

# Midlothian

# NOW

M A G A Z I N E

NOVEMBER 2014

SPECIAL SECTION:  
2014 Holiday  
Shopping  
Guide

## A Simpler Life

At Home With  
Monte and Shawn Mechler

## Songs from Uganda

Melanie Todd shows  
20 children a  
whole new world

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## ON THE COVER



*The Mechler family gathers to celebrate fall.*

*Photo by Amy Ramirez.*

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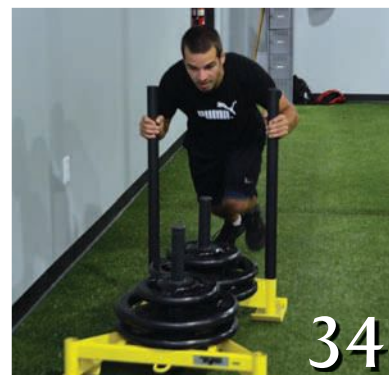
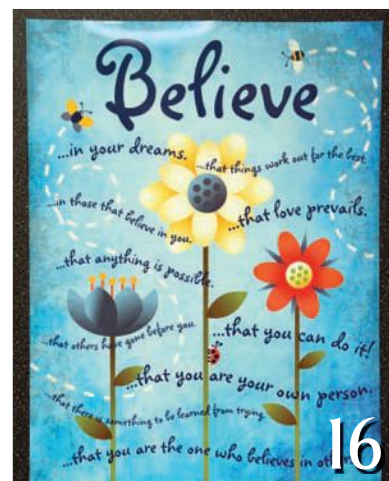
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## Editor's Note

*Hello, Midlothian!*

Do you remember the first Thanksgiving meal you prepared? As a newlywed, mine was a disaster that I managed to hide with the help of a nifty new invention called a microwave. I didn't know you're supposed to thaw the turkey many days before cooking. I tried in 12 hours. The result was nearly raw turkey on the inside. The outside was beautiful, so I showed it with all fanfare. Little did our guest know it was all show and no substance. In order to keep the meal moving along and

hide my ineptness, I would cut a few slices, microwave the life out of them and spirit the platter to the table. Our friend wondered why I kept jumping up and bringing more slices, when I could just fill up the platter and be done with it. It ended up being a day of gratitude that no one got sick!

Have a Happy Thanksgiving!

*Betty*

Betty Tryon  
MidlothianNOW Editor  
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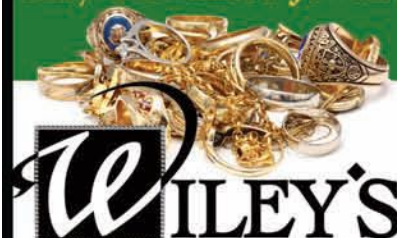
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MISD students and organizations joined more than 150 vendors that participated in the 8th Annual Midlothian Fall Festival. An estimated 6,000 guests attended the event and had the opportunity to see and hear about the great things happening at MISD while they walked through "Panther Alley".



## Rezoning for Midlothian Heritage High School

The MISD School Board has approved to make MHHS a comprehensive (9-12) high school. The process starts in 2015-16 when MHHS will have grades 9-11 and 2016-17 grades 9-12. It is planned that at the December 15 Board meeting an attendance zone for MHHS and other important aspects of the 9-12 rollout will be considered for approval.

### Townhall Public Meetings

The Board looks forward to input from parents and community members who attend the townhall meetings.

- Monday, Nov. 3 at 6:30 p.m. MHHS Cafetorium
- Monday, Nov. 10 at 6:30 p.m. MISD Board Room
- Saturday, Nov. 15 at 8:30 a.m. MISD Board Room
- Monday, Dec. 1 at 6:30 p.m. MHHS Cafetorium

### Timeline for MHHS Grade Levels

2014-2015	All MISD 9th graders only
2015-2016	9th-11th grades, MHHS attendance zone (approximately 600 students)
2016-2017	9th-12th grades, MHHS attendance zone (approximately 800 students)

## Rezoning online!

[midlothian-isd.net/district/rezone.html](http://midlothian-isd.net/district/rezone.html)

### Questions or Comments?

Contact the Communications Dept. at [info@midlothian-isd.net](mailto:info@midlothian-isd.net) email Superintendent [jerome\\_stewart@midlothian-isd.net](mailto:jerome_stewart@midlothian-isd.net) or call (972) 775-8296.

## Get in the holiday spirit by attending these free events and concerts

### November 2014

8	MHS Jazz Concert, 2 p.m. Downtown Midlothian
11	Veterans Day Assembly, FSMS 9 a.m., WGMS 10:30 a.m.
20	MHS Wind Ensemble, MHS Auditorium, 6:30 p.m.
24-28	Thanksgiving Break - MISD Closed

### December 2014

4	WGMS Christmas Concert @ MHS Auditorium, 6:30 p.m.
5	All-City Choir @ MHS Auditorium, 5:30 p.m. & 7 p.m.
9	FSMS Christmas Concert @ MHS, 7 p.m.
11	Christmas Band Concert @ MHHS, 6:30 p.m. MHS Choir Concert @ MHS Auditorium, 7 p.m.
15	School Board Mtg., MISD Board Rm., 5:30 p.m.
18-19	MISD 2-hr Early Release

Dec. 22 – Jan. 2 Winter Break - MISD Closed

Support the MISD athletes at their games. View the athletic calendar online.

## MISD Celebrates Veterans Day, Nov. 11

Veterans Day is an important day in Midlothian ISD. The district recognizes sacrifices made by local men and women who honor their country. Are you a veteran? If so, view the Veterans Day details online at [midlothian-isd.net](http://midlothian-isd.net).



## Benefiting At-Risk Students

Mark your calendar for the 2nd Annual Color Run for a Future 5K & 1K on Sat., November 15 at 9 a.m., MISD Multi-Purpose Stadium. Support the MHHS and MHS mentor program that

helps at-risk students in need. There will be music, a photo booth, decorated sunglass contest, and runners covered in colors during the chipped-timed race. Register at [movementtowardafuture.org](http://movementtowardafuture.org). MISD Rowdy Runners will register at school.



Midlothian families are encouraged to bring books and blankets on the field at the MISD Multi-Purpose Stadium on

Monday, November 3 from 6:00-7:30 p.m. This fun event includes a #MISDshelfie Photobooth, Book Walk, Computer Coding, Storytime on the Yard Line, Makerspaces activities, and Face Painting. Hosted by the MISD Library Media Specialists.



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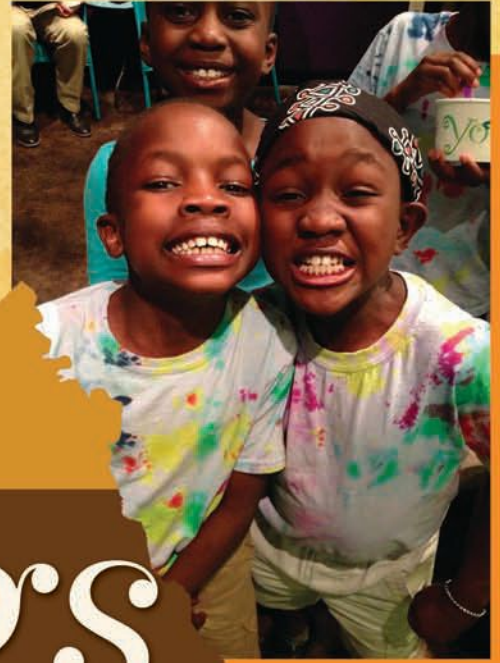
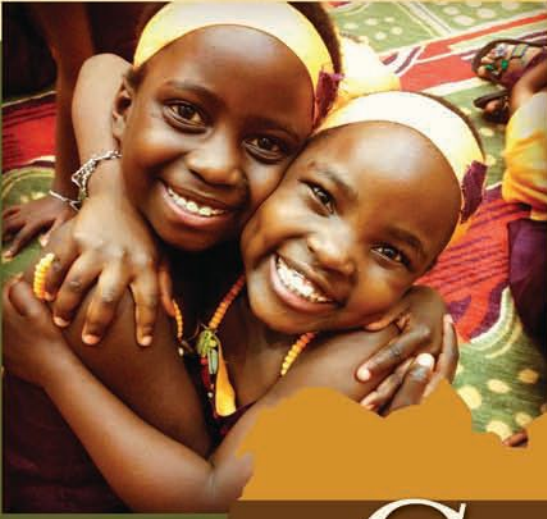
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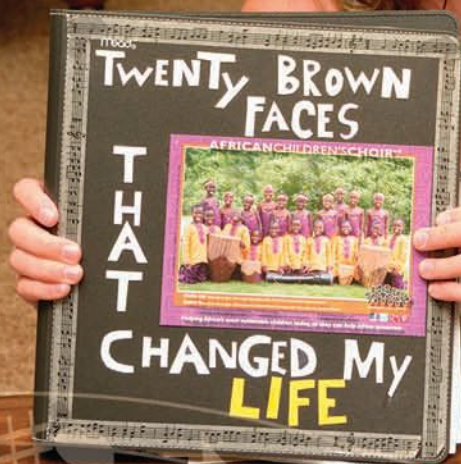
# Songs from Ugan

— By Betty Tryon





“Ever since I was a very little girl, I would talk about being a *missionary* and traveling.”



# da

*What magical invention caused the children to be awestruck and completely fascinated, standing with their mouths open, totally disbelieving what they saw? Was it a new app for the hottest games? A robot programmed to complete all their chores? No, it was one of the greatest inventions for homemakers — a washing machine. The children were from one of the poorest areas in Uganda and under the watchful care of chaperone Melanie Todd. To them, she was Auntie Mel.*

In their village, most of them walked a mile to get water from a well. “When they found out there was a machine that washed their clothes for them they said, ‘Auntie, no, no, that’s not real!’” Melanie related. “It was so fun to watch them experience those things we don’t think twice about.”

Melanie was a part of the organization African Children’s Choir, and toured 38 states, Ontario and the United Kingdom

with 20 Ugandan children and eight adults in 18 months. “We performed over 300 concerts and through that we raised funds for the organization to give the children a full ride all the way through university in Africa,” Melanie said.

Melanie has known of the organization since the age of 3 when her family hosted two children from the African Children’s Choir. The experience left a lasting impact on her. “Ever since

I was a very little girl, I would talk about being a missionary and traveling,” she remembered. “I had this globe, and I would twirl it, close my eyes, put my finger on it and say, ‘Wherever my finger lands, that’s where I’ll go.’” In 2011, at the age of 19, she started her journey by becoming a chaperone in the choir and going on tour.

A total of 20 children from ages 7 to 10 and eight chaperones comprised





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the choir. Three of the chaperones were from Uganda and the rest were from the states. In fact, all of the adults traveling with the children functioned as chaperones. They also took care of the choir's business. "I was the administrator," Melanie explained, "and a representative to the organizations we went to."

Melanie remembers the first time she met her group when she picked them up at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago and the ride to their first host



home. "I don't know how to explain their reactions!" she smiled. "They had never seen tall buildings before. It was a whole new world for them. It was so much fun watching the children learn about those commonplace things."

During their 18-month stay in America, they toured all over the country,





going to most of the states and different cities within each state. While they were in America, they were housed in host families' homes, usually the homes of the lead people who organized the choir's visit to their church or organization in a similar fashion to what Melanie witnessed when she was a child. During their tour, they were hosted in over 200 homes. "That alone was an adventure getting to see how different people live," the young missionary mused, noting that each individual home was totally different from the others and she felt like every home had its own culture.

Melanie and the chaperones were more than guardians to the kids. They became parents to them. "I don't have words to describe what an honor it was to be in such an intimate position with them," Melanie shared. In addition to physically caring for the children, the chaperones were responsible for homeschooling the children. This was a very tall order, considering the children didn't speak English and some of the chaperones, like Melanie, did not speak their language. The Ugandan chaperones had to translate for them. However, the kids were already so immersed in English that they started to pick it up quickly. "They are taught using Ugandan books," Melanie explained. "They learn in a totally different way than kids in America do, and the children are taught using the British School System English."

The American adults had to be taught the appropriate way to interact with the kids, because it was a totally different culture. "In Uganda, there is a firm line between adults and children," Melanie affirmed. "Children know exactly what they can and can't do. We had to change our thinking so as not to confuse the kids when they go back."

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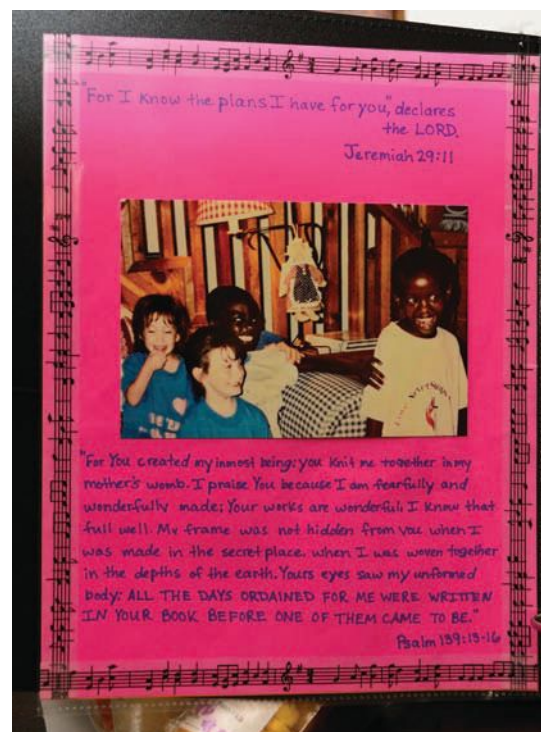
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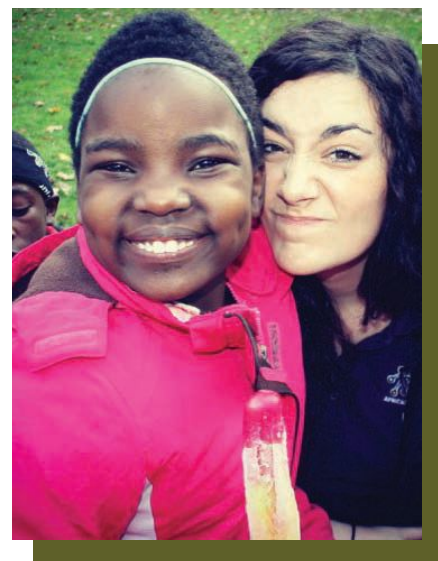
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most of the children would never have an education or learn to speak English or have the ability to get a job, because they come from a place where those opportunities do not exist. What is unique about this organization is that it doesn't just meet daily needs but gives the children a future, which in turn offers



hope for their families. "The children in the choir are not orphans," Melanie stated emphatically. "The organization pinpoints children who have families, so they can impact that family and break the cycle." One of the goals in bringing the children here was not to make them want to be American but to expose them to



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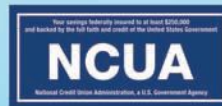
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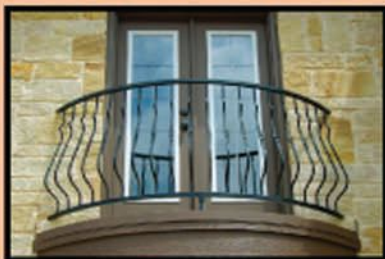
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a different way of life and occupations different from the ones their parents have.

After 18 months of traveling, rehearsing, performing and raising funds for the organization, the children are not abandoned by the organization when they return to Uganda. On the contrary, the same close instructional relationship continues as every child on the tour goes home to live in the African Children's Choir Primary School. All their clothing, food, education and everything they need is provided. "It's just like a boarding school," Melanie explained. "There they have a better life, because most of them would not have food to eat daily or clothes to wear if they returned to their village." After they complete their education, the graduates are then in a position to help their families.

During the time Melanie was with the group, they were closely shadowed by a film crew making a movie chronicling the children's journey from their village and



their travels through America. A trailer for the movie on YouTube is titled *Imba Means Sing*. Since Melanie was with the group during the filming, she will likely be in some of the shots.

Melanie's time with the choir will come to an end when she moves to Uganda to join an organization called Doors Ministries. This is a totally separate ministry but to her joy, she discovered she will be located only 30 minutes from where the choir kids live. "This is an incredible gift. Of all the places I could've been assigned, I get to live right next to them!" she enthused. Although she's leaving the organization, her experiences will be with her always. "I will forever be changed," she shared, "because of seeing the world through different eyes." **NOW**



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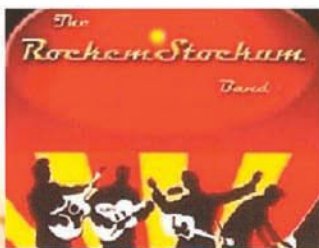
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— By Betty Tryon

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*When teaching in a men's prison, it's best to learn all the rules early. Michelle Powe should know all about it. As a young teacher, she taught in the Ohio prison system. But she learned about one rule too late. "I was told to never loan a book to a man in the prison," she related, "because that means you are engaged to be married." When she was informed of that, she gulped and admitted, "Oh, well that's a problem. I now have five fiancés."*

Before that adventure in Ohio, Michelle began her education at Texas A&M University with an undergraduate degree in journalism. There she was the editor for the campus daily paper called the *Battalion*. Her dream at the time was to become a famous foreign correspondent. She moved to Virginia and started working for a newspaper but soon discovered it was not her thing. "I liked the editorial and editing part of it," she noted, "but I was so shy that it was physically painful for me to interview people. I didn't know what to do, so I went back to school to The University of Texas at San Antonio to get my master's degree." One of her professors inspired her to the point of changing her life. "He was so shy in his personal life,"



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she recalled, “but so passionate in his teaching that it became an ‘aha’ moment for me.” Through his example, Michelle realized she could still feel shy and teach.

Buoyed by that knowledge, Michelle has gone on to teach in several states. She has many opportunities to help her students as an instructor at the Midlothian Campus of Navarro College and Palmer High School. “I like the community college level, because it is

**STAY  
MOTIVATED  
& GET OFF  
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kind of a stepping stone,” she said. “Some kids just getting out of high school are not quite ready for university and need a little bit more hand holding. I’m good at hand holding, because I understand the insecurities.”

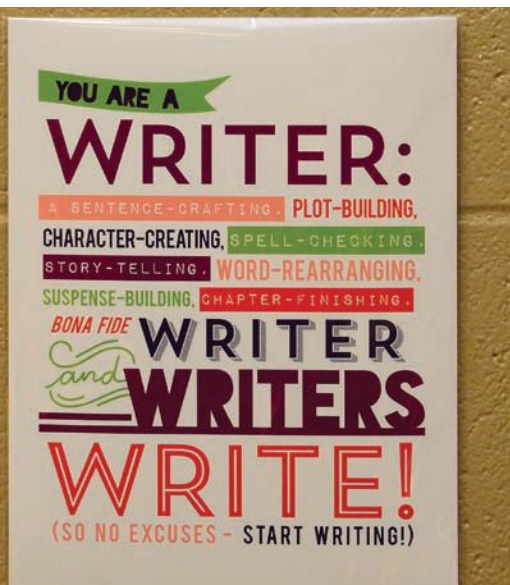
At the college she teaches British Literature, World Literature for sophomores and Composition Rhetoric I and II for the freshman class. At Palmer, she fosters the relationship between the high school and Navarro College by teaching dual credit classes. She also teaches regular high school English IV.





Her enthusiasm for teaching is contagious in her classrooms. In a Composition Rhetoric II class at Navarro, one of the students would high-five others to support them during the learning process. "He did that all the time! It was such an amazing thing," Michelle said in wonder. "It's kind of nice to say something in class and have someone turn around and high-five you. I also feel like everyone should have a standing ovation at least one time in their lives!"

During her teaching career, Michelle has taught in some unconventional settings. Naturally, she can recount many stories of her time as an educator in the



prison system in Ohio. "They were trying to get their associate degree, and I taught English and writing," she explained. Michelle reasoned that approximately 75 percent of her students there had some type of learning disability. "So, they had

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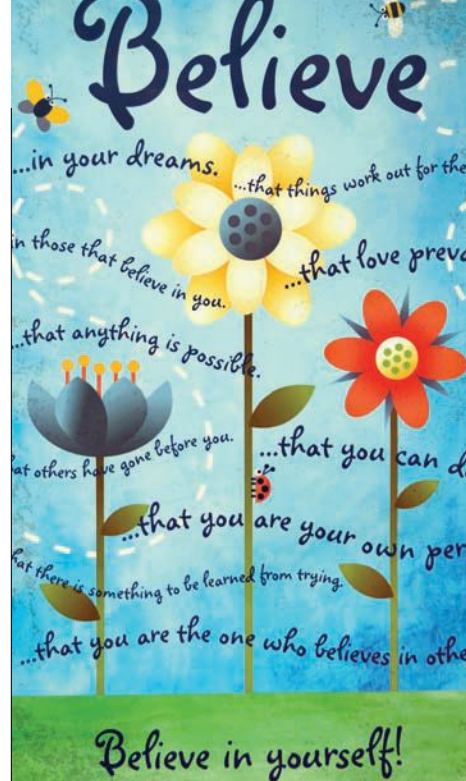
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dropped out of school, didn't know what to do and were floundering in life," she recalled. "Many had been told they were stupid and no one caught their learning disability." Michelle classified them as nontraditional learners, so she had to find nontraditional ways to reach them. "I think that was an important year for me," she shared. "I had to find some way to interest these students who had bad experiences previously, so they could overcome this."

One example was discovering how to make traditional literature interesting to the prisoners. Instead of going with the classics, she found poets or different authors the men liked. "Maya Angelou was very popular with them," Michelle remarked. "You don't need to read a Dickens novel to have a social discussion. We would discuss her works in terms of what was going on in their lives and that really worked."

Another memorable event occurred while teaching in a women's prison. In her writing classes, she usually allowed students to rewrite their initial draft. "As long as the student is willing to do the work, learn and correct their mistakes, they can rewrite and revise," she explained. With the first writing assignment given to the women, Michelle remembers giving a grade of D to a particular student. "I knew I was going to tell her not to worry about it, because she could rewrite and it would be OK," she added. While speaking





to another student, Michelle could see the woman who had received the D grade approaching her. "I saw her in my peripheral vision coming up, and she was angry!" Michelle remembered. "She was a big, big woman — 6 feet two inches and maybe 300 pounds. She got in my face trying to intimidate me." In the women's prison, there are no guards in the room, and Michelle later discovered she earned respect from the other prisoners because she didn't back down. "She turned out to be one of my favorite and best students," Michelle said.

Michelle enjoys helping nontraditional students seek different ways of learning. When she left Ohio and returned to Texas, she began teaching at Navarro. "I really like teaching community college, but I want to get my Ph.D. so I can teach at university level," she said. Michelle's support of her students stems from understanding the less than positive educational experiences some of them have had. "Some were told they were not good writers, and it turns out they are," she revealed. "They just didn't believe they could do it." Michelle's special gift lies in her ability to assure students there is nothing to be insecure about. On the contrary, she insists, they should be very proud of themselves. "When I teach, I like to try and find people's strengths and work on those," she said. "I figure my job is to get them job- or university-ready, and not have it be a beating along the way. I want them to learn and enjoy the class." **NOW**


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# A Simpler Life

— By Zachary R. Urquhart

*Monte and Shawn Mechler began their life together living in the heart of Dallas, only to yield to the rural/suburban appeal of Midlothian as their journey unfolded. Monte grew up in San Antonio, and graduated from Texas A&M University with a degree in environmental design. Having served in the U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Navy on active duty in Kosovo, Hurricane Katrina Recovery Operations and Operation Iraqi Freedom, he is now senior project manager for an architectural firm in Dallas.*



AT HOME WITH  
Monte and  
Shawn Mechler





Shawn grew up in Duncanville before attending Texas Christian University, where she earned a degree in finance. She serves as in-house director of financial services for CPA firms in Dallas, Fort Worth, Arlington and Austin. "I have to travel to each office, which is one of the reasons this location made sense," she explained. "It's somewhat in the middle for me." Monte and Shawn met during the July Fourth holiday in 2000. "We were both at Stan's Blue Note with friends, and we met and chatted a little," Shawn remembered. "But at the end of the night, he hadn't gotten my number, so I didn't know if anything would come of it."

Monte picked up the story. "I knew her name, her job and the building where she worked," he recalled. "I started calling each business until I found her." After



Monte's romantic pursuit, the two were married in 2001. They have two children — Sabrina is 11 and Zachary is 9.

When they first married, Monte and Shawn lived in a small house north of the M Streets in Dallas. "We loved it, but with young kids, we knew we needed to be in a different area," Shawn recounted. "We just had to decide whether to move north or south." Shawn's mom babysat Sabrina at her house in Duncanville until she turned 2, and the Mechlers had the same plan for Zachary when he was born. "We were actually driving from our house in Dallas to Duncanville, then back to Dallas for work each day," Shawn laughed. "It made so much sense to move



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down here versus looking on the north side of town."

They built a home in Crystal Forest in 2004. "We kept in mind that we would have two young children living here, so we under-built," Monte said. "Everything was sacrificial, because we felt that after the kids grew older, we could start doing improvements." After 10 years in a minimalist house, Shawn and Monte began making the upgrades and improvements they always knew would come. "We started painting in March, and everything just snowballed from there," he joked.

The front lawn sets the tone for the house. Monte takes immaculate care of



his grass. "I use a reel mower as it cuts the grass like scissors and makes the grass stronger, although in the summer heat, we just try to keep the grass alive as we are situated right over rock." With the beauty of the lawn itself, the few accents complete a remarkable first impression for the home.

The entryway is classic in its simplicity. Monte and Shawn both use the home office on one side of the entry, and a formal dining room sits opposite, decorated in a timeless style. The living

room has evolved the most in the past six months. "It's crazy how much it has changed," Shawn expressed. "Even just with paint and new floors it looks so different. We also added the big entertainment center. I'd say we have an Italian bling theme going." The living room features a painting they bought while on their Italian honeymoon, and the room's style is clearly influenced by the piece.

The painting is not the only noteworthy item, as Monte has two silk



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Persian rugs hanging on the wall opposite the focal art. "While I was in the Middle East," he reminisced, "I happened upon this little shop and bought these two small rugs. I got home and found out they were very valuable on top of being beautiful."

In addition to the items they have purchased, Monte made several accent pieces to enhance the home's style.




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"I made custom valences for all of the windows," he pointed out. "She purchased the fabric, and I made and covered the boxes."

The kitchen and dining nook reflect the Italian style of the living room, as well as include some items that are largely sentimental. "We had a platter made that looks like painted grapes," Shawn described, "but the grape bunches are actually the kids' footprints. We also have wooden bowls that my dad made as one of his hobbies after he retired."

The kids each show off their own style in their bedrooms. Sabrina's door is a collage of her artwork, and the room is pink, purple, black and, yes, "blinged" out. "With both kids, we put in loft beds, so they would have as much usable space as possible," Shawn shared. "Sabrina has a desk under her bed and Zachary has space to relax and watch his light show."

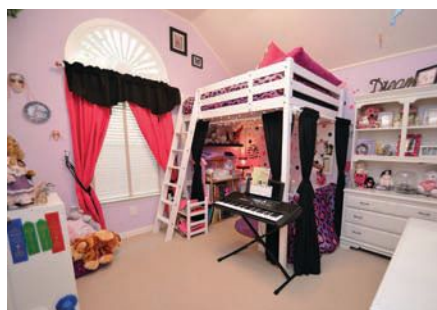
Zach has chosen car posters and memorabilia for his room, along with an odd color choice. "His parents went to TCU and A&M, but he's always loved dark orange, so he, of course, has UT stuff everywhere," Shawn giggled. The master bedroom is furnished with dark



wood, and a red color scheme flows into the master bath. The spacious room has a large tub and tile that is notable because this is one of the few areas in the house without wood floors.

There is an extra bedroom where one of Monte's hobbies is on display. "Monte loves photography," Shawn said. "So in the guest room, he has a wall covered with photos he's taken. It has everything from our honeymoon to photos of the kids, and he designed a frame, so it brings the hobby together with what he does for a living."

Monte is also a competitive archer, and the kids are active in sports as well. "Sabrina played soccer, but is focusing on art and riding horses for Hunter Jumper

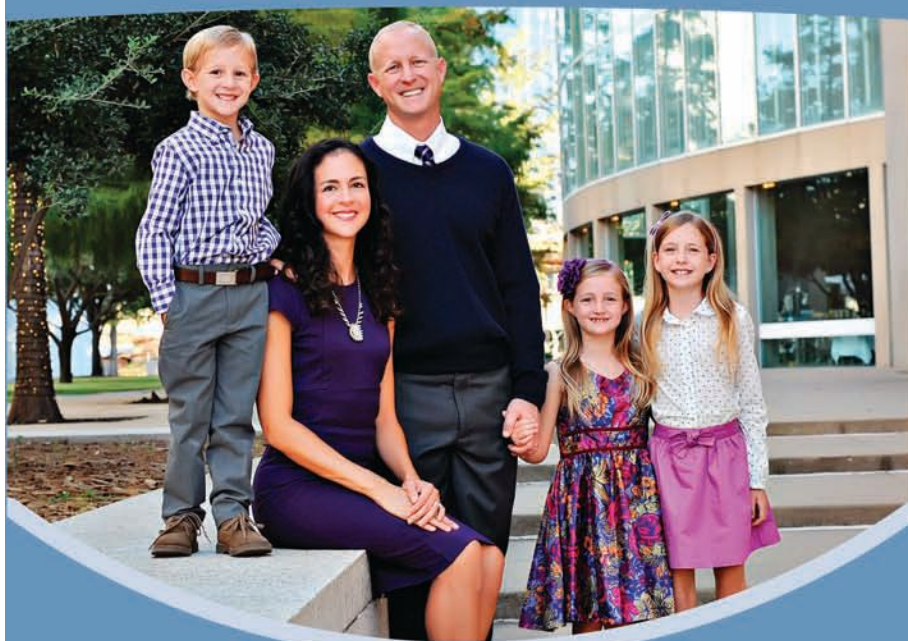


now," Shawn continued. "Zachary plays soccer on Storm FC, a club academy team, so he stays busy with that." The Mechlers also love the connection they have at FBC Midlothian, where members were especially helpful when Monte was overseas on active duty. "When we first moved, we didn't interact with many people, but once we got plugged in at FBC Midlothian that really changed," she added.

Ten years ago, Monte and Shawn traded in their big city life for the simpler pace in a town with the rural feel they appreciate. Though busy with work, sports activities, church and family time, they're now more at home than ever before. **NOW**



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— By Zachary R. Urquhart

*It doesn't make sense, and under normal circumstances it shouldn't seem like a good idea. But some people like nothing more than to slide head first down a mile of hard ice faster than*



*anyone else in the world. From its beginnings, the sport of skeleton has made many cringe with excitement, while a select few see the relatively young Olympic event as a goal to chase. Since February, Jace Zschiesche has been pursuing that dream as fast as he can.*



Jace grew up in Midlothian, graduating from Maypearl High School in 2013. He studies at Navarro College and hopes to transfer to Texas A&M University after completing basics. "I think I would like to study wildlife management," he explained. "I really like being outdoors, so that or marine biology would be a good fit — just something outside." He lives with his mom, dad and two brothers, and he works at Main Street Gym.

His interest in downhill sledding began as a child. "The first time I saw bobsledding on TV, I loved it," he recalled. Many kids have a similar experience, but few get the opportunity Jace has had in trying out for the Olympic squad, but he's had plenty of help getting to this point. "From working at the gym, I met Alex Allred, who was a bobsledder," Jace said. "We were talking about bobsledding, but she steered me toward the skeleton instead."

Participants in all sled events have to fit certain weight requirements, and Alex knew Jace was a better fit for skeleton. With a slight shift in direction, Jace saw an opening and started training right away. "I am on the small side," he granted, "so I do a lot of lifting to gain weight, along with speed training to get

**"THE  
TRAINING AND  
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faster. Patrick Wherland, a trainer at the gym, has been a huge help with that." Jace focuses on gaining weight, and pushes weight sleds to gain strength and speed for the takeoff portion of the event.

Planning to compete through intensive land training is exciting, but Jace has taken it a step further. He traveled this past spring to Lake Placid for the first of what he hopes are many skeleton runs at the Olympic Training Center there. "It

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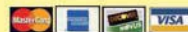
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was great," he said. "Three months after starting at the gym, I was going to New York to the Training Center. It was the first time I had actually been on a sled, but I wasn't scared. I figure, there's a first time for everyone."

After one week at the Olympic facility, Jace was hooked, and he's been working







toward the ultimate goal ever since. One of the greatest assets Jace has is the support of his family. Some parents might try to discourage their child from sliding face-first down a mountain, but his had the opposite response to his desire. "My mom told me I should talk to Alex in the first place, and my dad wasn't concerned," Jace laughed. "They are used to me doing crazy stuff anyway. And my friends weren't surprised. One of them said he might actually watch the Olympics if I made it there."

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Training for skeleton is hard for athletes living in the heat of the South, but it is actually difficult for all Americans. "The sport hasn't taken off as much as some others have," Jace pointed out. "We are self-funded. Some countries pay their athletes so they can train, but in U.S. skeleton, you have to pay your own way." In addition to coming up with money themselves, American skeleton

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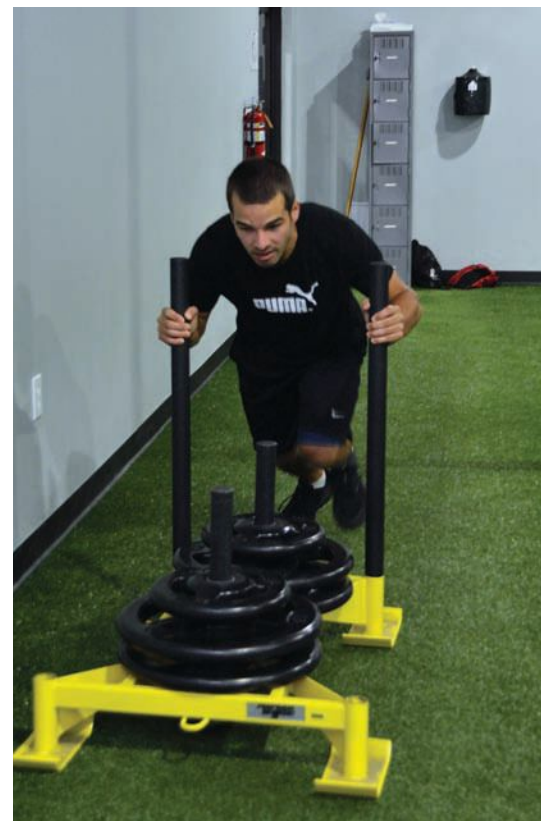
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competitors confront one more obstacle. "There are only two tracks in the whole country," Jace revealed. "Our sliding season is only about five months. It's not Russia, you can't slide all year." Some countries have indoor facilities allowing their athletes to train year-round, but in



the United States, those opportunities aren't as abundant. Athletes who are part of the American team spend the winter months in Lake Placid, where they spend a few hours each day completing training runs.

The average skeleton run lasts just under one minute, but there's plenty of time for athletes to either flash or flop. Jace spelled out a typical run. "The run starts with what we call 12 hard steps," he related. "You run as hard and fast as you can bent over, holding the sled with one hand. Then you hop on." It seems simple, but those first 12 steps can be the difference between a strong run and a failed one. "You steer with pretty much your whole body," he continued. "If you don't have control, it slows you down, but if you over-steer you can flip yourself. And at this point, you are going over 80 miles an hour." As intense as that sounds to the average person, Jace was ready for the challenge. "I looked down



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the course and watched everyone else. I just went and hoped I didn't crash, and I might have prayed a little," he added with a smile.

Jace has already begun the process of trying out for the Olympic team, participating in the Dallas area combine test in July. "At the combine, you complete speed and strength events," he spelled out. "They score you, and you have to get a high enough total number. Then you are invited to the Push competition in New York in the fall." By doing well enough at the combine, athletes go to Lake Placid and compete against the national team, in hopes of



joining them and getting to train with the U.S. Olympic squad. Although he was not chosen through his participation in the Dallas combine, he will be attending the competition in January.

Jace sees his age as both a hurdle and an asset. "I was the youngest guy at camp in March. Most of the Olympians are in their 20s," he admitted. "But I don't know that many teens who have done what I have." With an ultimate goal of making the Olympics, Jace likely has many years of opportunity in front of him, even if he is unable to crack the team in time for the 2018 Olympics.

For all its glory, there is one downside to making the team. "The training and competing are great," Jace confessed, "but it is hard to think of being gone for several months at a time." If he makes the Olympic training team, he will have to move to New York for five months of the year. "I love chasing new adventures," he said. Some of his adventures to date have included wakeboarding, scuba diving and even swimming with sharks. Though it would be tough leaving his family, being a part of the U.S. skeleton team would be one more adventure Jace would love to chase — going fast and head first, of course! **NOW**

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# Planning the Perfect Party

— By Amber D. Browne

*The hustle and bustle of preparing for the holiday season can be quite all-consuming. Adding a dinner party or overnight guests to the equation can increase the stress. Whether you're taking on the challenge of hosting friends for dinner or family in the guest room, having a plan in place is the key to a fun-filled occasion.*

When planning a holiday get-together, first decide who is on the guest list. You could choose to invite a few of your closest friends or a group of 20 or more. Or family

could stay for the extended holiday. In either scenario, plan the date and set a time for the holiday dinner.

Incorporating a theme is a key component to any event. The holiday itself can be used in planning for decorations, music and games, but if it's a dinner for friends, choosing a fun theme may be a good choice. Pinterest or event-planning blogs feature a variety of theme options.

Keep the following in mind if you choose to host a holiday dinner:

1. What is your budget?
2. Will it be a sit-down or buffet-style dinner?
3. What type of decor will you use?
4. Is the dinner adults-only or will children also attend?
5. What type of music and entertainment will be incorporated?





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## Budget:

The budget should include funds for food, beverages, decor and entertainment. If you plan to hire a caterer, a printer for invitations or even a cleaning crew, include those costs in the budget as well. If you don't want to host the event at your home, a local restaurant or rental facility may be the perfect place to gather. Include any rental fees in the budget. Setting aside additional funds for last-minute costs is also a good idea.

## Food & Beverage:

Planning the menu ahead of time is a priority. Cookbooks, the Internet or cherished family recipes offer delicious choices for holiday meals. If you are planning a themed meal, stick with recipes that fit the motif.

If you don't want to spend time prepping and cooking the food, hiring a caterer is an option. Many caterers provide dinnerware, serving dishes and utensils, flatware and related items. On-site caterers can help with cleanup, too. For easier cleanup or a more casual event, purchase disposable dinnerware and flatware, and make trash cans readily available to guests.



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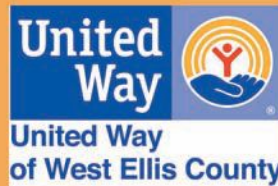
When hosting a party, you may decide to serve alcoholic beverages. You can stock the bar yourself or advise guests to bring their own alcoholic beverages. Hiring a licensed bartender to serve drinks during the event is another option. Don't forget to provide nonalcoholic beverages and have extra ice on hand. For guests who may overindulge, have a taxi service phone number available.

## Venue, Decor & Entertainment:

Preparing your home for guests can be an undertaking, but a clean home creates a relaxed atmosphere. Stock the bathrooms with toilet paper, soap and clean or disposable hand towels. Offer guests a safe place to leave coats and purses. Lighting the fireplace or candles throughout the home creates a cozy ambience, but don't forget to extinguish the flames after the party!

Fresh flowers can brighten any table. You may choose to purchase arrangements from a local flower shop or buy seasonal flowers to create your own arrangement. Cranberries are popular this time of year and can be incorporated into

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the arrangement. Add one to two bags of fresh cranberries to a clear vase. Fill the vase about three-quarters full with water. "Using a sharp knife, carefully cut the ends off the fresh flowers at a 45-degree angle. Add cut flowers to vase, arranging as needed," explains a how-to page at OceanSpray.com.



If children and teenagers are invited, set a separate table for them. Using real dinnerware will create a more formal atmosphere and adding amusing trinkets to the table will keep the younger crowd entertained. Place holiday crackers, which hold small toys, at each table setting as a fun addition.

For entertainment, themed music can play during the event. You can incorporate games, too. For a guessing game, you can purchase a nice container and add individually wrapped candies.

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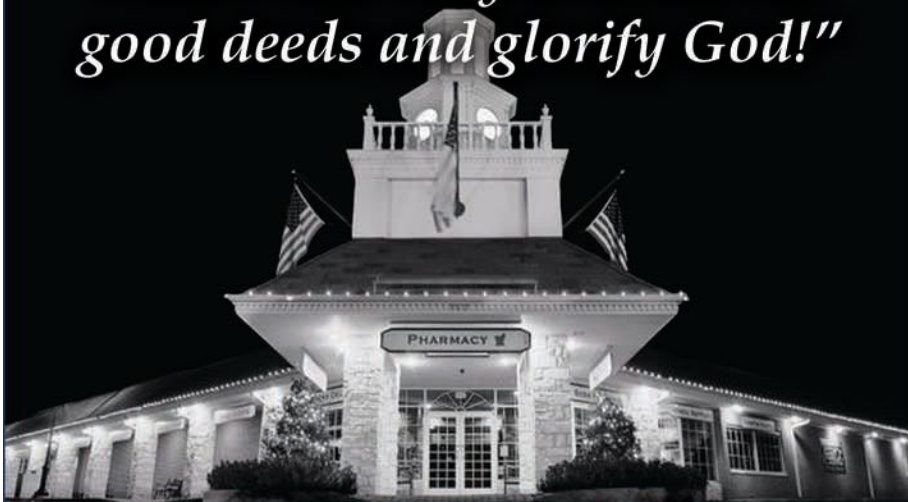
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## **Overnight Holiday Guests:**

Find out beforehand what types of snacks and drinks your guests prefer, and stock the cupboard and refrigerator. When planning the meals, get your guests' input. Be sure to find out if they have any food allergies. Many overnight guests may want to help out in the kitchen and chip in on food.

An inviting guest room is a necessity. You want your guests to feel at home when they visit. Provide clean, comfortable bedding, a night light and a couple of bottles of water on the night stand. The guest bathroom should include everyday grooming items, including soap, shampoo, conditioner and cotton swabs. Include plenty of fresh towels, extra toilet paper and air freshener.

Keeping your guests entertained during their stay can be a challenge. Why not plan a shopping trip with your female guests and send the men off to play golf? Whatever you choose, don't stress! Your guests will be happy to spend quality time with you.

Hosting parties and overnight guests can take a lot of time before, during and after, so ask for help. Many hosts and hostesses often find themselves too busy to enjoy their hard work. Don't let that happen to you. Take time to sit back, chat with your guests and enjoy yourself! **NOW**





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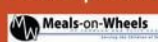
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# Martial Arts for Life

*Randy Clayton's Guardian Jiu Jitsu improves participants' futures.*

— By Betty Tryon

A business begins for many reasons, the No. 1 reason being financial. For Randy Clayton, owner of Guardian Jiu Jitsu, a desire to help others would probably share that No. 1 spot. He began the sport himself when looking for a way to lose weight. He now has his purple belt. "It's a 12-year process to get black belt," he said. "I'm now in my 10th year." Learning the sport was a life-changing experience for him as he became more involved in the lifestyle. It was beneficial that he opened his own business eight years later to teach others the art of jiu-jitsu.

In his business, he wanted to help kids who would not be able to afford the training. With that in mind, Randy started a

nonprofit organization called The Road Foundation. "We have worked with homeless kids and with multiple kids referred to us from the high school's Movement Toward a Future mentoring program," he explained. "We try to build up self-esteem in kids." Three years ago, Randy believed God was telling him to use the brotherhood and physical fitness aspects of the jiu-jitsu lifestyle to help kids who had been bullied in the past to grow in confidence.

Guardian Jiu Jitsu has developed a very family-oriented atmosphere in reaching out to assist children. Not only are the children being ministered to but many of the adults are as well. "It's really turning into a mentoring program for the



men who are here and the children get a father figure in their lives,” Randy pointed out. “We transition into Bible study on Wednesday night.” The outreach attracts those in need of spiritual comfort — men who may be struggling in their marriages, or kids who’ve tried to commit suicide. “We are just trying to give those kids and adults a family bond,” he added, “so they have someone to talk to if they have issues or problems down the line.”


Guardian offers Brazilian jiu-jitsu, a form of grappling martial art. It’s a sport that teaches self-defense using leverage and various techniques. Randy also offers Muay Thai classes with Brandon Collette as the instructor. Muay Thai is a martial art from Thailand that is also called the martial art of eight limbs, because it uses elbow and knee strikes, kicks and punches.

There are many benefits from these two sports. The building of confidence is one and friendships developed from

**“We have worked with homeless kids and with multiple kids referred to us from the high school’s Movement Toward a Future mentoring program.”**

the camaraderie on the mat is another. An additional benefit is health. “We have two gentlemen who have lost over 100 lbs. each,” Randy acknowledged. “The physical fitness part of this sport is great with cardiovascular effects that are second-to-none.”

Randy has been so successful with Guardian Jiu Jitsu that the studio moved to a new location three months ago. “We went from 2,000 square feet to 8,000 square feet,” he enthused. The gym doesn’t have contracts but rather offers month-to-month service. The cost is \$75 per month for adults and \$50 per month for kids. In his quest to help others, Randy has developed Guardian Jiu Jitsu into a welcoming place where life genuinely gets better. **NOW**



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Regardless of your required beginning date, you must take subsequent distributions by December 31 of each calendar year. You'll continue to take the annual distributions each year until your death or until your account balance is reduced to zero. You can always withdraw more than the required minimum amount in any given year. However, if you withdraw less, you will be subject to a 50-percent federal penalty on the difference between the amount you should have taken and what you actually took.


The basic calculation for individual accounts provides that the required minimum distribution is determined by dividing the account balance by the distribution period. For lifetime required minimum distribution, there

is a uniform distribution period for almost all individuals of the same age. The uniform lifetime distribution period table is based on the joint life and last survivor life expectancy of you and a hypothetical beneficiary 10 years younger. However, if your sole beneficiary is your spouse and he or she is more than 10 years younger than you, a longer distribution period measured by the joint life and last survivor life expectancy of you and your spouse is permitted to be used. However, the specific rules on required minimum distribution calculations are complicated, and you should consult a tax professional regarding your situation. **NOW**


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*Todd Simmons is a Raymond James Financial Advisor in Duncanville.*

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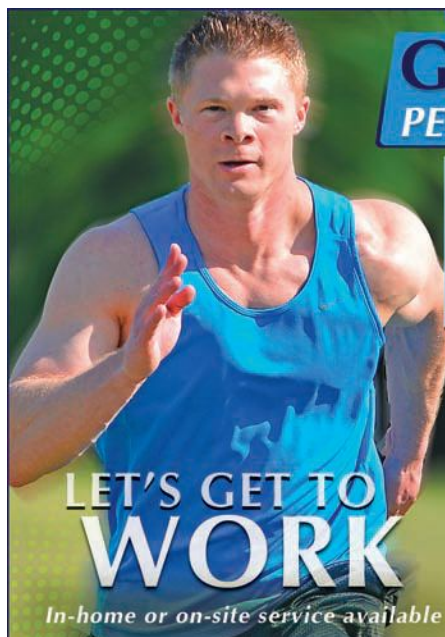


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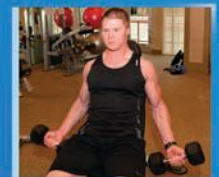
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# An Indulgent Brew

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

Umm, the smell of hot coffee brewing is the best wake-up call. It is even better than the smell of sizzling bacon, because with coffee you get a little extra something. Caffeine is a central nervous system stimulant, which means it can change the way you feel and behave. That little zap to your system makes you feel more awake, focused and alert. Studies now show caffeine's benefits go beyond increased energy to providing some protection from diseases such as type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's and dementia.

But as with anything affecting your brain and your heart, there is always the possibility of too much of a good thing. With caffeine, overindulgence is easy. Since the FDA identifies it as a drug and a food additive, the products in which you can find it are endless. Caffeine is in prescription and over-the-counter medications, such as headache tablets and diet pills. You can find it in certain teas, energy snacks, soft drinks and candy — particularly those with chocolate. You can also find caffeine in some ice creams and yogurts. If you need to lower your daily intake of caffeine, it is necessary to read labels to be sure how much you are taking.

Generally, caffeine does not cause difficulty if consumed in safe amounts. A moderate amount of 100-200 mg. caffeine, which is roughly two cups of coffee a day, is considered to be reasonable.

Regular sized soft drinks, such as Coke and Pepsi, contain approximately 35-55 mg. The total of what is safe for individuals may depend upon body type, size and health. Taking over 600 mg. of caffeine a day can be detrimental to your health. The amount of caffeine children consume should be greatly limited. A safe amount for adolescents is considered to be no more than 100 mg. per day. Pregnant women should check with their doctor before consuming caffeine.

Symptoms of consuming too much caffeine are increased heartbeat, feeling jittery, nervousness, increased blood pressure and headaches. Those with heart irregularities may want to check with a physician to determine a safe level of caffeine to consume. Drinking caffeinated drinks too close to bedtime can cause insomnia. Caffeine is a diuretic as well as a stimulant. A diuretic increases the output of urine — meaning you lose more fluids. That is why caffeinated drinks should not be used to quench your thirst.

There is a lot of good along with some risk in caffeine. Pay attention to your intake before you enjoy! **NOW**

*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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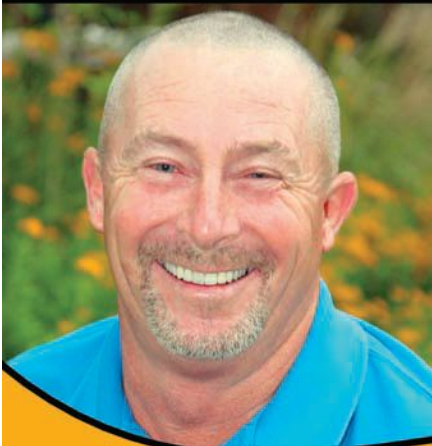
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### November 4, 11, 18, 25

Community Prayer meeting: 7:00-8:00 a.m., Midlothian Conference Center, 1 Community Circle Dr.

### November 8

Jazz in the Plaza: 2:00-3:30 p.m. Back Alley Plaza, downtown Midlothian.

The Midlothian High School Jazz Band will perform along with a special guest artist. If inclement weather, the concert will be in MHS auditorium.

### November 11

Annual Veteran's Day Dinner: 6:00-9:00 p.m.,

Midlothian Conference Center to honor all veterans and active military in the Midlothian area. Call (972) 775-7777 for more information.

FSMS Veterans Day Assembly: 9:00 a.m., Library / Big GYM.

Field of Readers: 6:00 p.m., Multi-Purpose Stadium.

### November 13

Asperger's Syndrome Community of Ellis County meeting: 7:00 p.m., 208 S. 4th St. Support group for adults with or living with Asperger's Syndrome.

### November 14

Longbranch Elementary Jingle Bell Bash, Run and Silent Auction: 6:00-9:00 p.m., 6631 FM 1387. Fun-filled evening full of food, games, cheer and run. For more information call (972) 765-5824.

Concert with Domingo, The Best Voice of Elvis and More: 7:00-9:00 p.m., Midlothian Conference Center, 1 Community Circle Dr. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. The Blackwood Quartet, The Randy Stockum Band, Cruisin' Al from KAAM, Saturday Night Sock

Hop. Tickets \$30. Concessions. Wheelchair accessible. Call (469) 774-4203 for more information.

### November 15

Pet Adoption Event: 9:00-11:00 a.m., Walmart - Garden Center Entrance, 400 N. Hwy 67. Contact (972) 775-7614 for more information.

### November 17

Indian Trail Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist meeting: 6:00 p.m., Business Meeting; 7:00 p.m., Program, First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie. Family Life Center Gathering Room, Recycling & Methane Gas Capture, Waste Management Spokesperson.

### November 20

MHS Wind Ensemble concert: 6:30 p.m., MHS Auditorium.

*Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to [betty.tryon@nowmagazines.com](mailto:betty.tryon@nowmagazines.com).*



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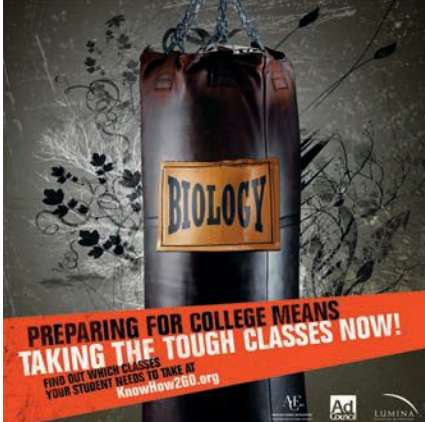
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## In the Kitchen With David Roberson

— By Betty Tryon

David Roberson is a true foodie. “Cooking is fun. It’s in my blood,” he admitted. “I love to eat and to cook. I love the smell and the textures of certain foods.” David learned about food and cooking mostly through his own life experiences and shares his passion with high school students in Ft. Worth as a culinary art instructor.

“Being able to share my skills from the industry with underprivileged kids, who otherwise would not see cooking as a way to contribute to society, is truly a humbling experience,” he explained. David likes to take recipes and change ingredients to make them his own. However, the Hamburger Gravy recipe below is a childhood favorite with no changes needed. **NOW**

### Hamburger Gravy

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil**
- 1 small onion, diced**
- 1-2 lbs. 85/15 blend ground hamburger meat**
- 1 Tbsp. garlic powder**
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper**
- Salt, to taste**
- 4 Tbsp. flour**
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup**
- 1 1/2 cans of water (use can from cream of mushroom soup)**
- 1-2 tsp. Kitchen Bouquet**

**1.** Place oil and onions in a large skillet on medium-high heat. Cook onions until clear; add meat. Season meat with garlic powder, black pepper and salt. Cook meat until no pink is visible.  
**2.** Sprinkle flour over meat and combine until flour is well-incorporated. Cook until flour becomes a brown color, about 5-8 minutes.

**3.** Add cream of mushroom soup and water. Use more or less water for desired thickness of gravy. Stir gravy to combine soup and water with meat. Add Kitchen Bouquet as desired for color. Turn heat to low or medium-low and allow gravy to simmer and thicken.  
**4.** Serve over toast, biscuits, hot water cornbread, johnnycakes, hoecakes, rice, skillet potatoes, grits or by itself.

### Sugar Addix Black Skillet Cornbread

- 1/3 cup plus 1/4 cup vegetable oil (divided use)**
- 1 cup yellow corn meal**
- 1 cup all-purpose flour**
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar**
- 4 tsp. baking powder**
- 1 egg**
- 1/2 cup onions, chopped**
- 2 jalapeños, chopped (Add jalapeño seeds according to preferred heat level.)**

- 1 can cream-style corn**
- 8 oz. sour cream**
- 1 cup Monterey Jack cheese, shredded**

**1.** Preheat oven to 425 F.  
**2.** In a large cast-iron skillet, add 1/3 cup vegetable oil and place in oven to heat.  
**3.** While pan is heating, combine corn meal, flour, sugar and baking powder in a large mixing bowl.  
**4.** Add remaining 1/4 cup of vegetable oil and the rest of the ingredients. Mix with dry ingredients until well-combined.  
**5.** Remove skillet from oven and carefully pour cornbread batter into skillet. Place skillet back into oven and bake for 20 minutes or until golden brown. Test cornbread with a toothpick to check doneness. When toothpick comes out clean, the bread is done. Let bread rest for 10 minutes before serving.  
**6. NOTE:** This is very moist bread.

### Garlic Herb Crusted Pork Tenderloin

- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped**
- 1 Tbsp. fresh sage, finely chopped**
- 1 Tbsp. fresh rosemary, finely chopped**
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme, chopped**
- 1 tsp. sea salt**
- 1/4 tsp. fresh ground black pepper**
- 1 tsp. smoked paprika**
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil (divided use)**
- 1 1.5- to 2-lb. pork tenderloin**

**1.** Stir together garlic, sage, rosemary, thyme, salt, pepper, paprika and 1 Tbsp. olive oil in a small bowl. Rub mixture all over pork tenderloin. Marinate 30 minutes to 2 hours. Preheat oven to 400 F.  
**2.** Heat a large, heavy and oven proof sauté pan or cast-iron black skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 Tbsp. olive oil and pork; brown about 4 minutes on each side.  
**3.** Transfer pan to oven. Roast pork, turning occasionally until a thermometer inserted into thickest part registers 145 F to 150 F for about 20 minutes. Transfer pork to cutting board, tent with foil and let rest 10 minutes before slicing.

To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).



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