher at Waxahachie Ninth Grade Academy, has been volunteering for two years. She has seen firsthand how the horses affect the riders. "The horses have a way of connecting with people who have special needs," Judi said. "They help them overcome some of the difficulties they're having."

The facility also benefits the parents of children with special needs. "Sometimes, that's the only time the parents get a break," Judi said. "They're able to just come, sit and relax while watching as their children accomplish something." Many riders make progress they and everyone around them never thought possible. "We have some autistic students who have difficulty communicating and concentrating, but they seem able to do that when they're on the horse," Judi said. "We've had some who didn't talk at all, but when they got on the horse, they started talking. It was gradual, but you could see their progress."

Two years ago, Truett Huddle decided to attend an orientation at the riding center, and he's been volunteering there ever since. "What really made my mind up was after I was here about two weeks with the children and the parents, I saw how much good it did and how much the riders enjoyed it," Truett said. "I was hooked."

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Charles Leach, M.D., specializes in internal medicine and accepts Medicare patients. He enjoys working with patients on a wide range of their healthcare needs. Dr. Leach is a founding member of the former Medical Clinics of North Texas (MCNT), where he practiced for 14 years. He and his wife live in Arlington, and enjoy movies, books and traveling. They have two sons.

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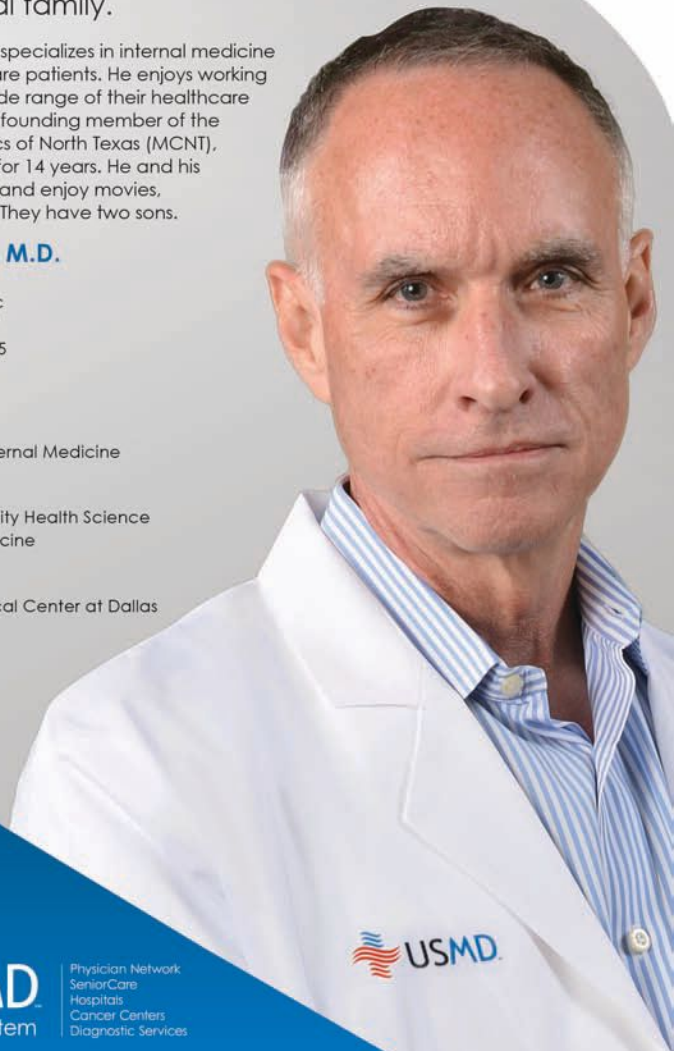
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Truett works with both the riders and the horses and knows the importance of volunteers to any organization. "Without volunteers, it wouldn't run," Truett said. "You step outside and give something,



Judi Hammock, Emily Oliver and Truett Huddle take a break on the porch.

and you get so much more back. The community gets something, too. It's important for me to volunteer and get outside of my comfort zone to see if I can grow a little bit."



Emily couldn't agree more. "Without volunteers, I can't do anything. We certainly can't serve the 50 students we have," she said. "They work with the horses, work with the kids, fill out forms




to get grant money, prepare food for appreciation dinners — everything that goes on happens because enough people have good hearts and want to give back.” To Emily, having volunteers donate their time means her dream continues on. “Without volunteers, we would have to cut back or close our doors, because we just couldn’t do it,” Emily said. “I’m just so thankful for them.”



A large part of being a volunteer means providing consistency to the riders. “The kids get used to you,” Judi said. “If you’re not there, they miss you.” She mentioned one 3-year-old boy with cerebral palsy and weakness on his left side. “When he first started, he was very shy and hardly talked at all,” Judi remembered. “He had a difficult time with his arm and leg, so we worked on

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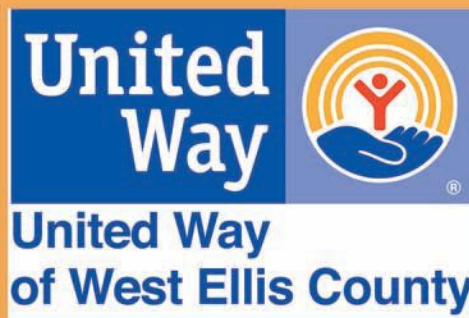
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that quite a bit. Now, he talks up a storm! Just seeing them as they come out of their shells and talk — as well as seeing them make physical progress — is great.”

Truett remembers an autistic rider who made outstanding progress. “I worked with him the first year I was here,” Truett said. “Holding his attention or having him follow instructions was very difficult.

*“The horses
 have a way of
 connecting with
 people who have
 special needs.”*

He’s improved so much that he now rides around by himself with Bobby teaching him.” Truett feels the most difficult aspect of being a volunteer is the toll it takes emotionally. “It touches your heart,” Truett admitted. “You don’t want to be apathetic, but you don’t want to be at the point where you can’t control what you’re doing around the child. It really brings to light how simple my life is, how great I’ve got it. The hardest thing is being willing to step into that, be a part of it and help others grow. It’s helped me grow more than anyone else.”

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One of the most rewarding moments each year is the Ride of Champions, a festive ceremony that gives riders an opportunity to display their achievements of the season. The riders look forward to the chance to show what they've learned. "It's open to the public. Every rider will do a short ride that shows something they've worked on and learned," Judi said. At the ceremony, parents, relatives, friends and volunteers watch each rider perform and receive a medal. "For some of the kids out here, riding is the only sport they do," Judi pointed out. "They may not be able to play football or baseball. This is their big event. It's a culmination of the season to show what they've accomplished." This year, the Ride of Champions will be held on November 15.

Campfire Creek is a place of healing and growth for riders and volunteers alike. Truett and Judi encourage anyone interested in volunteering to give it a try. "Visit and see what happens," Truett said. "It's not everyone's piece of cake. It's hot in the summertime and cold in the wintertime. But the rewards are immense, and it's amazing what they've done and continue to do here."

"It's growing so much. We're getting so many more riders that the more volunteers we have, the better to help everything continue here," Judi said. To Judi, helping others also means helping herself. "We come out here to help others grow, but I come out here and it helps me, too," she added. "I can come out here frustrated or depressed, and it calms me and touches me. It's my therapy." **NOW**

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Never Giving Up

— By Sandra Strong

Life is a never-ending wheel slowly spinning round and round. Sometimes circumstances cause time to come to a complete stop. But just as abruptly as it stops, it once again begins to revolve. So many events can cause the world to feel as if it's stopped rotating on its imaginary axis: birth, death and all the events, both happy or sad and good or bad, that occur in between. Those same events, referred to as the dash between life and death, are the ones that give meaning and depth to life, the moments that make a person who they are.

Paul O'Rear and his wife, Susan, experienced just such a breathtaking halt on the





morning of November 24, 2001, when their oldest child, Ashley, lost her four-year battle with cancer at the age of 14. Initially, when their world finally began to revolve again, it spun out of control. "We were devastated, and we really don't have a plausible explanation why it happened," Paul admitted. "We are bound by time and what we can see. God is not. God had a plan for Ashley's life and that plan included the c-word."

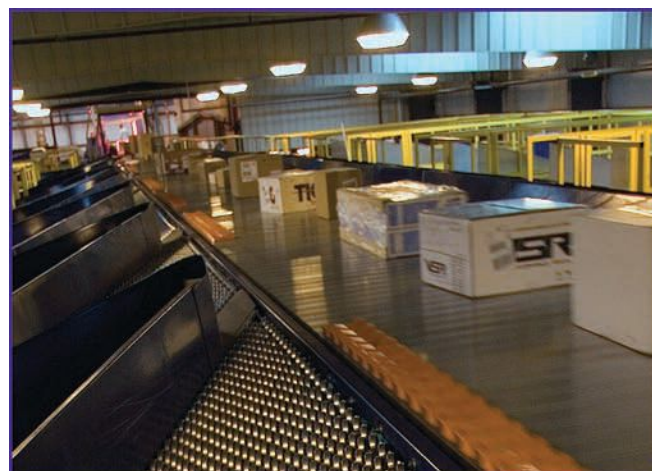
As time passed, Paul knew he needed to put his daughter's memory into a book, and not just any book. The words he wrote had to bring Ashley to life on the pages while helping others who have lost loved ones see there is still joy to be found amongst the sadness. "The name of the book is *Living With a Broken Heart, Rediscovering Life After Loss*," Paul said. "It offers practical advice for those who are grieving."

The book was not an immediate response to Paul's overwhelming loss. The words, thoughts, memories and joy, *yes joy*, were finally completed 10 years following her passing. As he sat down to write, he couldn't help but smile through his tears. "Her absence hurts so much because her presence brought so much joy," Paul reiterated. "She never let her illness stop her from doing all the things she dreamed of doing. She never gave up. She lived her short life to the fullest."



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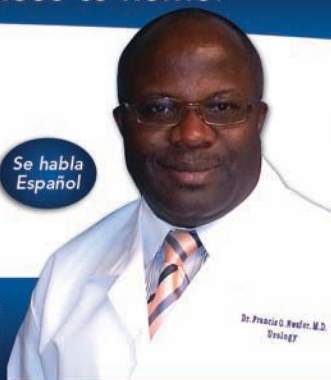
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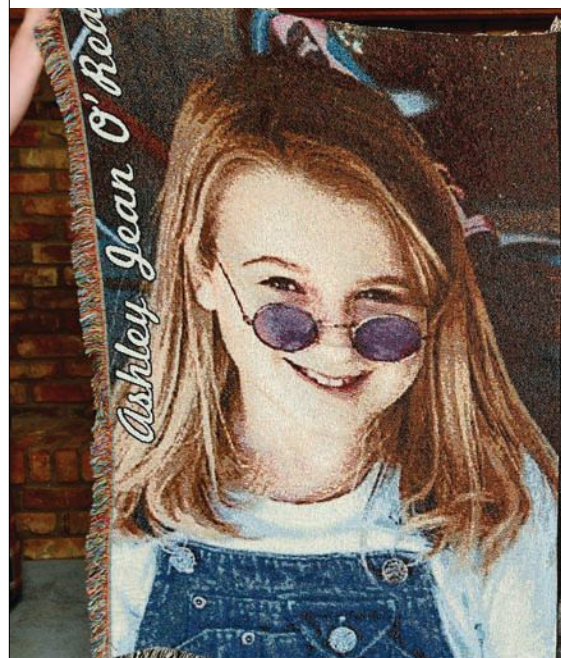
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That same attitude for living is what Paul has conveyed to readers in his book. In fact, Paul wants to be just like his daughter "when he grows up."

There are a couple of key reasons Paul decided to write his memories down. The first was solely for self. "I want her memory to live on. She touched so many people in the way she dealt with her cancer," he explained. "The altruistic reason is found in the way Ashley's courage inspired others." Paul also wanted people to know it's OK to go through the grieving process, but somewhere along the way you have to go on — you have to begin to live again. "You really can rediscover life after loss," Paul added.

Life following loss for Paul, Susan and their son, Justin, comes in remembering all the good times. As they remember Ashley, laughter fills the house. "As a family, we shared so many lifetime experiences with Ashley," Paul stated. "We wouldn't have such wonderful





memories of Ashely if her life path had turned out differently?"

One of Susan's funniest memories, and one that proved Ashley was no different than any other teenager, came during one of her hospital stays. "I just needed a break," Susan explained. "I left the hospital to go play softball with my church league. I ended up breaking my ankle as I slid into home plate."

"She got her break," Paul added with a huge grin.

"Ashley told me it served me right for leaving her to go play ball," Susan said.

Another family memory came from Ashley's desire to be an actress. She used a good bit of her savings to have professional photographs and headshots taken at a Dallas modeling agency. Paul has two all-time favorite photos of his daughter, one of which was taken during this photo shoot. Ashley got to meet Jenna Leigh Green, the actress who played Libby Chessler in the TV series *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*. "The coolest



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thing was when we got to serve as extras for an episode of *Walker Texas Ranger*," Paul said. "During a break, Chuck Norris, as Walker, talked to us for about five minutes."

The loss of her hair from the treatment traumatized Ashley, but only for a minute. She got a wig, even though she felt quite comfortable in her baldness. When serving as an extra, Ashley also met Chuck's personal hairdresser. "Ashley was beautiful, but she was as bald as Telly Savalas," Paul said. "The hairdresser told Ashley she wanted to handcraft a wig especially for her. A couple months later, she was ready to present the wig."

Another unbelievable moment came when Ashley, along with her family and other children with cancer, spent a day at what was then known as Texas Stadium. Pictures of Ashley were taken with Jerry Jones in the center star on the field. "Ashley got to wear a Super Bowl ring while having her picture taken. You don't see the two body guards who are there to protect the ring," Paul beamed. "She also got to wear Crazy Ray's cowboy hat."





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PAUL O'REAR

The one event Ashley was unable to attend, due to her passing, was carrying the Olympic Torch. "Nikki Stone, a past gold medalist, hand-delivered the torch to Ashley in early November," Paul said. "Justin was asked to carry it in her place." The rules state each runner should carry his or her own torch, since it could be dropped in the hand off. The Salt Lake Organizing Committee allowed for "some bending of the rules" to honor Ashley's memory. "Justin handed the torch off to me," Paul explained, "while Susan was able to capture the moment as she held a photo of Ashley."

Paul believes life is what we make of it. Destiny is a matter of choice. "You can be happy by choosing to be happy," Paul stated. "That's what Ashley did. She lived every minute to the fullest. She made the conscious choice to be happy."

Ashley was a normal child. She argued with her brother. She was spoiled, to some extent, but there was something much deeper within her, something more profound and easily seen by others. She was an old soul filled with wisdom beyond her years. During her battle, Ashley chose to remain faithful in her spiritual walk. Whether she knew it or not, God was going to use her cancer journey to bless others. "God is still making good stuff come out of bad stuff," Paul said, "just like He promised. Grief and happiness can coexist."

At the end of the day, hope and joy are what this family's story is all about. That's what makes their "never give up" attitude doable. **NOW**

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A collection of colorful autumn leaves in shades of red, orange, yellow, and green, scattered across the upper left and top portions of the page, appearing to fall.

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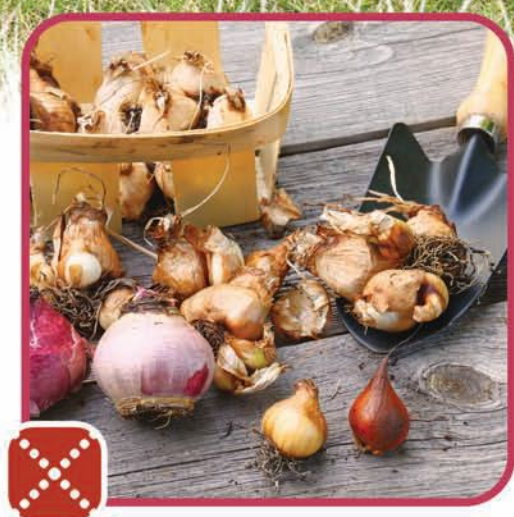
centers, as well as your local big box stores, offer a range of sizes and weights.

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

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(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 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.



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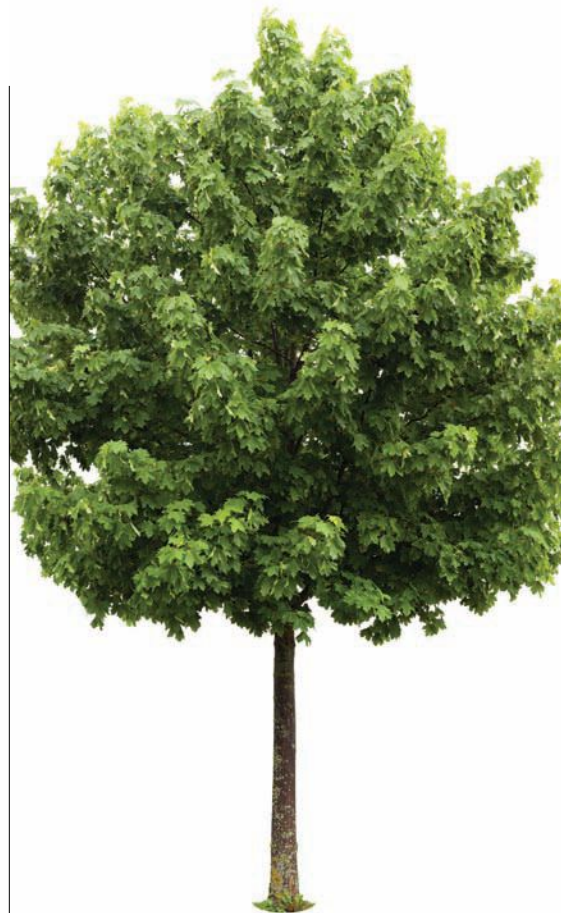
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Mike McGrath expounded on why it's advisable not to prune until winter. "As I try to stress every year at this time, pruning now stimulates new growth just when the plants are trying to go dormant, and this severely weakens the plants."

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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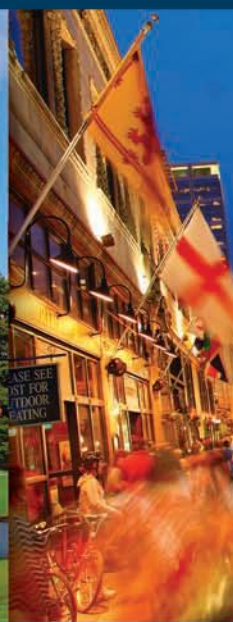
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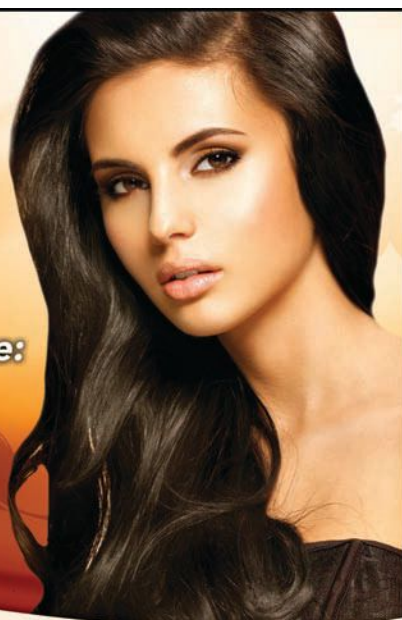
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dance troupe at Cowles Center for Dance and Performing Arts or their favorite band at First Avenue, the Fine Line Music Cafe and Mill City Nights.

World-renowned museums like Walker Art Center and Minneapolis Institute of Arts are among the 55 museums in the Minneapolis area. The city boasts the most theater seats per capita after New York City, with Broadway tours, local productions and the Minnesota Fringe Festival each August to entertain and delight visitors. Festivals like Northern Spark and the Uptown Art Fair take over the city during the summer months with art from every discipline and price point.

With no sales tax on apparel and shoes, it's hard to deny Minnesota's shopping appeal. On top of that, the country's largest shopping center, Mall of America, is nestled in the Minneapolis suburb, Bloomington, which is a short Metro Transit ride away from downtown. Packed inside its 4.8 million square feet are more than 520 stores, an indoor theme park, Nickelodeon Universe, an aquarium housing more than 10,000 sea creatures, a 14-screen movie theater and countless restaurant options. Downtown, take in the flagship Target store on



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Nicollet Mall, then stroll to Saks OFF 5th and many other shops lining the city's pedestrian mall.

In an effort to keep Minneapolis safe, clean and green, the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District (DID) was implemented in early 2009. Through its many initiatives, visitors and natives can explore the city worry-free while DID Ambassadors patrol the sidewalks, aiding those in need of directions, those who have lost property and even those with medical emergencies. As one of the top-ranked cleanest cities in the world, Minneapolis is kept clean through DID's diligent help with pressure washing, litter and graffiti removal and an outdoor recycling program that stretches throughout downtown. With the goal in mind to have every block green in 20 years, the Minneapolis DID fills the 120-plus block district with more than 15,500 colorful plants to amplify the city's already beautiful downtown.

Minneapolis offers endless opportunities for fun and exploration year-round. Visit Minneapolis and relish in its changing seasons, endless bike paths, multifaceted arts scene and guilt-free shopping while indulging in the city's delectable culinary offerings. For more information about Minneapolis or to plan a trip to the City by Nature, visit www.minneapolis.org. **NOW**

By Annie Michaelson. Photos courtesy of Meet Minneapolis.

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Summer Miller, Linda Green and Pam Peterson encourage shoppers to come experience the extensive product line they carry at the boutique! They really do have something for everyone in their “bag of tricks.”

The Full Package

Imparting knowledge allows clients to feel good about themselves. — By Sandra Strong

The passion is apparent in the words Pam Peterson uses to describe the offerings available to her clients. She smiles with a self-confidence that comes with loving what she does for a living as the proprietor and buyer for Merle Norman Cosmetic Studio & Boutique. “We’re no longer your mother’s makeup,” Pam said, referring to the extensive cosmetic line Merle Norman currently offers. “We are well beyond where the company was when Merle Norman first started her business in 1931.”

Pam took ownership of the thriving franchise nine years ago, after deciding she was ready to say “goodbye” to corporate America. “I knew the business side of things when I took over,” Pam shared, “but I went to school to become a master makeup artist, so I could understand the mechanics of operating a cosmetic studio. I wanted to fully understand the needs and wants of the clients. My desire was, and still is, to impart

knowledge to them, so they can leave the boutique feeling good about themselves and how to apply the products at home.”

With 13 foundation formulas and over 190 shades, Merle Norman Cosmetic Studio & Boutique has a full “bag of tricks” for every complexion and skin type. Personalizing the makeup experience is the most important aspect for the clients, as far as Pam and her staff — manager Linda Green and beauty consultant Summer Miller — are concerned. “We want clients to be comfortable as they learn about the products we offer and any possible purchases they may make,” Pam said. Although everyone is different, we’ve found that everyone still enjoys a relaxed atmosphere.”

Once the makeup has been decided upon, clients can complete their new look with upscale clothing items, shoes and the perfect selection of costume jewelry. “You get the

whole package when you come to the boutique,” Pam explained with a smile. “The time we spend with our clients is not hurried. Time with a client can last from 30 minutes to a full hour. It’s all about them and what they want.” Sometimes clients have a desire to learn the technique for smoky eyes. Other times, they want to learn about the products that can conceal and hide scars, red patchy areas and/or tattoos.

“We offer much more than a product. We offer confidence-building tools, as we get to know clients on a very personal level.”

Offerings that work as maintenance to enhance the makeup offered at Merle Norman Cosmetic Studio & Boutique include facials, thermal exfoliators, hydration treatments, a wrinkle smoothing system and self-tanning foam that’s not only safe but meets the current FDA guidelines. Facials come in a range of choices from those that soothe to those that brighten the skin. “We know the benefits the facials have,” Pam said, “because we see the volume of product that goes home with the clients.”

Pam felt compelled to offer a full line of wigs for cancer patients who have no desire to travel elsewhere. There are many styles and colors to choose from. Gift ideas also include: Listen Doll greeting cards, decorative battery-operated toothbrushes, jelly, salsa, DaVinci add-a-beads, belts, purses and scarves.

Clients receive so much more than a pretty face at Merle Norman Cosmetic Studio & Boutique. Many times they regain a lifestyle of beauty and self-esteem. “We offer much more than a product,” Pam emphasized. “We offer confidence-building tools, as we get to know clients on a very personal level.”

The main goal for Pam is for clients to feel super special following their experience at the boutique. “I know it sounds cliché,” Pam said, “but we want clients to leave feeling like a million bucks.” **NOW**

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A ribbon cutting is held by the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce for Ten Clinic.



Kaden Hill comes in out of the rain to help his mom do some shopping.



Chamber members are wet after the ASL Challenge. Micheal Lyle of Landmark Equipment provided the loader full of ice water.



Adopt-a-Class volunteers enjoy a breakfast where they are matched with their third grade teachers for the year.



Zula Spencer and Carson Almand perform as Snow White and Prince Roenel in Waxahachie Community Theatre's rendition of The Poisoned Apple.



On a mild Sunday afternoon, Jeremy and Zane Robinson take their afternoon naps in the front porch rocker.



Pettigrew Academy celebrates the start of their 10th year with a Chamber ribbon cutting, live dove release and breakfast.



Waxahachie Chamber members help introduce Bealls Department Store's new line, smashbox.



Members of the North Texas Patriot Guard Riders honor a fallen hero at his funeral.

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Finding the Perfect Checking Account

Things to consider when finding a checking account that provides the best benefits

With nearly every monetary transaction now requiring use of a checking account or a debit card, these have become requisites of living and thriving in the modern world. Plastic is now accepted and encouraged for payment almost everywhere, even at yard sales, where the seller can ring up purchases on a swiping-equipped smartphone. Because checking accounts are such a big part of daily life, it is important to seek out a financial institution that can provide an account suited to your needs and lifestyle.

When choosing a checking account, it is important to consider what it can do for you and not just what you can do with it. Information about convenience features like mobile banking and online bill pay is great to know up front, but be sure to dig a little deeper before signing up for a new account to make sure you know the whole story.

“Free” is the keyword when it comes to what people desire from their checking accounts, but it isn’t always what they get. Even if the account was touted as free at the time of signup, you may incur fees by not meeting certain requirements. Common requirements to look out for are minimum balances or direct deposit activity.

Finding your perfect checking account requires simply matching up the requirements for obtaining free checking with your banking habits and lifestyle. For example, if you are a freelancer who doesn’t have a consistent monthly source of income eligible for direct deposit, you may get the best deal by finding a checking account with a larger minimum balance and no direct deposit requirement. The opposite would be beneficial for a startup manager who has paychecks that satisfy a direct deposit requirement but who cannot ensure that a minimum balance remains in the account at all times.

If you don’t plan to use direct deposit or don’t currently use it, or if you don’t maintain a sufficient checking balance, you may want to consider opening an account with a credit union or local financial institution, because they tend to have fewer requirements and fees than do larger banks.

Selecting an insured institution and staying within coverage limits is important when choosing a bank account or credit union. Another thing to consider when comparing checking accounts is ATM fees, which can add up quickly at around \$2.50 per transaction for some accounts. Ask the credit union or bank if it has a policy of refunding ATM fees from other financial institutions and if it charges its own fees. This is especially important for people living in rural areas who may not have access to many ATMs and for people who travel frequently for business and may not always have time to seek out an ATM from their own bank. When researching local credit unions in your neighborhood, see if they offer Shared Branching — a national network of credit unions from all over the country that share facilities to give members thousands of convenient locations and surcharge-free ATMs to perform transactions, just as if they were at their home credit union.

If you keep these things in mind while on the hunt for a checking account, you have the best chance of ending up with one that will make you a happy customer for many years to come. You may also want to consider using an online comparison tool, such as the one offered at Bankrate.com, to help you examine several accounts at once. **NOW**

Aaron Penny is the branch manager at the Neighborhood Credit Union in Waxahachie.

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October 3, 4

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Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce Annual
Auction "Salsa Nights": 6:00-9:00 p.m.,
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October 9 — 12

Crossroads of Texas Film Festival.

October 10

Texans Against Breast Cancer Annual
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October 24, 25

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October 25

Texas Country Reporter Festival:
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Slowly Into Darkness

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

The thief was very thorough. Insidiously and stealthily striking in such a way that what was lost could never be returned. Glaucoma is the thief. The tragedy in this disease is not just the blindness but also in how it happens. It has no symptoms until vision is lost. However, if it is caught early enough, it can be treated and its ultimate tragedy kept at bay.

Glaucoma is a disease that damages the optic nerve and progressively compromises vision. The damage is irreversible. There is a buildup of pressure called the intraocular pressure in the eye. It is this pressure that damages the nerve. The increased pressure can come from various conditions affecting the aqueous fluid in the eye. The aqueous is a clear fluid produced by the eye. When it can no longer flow properly, because of too much production of fluid or by inadequate drainage, the potential for high intraocular pressure increases and can set up conditions for glaucoma. Some medications can increase eye pressure. Other eye disorders and injuries to the eye can also set up these adverse conditions.

One can have glaucoma for years without any symptoms. Only when there is noticeable vision loss and the person seeks professional help can the diagnosis be made. The most common type of glaucoma is open-angle glaucoma or wide-angle glaucoma. With open-angle glaucoma, there are no symptoms except the gradual loss of vision beginning with peripheral vision.

The peripheral loss is at first unnoticeable, because most people simply turn their heads to see. However, as the loss increases, it becomes very apparent the visual field is narrowing. Eventually, the person's visual field is just a frontal tunnel. If glaucoma is not treated to slow down or arrest the progression of the disease, total blindness will occur.

There is no cure, and everyone should have a comprehensive eye exam every one to two years to rule out issues that may be detrimental to their eye health. A portion of the population is more susceptible to glaucoma — a family history of glaucoma, a person who is African-American, Hispanic and/or over the age of 60. For African-Americans, the concern begins around age 40. If you are treated with medication for your condition, take it exactly the way it is prescribed and follow up with all doctor appointments. Your eyesight depends on it. As the second leading cause of blindness according to the World Health Organization, early diagnosis and proper treatment is crucial and irreplaceable. **NOW**

Source:

www.who.int/blindness/causes/en/.

This article is for general information only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult with your physician if you have questions regarding this topic.

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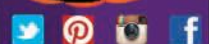
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In the Kitchen With Paula Manley

— *By Sandra Strong*

Paula Manley's love and knowledge of cooking came from watching both of her grandmothers create meals for the family. As a pastor's kid, she grew up in several different states. "However, one of the things consistent from state-to-state is the church potluck dinners," she shared with a smile. "I have one church cookbook that's my first stop when looking for a particular recipe, or when I want to try something new to share with my family and friends or my students at SAGU."

As a young girl, Paula participated in a club for girls at her church. "We worked for several different badges, one of which was cooking," Paula explained. "I remember having to cook a whole meal by myself when I was 10. I made Quiche Lorraine." **NOW**

Spicy Jalapeño Ranch Dip

- 1 1/3 cups mayonnaise
- 1/3 cup buttermilk
- 1/3 cup salsa verde
- 1/3 cup jalapeños, chopped
(add more for extra heat)
- 1/4 bunch cilantro, chopped
- 1 pkg. dry ranch dressing mix

1. Mix all ingredients in small food processor until well-blended. Serve with tortilla chips.

Creamy Chicken Tortilla Soup

- 1 onion, chopped
- 3/4 cup green onion, chopped
- 1/4 cup green chilies, diced
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 1 10-oz. can Ro-Tel
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. cilantro, chopped

- 1/2 tsp. chili powder
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups heavy cream or half-and-half
- 2 26-oz. cans cream of chicken soup
- 1 rotisserie chicken, deboned and shredded

1. Sauté onions and chilies in melted butter, until tender. Stir in Ro-Tel, cilantro and spices.
2. Add broth, cream or half-and-half and soup to the mixture.
3. Cook over medium to low heat, until hot. Add chicken. Serve garnished with shredded cheese and tortilla chips.

Tasty Tortilla Soup

- 1 14-oz. can tomato sauce
- 5 cups water
- 1 medium onion

- 4-6 cloves garlic, to taste
- 3 Tbsp. chicken bouillon
- 1 7-oz. can chipotle peppers
- 1 rotisserie chicken, deboned and shredded
- 2 cups Monterrey Jack cheese, shredded
- Fried tortilla strips

1. In a soup pot, combine tomato sauce and water. Remove 1 cup of liquid and add to blender, along with onion and garlic; puree until well-blended. Add pureed onion/garlic liquid to pot.
2. Add bouillon, whisking until dissolved. Bring to a boil then lower temperature, allowing mixture to simmer. Add peppers. Simmer for 15 more minutes. (Longer if you want spicier soup.) Using a slotted spoon, remove chilies. Add chicken.
3. Garnish with shredded cheese and fried tortilla strips.

Bacon Cheddar Cheese Ball

- 1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened
- 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 3-oz. pkg. Real Bacon bits or pieces
- Pepper, to taste

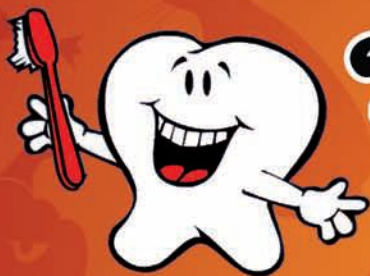
1. Use mixer to blend cheeses and bacon until well-blended. By hand, shape mixture into a ball. Roll in pepper until coated.
2. Refrigerate until firm. Serve with crackers.

Perfect Pumpkin Bread

- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 1/2 tsp. salt
- 3 tsp. pumpkin pie spice
- 3 cups sugar
- 2 cups packed pumpkin
- 1 cup oil
- 2/3 cup water
- 4 eggs

1. Mix first four ingredients. Add sugar; mix well.
2. Beat pumpkin, oil and water in a second bowl. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing between each egg.
3. Pour wet mixture into dry mixture. Stir until moistened. Pour into greased loaf pan. Bake at 350 F for 1 hour.

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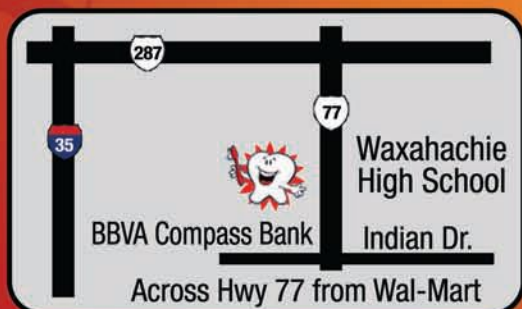
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