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December 2007

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Red OakNOW is a NOW Magazines, L.L.C. publication. Copyright © 2007. All rights reserved. *Red OakNOW* is published monthly and individually mailed free of charge to homes and businesses in the Red Oak, Ovilla, Glen Heights and Oak Leaf zip codes.

Subscriptions are available at the rate of \$35 per year or \$3.50 per issue. Subscription and editorial correspondence should be sent to: NOW Magazines, P.O. Box 1071, Waxahachie, TX 75168. For advertising rates and other information, call (972) 978-5151 or e-mail us at: rhensley@nowmagazines.com.



Editor's Note

Holiday Tidings,

Is it not wonderful that we live in a place where we get to experience all of the different aspects of the holiday season? There is something really magical about having crisp star-filled evenings, light frost on the ground and quiet, peaceful nights snuggled by the fireplace. Not only do I appreciate these experiences, but I am also grateful for the opportunity to meet kindhearted people here in our community who remind me how truly wonderful it is to live here. One such resident is Missy Mease, who helps make life better for many Ellis County children. There is also local teen Taylor Van Hove who is a leader on the high school volleyball team and demonstrates the importance of helping others through her talents. These ladies, along with our featured homeowners, Doug and Glenda Curry, are sure to fascinate you with what they have learned through their ceaseless quests of giving. Let them inspire you during this new and exciting holiday season.



Diana Merrill Claussen

Red Oak Editor

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It is said the most valuable gift one can give is their time. Local resident Missy Mease's time is spent as the Volunteer Supervisor for Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Ellis County. CASA is a guardian ad litem program charged with the responsibility of being a "voice" for children, representing a specific child's best interest within the legal system, helping those who cannot help themselves.

When Missy realized her calling was to help others, she attended Southwestern Assemblies of God University and received her bachelor's and master's in counseling and psychology. After she graduated, she started working for the ADAPT program in Texas, where she was able to help counsel and teach children and adults necessary life and behavior management skills. When Missy started at ADAPT, she was mentored by the children's team leader, Cynthia Winter. "Cynthia is my hero," Missy said. "She is amazing." When Cynthia left ADAPT to work for CASA, Missy decided to go as well.

It has now been over two years since Missy started with CASA, and her decision to change jobs has had a profound impact upon her. Through the organization, Missy has been involved in different levels of situations and circumstances, some of which were life threatening to her clients, while most were life changing for everyone involved.

Through Missy's department, people apply to be a child

advocate volunteer. A child's welfare and well-being are the advocate's concerns, and it is their role to make recommendations to the court regarding what is in the best interest of a child. The court is then responsible for making all final decisions pertaining to the child's future. "Besides the courts and CPS, we work with therapists, teachers and the [children's] families," Missy explained. "We work with all aspects of the system."

Missy believes being a volunteer is one of the most positive choices a person can make. "There is such a huge need for people in the community to be involved," she expressed. "We are only able to serve less than half of the kids in foster care because we need more volunteers." Taking on the ad litem role is life changing for everyone involved, including the volunteers. "I have seen so many guardian ad litem who have intervened for kids, and it has totally affected their entire life for the better," she said.

Missy oversees an average of 30 volunteers within the county, with the average advocate providing approximately 15 hours of their time each month. There are many criteria involved in being a CASA advocate. Essentially, the role of the CASA volunteer is to increase the opportunities for positive change within the lives of the children they unconditionally support. "CASA needs volunteers, and we need people who can look at the whole scope, make a difference and do more good for the life of the child. I try to



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encourage potential volunteers to look beyond themselves and realize how big of an impact they can have on a kid's life," she explained.

"Our volunteers come from all walks of life," Missy added. "They are fun and passionate about working with the kids." Often, these volunteers are just as impacted by the differences they make in the lives of the children

"Many people play a role in changing a child's life, and the advocates play a huge role."

as the children themselves.

When an intervention is requested, often by one of the child's family members, friends or school officials, an initial report is filed, and CPS then steps in. "When CPS receives a report of abuse or negligence, that report is investigated," Missy said. "It is then decided by CPS and a judge if a child should then be removed from their home."

After CPS has decided where the child should be placed, an organization such as CASA is then appointed by the judge to be the child's voice within the legal system. Positively interceding is sometimes the best aspect about Missy's job, and other times, the most difficult. "Recommending on whether a child should go back home or be adopted is not always the easiest decision," she admitted.

Missy and her team have to concentrate on assessing if the child's needs are being met, especially when they are living in sub-standard conditions. Sometimes a child's problems are also compounded by various types of abuse, making the decision process even more difficult. "Most of the kids we work with, their parents are on meth, which is very rampant in Ellis County," Missy said. "So a lot of the kids aren't directly abused, they're neglected instead. This



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is what opens a lot of our advocates' eyes because that is when they see that abuse is not only physical. Next we have to recommend on whether the child should be returned to the parents, be placed with extended family or remain in foster care for adoption.

"I have a big passion in focusing on prevention with the kids before they become an abusive adult," she added. "I'm always wondering if a parent could have gotten help before he/she became an abusive parent. You will oftentimes see generations of abuse to the point where the families see things like incest as normal."

It is, therefore, sometimes essential to remove a child from their home environment. "After a parent relinquishes rights and the child has been adopted, it's really amazing to see the kids with their new family," Missy shared. She also said there are many devoted people who work within this entire process and are vital when it comes to turning a child's life around for the better.

This team effort is what creates a better life for an individual, and Missy does not take sole credit for anything. She often reflects on the people who make the difference in what she does. "Many people play a role in changing a child's life, and the advocates play a huge role," she said. It is this team of dedicated people and local judge Greg Wilhelm who help to provide rays of hope, for the children.

Those rays are especially needed during the month of December, CASA's busiest time of year. "In the past, CPS has removed a lot of children from their homes in December," Missy stated. "This is possibly because of families facing stressful situations, especially around the holidays."

Last December, CASA hosted an Adoption Day event where there were multiple adoptions and a big party for the children and their new families. "We just cried with each other at the event. It was very touching," she recalled. It is also the best gift Missy said she and her volunteers could ever give: the gift of a forever family. 



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Counting Their Many Blessings

— By Sandra McIntosh

Doug and Glenda Curry have known each other for a very long time. Doug was born and reared in Jacksonville, Texas, but traveled extensively as a youngster with his family who ministered through Christian music. One day, the Curry family happened to be performing in Glenda's hometown of Kerens, Texas. During that visit, Doug signed the inside of Glenda's Bible. "He was in sixth grade," Glenda added, "and I was in the seventh." Many years went by before their passing acquaintance grew into a lasting friendship. "We ran into each other again at college," Doug said. "I guess it was just meant to be."

The couple, who celebrated 24 years of marriage on December 3, ended up in Red Oak in 1984 through another ministry known as Freedom. "The First Baptist Church of Red Oak wanted to support the ministry," Glenda explained. "We would come into a community and help out where we could. We'd substitute teach in the schools while helping in the church with Sunday school and praise and worship." Not long after the move, Doug began subcontracting for a gentleman who at the time was the proprietor of his own business. Six

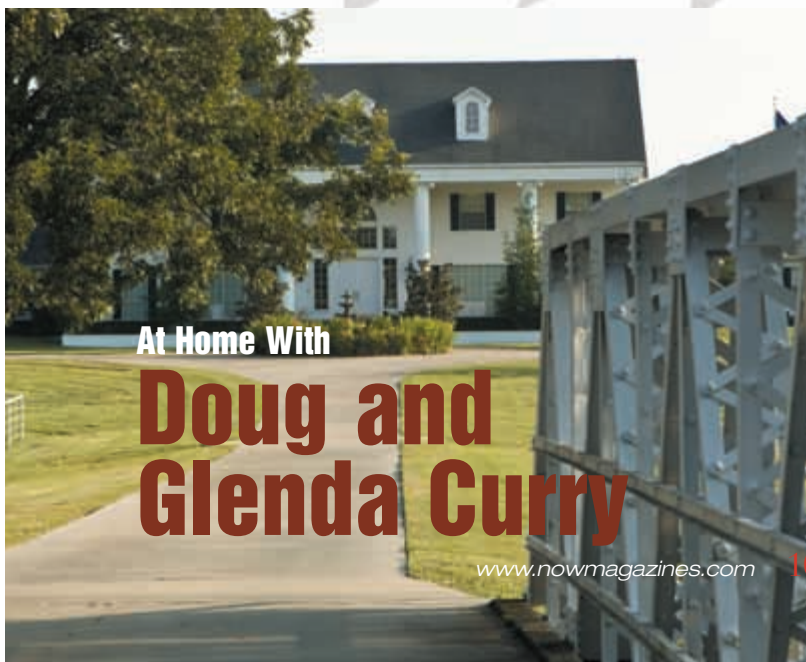


months later, the Currys bought the business. After six years of subcontracting, Doug took on the title of pool builder, completing his very first pool in July 1991. "We had only eight pools that summer," he remembered. "The winter that followed nearly killed us."

During that first winter, they lost everything. "We learned how to scale down so we could build the business up," Glenda said. "We moved to a smaller house; we let one of the cars go back, and I learned how to write a paycheck to ourselves so we could start tithing on a regular basis." They are firm believers that their five-bedroom, six-and-one-half-bath home, which sits on 65 beautiful acres, is a product of the changes they elected to make when the business was new. Losing everything allowed Doug, Glenda and their three children, Josh, Matt and Kate, to see and experience firsthand the blessings that come from unselfishly giving.

Doug and Glenda owned the property on West Red Oak Road for nearly 10 years prior to building. The first edifice to be erected was the barn. "We lived in the barn for a year while the house was being built," Glenda said, adding that the barn is now a large, one room, efficiency-type apartment with all the comforts of the larger house, just nowhere near the 6,000 square feet found in the two-story main house the family enjoys today.

When planning, designing and building the home, Doug and Glenda wanted it to be open and airy, thus offering the relaxed environment they desired for entertaining. "Our home and the resort-like atmosphere we've been able to create is



At Home With

Doug and Glenda Curry

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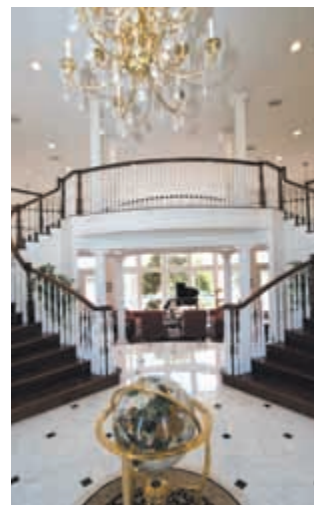
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for sharing," Doug said, as Glenda nodded her head in agreement. "Being good stewards of what God has blessed us with means sharing it with others."

With Christmas and New Year's Day just around the corner, Doug and Glenda are once again expecting a crowd of no fewer than 35 family members and friends to share the wondrous holiday season. The home is big enough to sleep quite a few, but the overflow will find warmth and comfort in the barn and the detached guest house. While some will surely congregate in the upstairs home theater, just as many will find their fun in the great outdoors. "They can get some off-road action back in the section we left in its natural state," Doug said, referring to the dunes. "Others can fish for bass, catfish, perch and crappie in the man-made, seven-acre private lake or they can bundle up and enjoy relaxing on the beach."

To say they thought of everything would be a bit of an

understatement. Tennis courts, a putting green, dove hunting, camping out under the stars and sand volleyball are also offerings found in the backyard. There is a quiet, secluded place in the wooded area perfect for cookouts, with two fire pits and one larger pit for barbecuing. "We just built a resort here since we're too busy to do much traveling," Glenda said. "We only get to play when we have time, so having our vacation spots right here at home works out well with our schedule."

Doug and Glenda also thought of everything when they dressed their home for the holidays. The huge 12-foot, down-swept tree is placed in the corner by the circular back windows. The double circular staircases on both sides of the entryway leading up and around the catwalk are decorated in garland, lights, ribbons and bows. At least 40 velveteen poinsettias in decorative pots are displayed throughout the

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home. Stockings are hung on the fireplace mantle with great care, and there is a seasonal wreath on every door. "I love the holidays," Glenda said. "It can get overwhelming when you have to do all the decorating yourself. Thankfully, I had some great help." Wreaths will be added at the gate which is guarded by two very regal-looking lions.

The family traditions will begin on Christmas Eve and extend through the New Year. The time they spend together is a large part of the close relationship they share as a family. "On Christmas Eve, Doug and I spend the evening with the kids. We eat and read the Christmas story. We play games and open a few gifts. We buy gifts on Christmas Eve day," Glenda said. "We bring them home and wrap them just in time to exchange them with one another that



evening." In the spirit of giving back, the Currys have made it another Christmas tradition to adopt a family in need each Christmas. "We celebrate a form of Christmas every day," Doug said. "It's important for us to give to those in need."

On Christmas Day, everyone will load up for the visit home. The first stop will be with Glenda's family, followed by time spent with Doug's family. "It's a trip that takes at least two full days," he said. "Then we come home to get ready for our big New Year's party." Hurrying home to heat the hot tub is on the top of the list of things to do in preparation for their annual event. A 20-foot fountain on one end of the lake and a second, 10-foot fountain on the opposite end adds to the beauty as fireworks explode in splendor over the lake marking the beginning of another year — one where Doug and Glenda are sure to continue counting their many blessings. **NOW**

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**ARTS
NOW**

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

Bob and Freda Brand lead very active lives. The couple lives in a beautiful, lakefront home complete with well-kept gardens and a unique collection of egg-laying hens. They also perform and sing at the Especially For You Bluegrass Jam every third Saturday and give free performances through their southern gospel duo called Brand New.

The Brands have been married for many years and proudly proclaim that having hobbies enriches their lives, keeps them busy and makes them happy. Bob enjoys spending time with his wife, but he also appreciates the fact that they have some hobbies of their own. "Freda likes to quilt and garden," he proudly proclaimed. "I enjoy building things from scratch and woodworking."

Bob gets to use his building skills in his pastime of model train construction. An active member of the South Side Model Railroad Club in Dallas, he has been involved in handcrafting train sets/displays for many years. "I had to have been 9 years old when I got my first train," Bob reminisced. "That old Lionel set just grew from there, and I've been active in the models for the last 35 years."

Bob's current display is housed in the couple's renovated chicken barn, now called the "train barn." "My current train display is seven years in the making," he said. "Its size is about 320 square feet." The train and other parts of the display are not just store bought pieces glued to a track. Freda and Bob take great pride in the work he has put into his railroad creations, and are planning to host an open house, displaying

the train barn on December 15.

Bob's favorite part of the construction is building, but he does much more than that. "I am known as a scratch builder," Bob explained. "I will take pictures of how I want my display to look and then build what I see from the picture." Besides recently upgrading his set to all digital wiring, most of his pieces, from the trees to the cabins, are handmade and painted.

"Because I enjoy building everything from scratch, I've even made the working railroad light signals on the track from spare parts," he pointed out. "All of my locomotives and people figurines are hand painted, too."

Freda is proud of Bob's work and enjoys supporting her

husband's hobby,

participating in the model railroad construction on occasion. "It's always good that he has this hobby," she said. "I think every man should have a hobby, or something that he has to look forward to besides work." Freda's support of her husband is not only shown through her words, but also through her works. "Bob has detailed and distressed many of the train set's pieces," she said. "I even have my own building on the set called Freda's Produce, along with a little quilt store that I painted to represent my hobby of patchwork quilting."

Freda also added that Bob loves using old lumber to make



ARTS NOW

many of the pieces located throughout the display. Some of these include the bridges and California Redwood trees that complement and meander throughout his impressive work of art.

For Bob, creating his train display is educational as well as relaxing. "You learn electronics and woodworking, and how houses are built," he said. "It's all encompassing because you can have a hard day at work and when you come home and work on the train, it is very relaxing." Freda agreed that Bob's activity with the trains helps him in many ways. "This hobby keeps Bob sharp," she said. "Instead of dull and flabby," Bob finished with a smile.

Besides working on his own train, Bob also loves working on the train sets that are located at his model club. "Our current project is 25 feet wide by 80 feet long, and all of the members of the club are helping to construct it," he enthused. "During the holidays the club will be having its railroad model tour of homes on January 19 and 20."

"The club is located at the South Side on Lamar building in Dallas and is always asked to participate at events," he stated. "But, if anyone is interested in coming by or joining, we're open to the public every Tuesday night from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Then on the fourth Tuesday of the month we have anywhere from six to 12 operators running the trains at a time," he said. "Kids are welcome to see the interactive, live display."

Bob's experiences with the club, the trains and the kids are, for him, very rewarding. "It's exciting to see the kids' eyes when they walk in to see the trains," he said. "It's good to me to be able to make somebody smile and laugh." He feels blessed to be able to create his train pieces, and share his love for the hobby with others while spreading some joy all at the same time. **ARTS NOW**

Editor's note: See the community calendar for open house details.

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Sports
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Giving Her All

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

As a 17-year-old star player on the Red Oak Lady Hawks Varsity Volleyball team, Taylor Van Hove is a busy girl. To many within the community, she is considered a shining star both on the court and off. Not only is she the setter for the team, Taylor is also very involved in her school, with her peers and within the community.

"I've been playing volleyball for seven years," Taylor said. "I'm also a big recruiter of our team." Taylor is in fact so intent on finding potential players for her team, she has been known to attempt recruitment while shopping at Brookshire's.

Besides her recruiting endeavors, Taylor has also coached peers, younger students and even some of her brothers' friends. She then takes them to school gyms or to Red Oak Park's sand courts for some intense training and workouts. "Taylor especially helps the younger volleyball girls," her mom, Tracy, shared. "She practices with the girls and lets them know what to expect at the school's tryouts."

In addition to mentoring others, Taylor has learned much from volleyball and her experiences on the team. "You learn a lot from coach; he has taught me a lot of respect," Taylor said. "He tells us we are a winning program, and everyone looks at us to be good examples, especially in our conduct."

Taylor added there is a great deal of hard work and effort involved when it comes to doing well in the sport. "We put a lot of time into our workouts," she explained. "During the season, we practiced six days a week, and during the summers, we had 6:30 a.m. workouts every day."

Volleyball requires strength, determination and drive, and Taylor possesses these qualities. Her family, team and coaches are some of her biggest mentors, both on the court and in her life. "Volleyball is very competitive," she asserted.



"Volleyball is also my life, and I like to win.

"One of her coaches has been a huge inspiration to her," Tracy said. "Her name is Coach Porter, and she is really amazing." Taylor has shown her appreciation to her mentor by taking the coach's daughter, as well as many other local children, under her own wing. "Coach Porter's daughter is like a little sister to me," Taylor said.

Taylor's family has influenced her to be who she is today. "My mom is my number one supporter," she added. "She does everything for the team, and it's really nice to have someone who is always there who supports me in everything that I do. When I need someone to talk to, she's there for that, too." Taylor credits her father, Rick, as her motivator, adding that her brothers and grandfather are also great supporters. "I learned to be strong and honest and,

at times, sarcastic from my granddad," she smiled. "He is a very strong man and still works every day."

Taylor has also been known to organize bake sales and fundraisers to assist local families in need. "Taylor has a big heart on the inside; she is the kind of person who would rather give a gift than receive one," Tracy stated proudly. "She's been through a lot and has overcome a lot. She's had adversities, but they have all made her as strong as she is."



Sports NOW

Tracy is confident these life experiences have made her daughter capable of handling anything that comes her way in life.

Crediting sports for helping her through some rough times, Taylor said, "When you get involved in

"Volleyball is also my life, and I like to win."

extracurricular activities, you're going to stay out of trouble." Whether she is interacting with her friends, teams or coaching the local children, she appreciates the opportunity to share her learned lessons. "I remind them to stay strong, and not to give up on themselves, especially in school, sports and life," Taylor said. At times her teammates have reminded her to do the same. "Our team has been very close this year," she added.

Though this is her final season of high school volleyball, Taylor has big plans to continue in the sport she loves. "I want to keep playing volleyball after high school, so I've been talking with a few colleges," she divulged. "If I don't get a scholarship offer, I will go try out at Tarleton State in Stephenville or at Tyler Junior College. Volleyball is what gets me up in the morning for school. If I continue to play volleyball in school, it will be a lot easier to show up for my college classes if I'm continuing to do something that I love."

Taylor's immediate future, particularly around the holidays, will be filled with helping others in need. "Last year, I organized a bake sale for a local family and we collected \$4,000," Taylor said. "Since the volleyball season is over, I will definitely start doing more community service." Her hopes for the holidays are to work in a soup kitchen or sponsor an angel tree while delivering the gifts herself. Whether in sports or life, Taylor has been known to help many by giving her all. **NOW**



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New and Bright Beginnings

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

In a red wooden house located on Ovilla Road are two ladies who love to teach and interact with children. Mrs. Ginger Shaw and Mrs. Brandi Byers, owners of A Bright Beginning Day Care, have been friends for many years. They also share a heartfelt passion when it comes to rearing and teaching children of all ages.

Ginger and Brandi focus on both the foundational and educational aspects of teaching. "We want our day care to be like the learning centers of the past where children were taught the importance of manners, respect and responsibility," Brandi shared. "These are the core elements one needs to learn in life, and we think that it is very important that these concepts are instilled starting at a very young age."

These moral guideposts are only a few of the many lessons Ginger and Brandi enjoy teaching. "We provide a

safe, caring atmosphere that encourages the children to learn and reach their highest potential," Ginger said. "We currently teach the A Beka curriculum for all ages and are currently making preparations to incorporate a



program to be innovative and essential when it comes to enhancing a child's education and expanding their learning capabilities. "The Montessori program is really innovative; it is an educational process which emphasizes each individual's

own unique and natural learning abilities," Brandi stated.

From their combined 54 years of child care experience, Brandi and Ginger have learned a lot concerning what is important to parents when choosing the best establishment in which to enroll their children. "I am ECMI

accredited, plus Ginger and I both take 15 credit hours of continuing education every year," Brandi added. The owners and staff are trained in CPR for both



Montessori program, such as the Montessori Kids Day Out School," Brandi added.

Both ladies believe the Montessori

Business NOW

infants and children. "We are also approved to provide 24 hour care, and we allow parents to bring their children to us on a "drop-in" basis," Brandi added. "Sometimes we will watch children on a 12-hour rotation, because we realize some parents work second or third shifts."

Although their day care sometimes accepts children around the clock, their


"We have a parental board of advisors, and they are involved in providing input into many of our decisions."

regular daytime hours are from 6:15 a.m. - 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. To further assist parents, A Bright Beginning also provides after-school pick up and programs for children who attend the Red Oak, Waxahachie and Life Schools.

Believing that after-school care should be fun, Brandi and Ginger implemented cheerleading and other sports activities into their program and are looking toward adding a swimming pool to their facility within the near future. They also believe in having a low child-to-staff ratio. "This allows us to have a more one-on-one relationship with the child," Ginger stated. Close, positive relationships with the children and their parents are important to the caring staff at A Bright Beginning.

"We have a parental board of advisors, and they are involved in providing input into many of our decisions," Brandi said. "We encourage the parents to be involved and want them to feel comfortable and confident when they leave their children with us. We truly have a love for children, and will see to their child's needs."

This holiday season, A Bright Beginning will be hosting an Open House Christmas program for parents. They will also be open for children during New Year's Eve where they will be having their own Kids' New Year's Bash. To contact A Bright Beginning regarding their services and upcoming events, please call (972) 617-2260. **NOW**



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Flying High

— By Alex Allred

When the Red Oak school board began its search for a new school superintendent, they knew they wanted someone innovative, creative and savvy as to the ways of the business world. So thorough was the board that they were not satisfied to simply meet potential candidates in Red Oak. When they got down to the finalists, the board traveled to these specific school districts to see firsthand how the school districts operated. This long, exhaustive search would eventually lead them to Texarkana, Texas.

When they traveled to Texarkana, they found Scott Niven and a progressive school district worth modeling. Both the appearance and condition of the schools were a plus, but Scott believes, “they liked the innovative programs we put in place.” At the time, Texarkana offered 29 dual credits in the high school, “so that it could carry over to college.” It was a program that was very popular with both parents and students. “You could almost finish your freshman year before entering college,” Scott added.

Additionally, the elementary programs were a success with rising TAKS scores, a newly implemented Reading First program and developing mathematics programs. As important as these programs were, the board also wanted someone who could look



beyond the walls of the schools and into the future. They needed a visionary who was not scared to look outside the box. “I think many school districts are realizing that they are trying to run a corporation. If you think about the school system, it’s the biggest business in the community with,” Scott hastened to add, “very important clients.”



Ironically, what made Scott the perfect choice for the Red Oak school board was not his educational, but business background. After earning his undergraduate degree in accounting and becoming a licensed CPA, the Texarkana ISD became one of his clients. After a short period of time, he was recruited as the new director of operations for the school district. “After that,” Scott said, “I moved to

associate superintendent of operations and went back to college to get my master’s degree in education.”

In education Scott found his true calling. Although he had always been active in his community, it was not until he was working in the school system that he realized his passion. Education is deeply rooted in his family tree, with his mother and sister both teaching and his wife, Christy, a former elementary principal. It was only natural for Scott to earn his principal and superintendent certifications.

When it was his turn to look at Red Oak, he viewed it not as an educator, but as a business leader, and saw great potential. “The thing about Red Oak that I liked is that there are a lot of great people here. The staff is focused on student success and the communities of Red Oak, Oak Leaf, Glenn Heights, Ovilla and Pecan Hill want their students to be successful,” Scott explained. “The first thing I saw was we could take this district to the next level. The feedback I got was that everyone wanted to see the schools move forward. They supported the bond, and that says a lot about how

Education NOW

they feel about education. The people here want to invest in their schools."

On a personal level, Scott knew this was an excellent school district in which to rear his three children. "I was excited to be part of a community that feels so strongly about the school system," he said. As a visionary businessman, Scott is focused on the school's customer service, saying, "I think we, as a school district, have to recognize that the students are our customers. We want to deal with people, both parents and students, in a professional and courteous manner. It's very important that we realize that the school district belongs to the community," Scott continued. "We want community input as to the direction of our schools." Already, exciting construction projects are underway for new schools and Scott hopes to bring in dual credit classes to the high school as well as new reading and mathematics programs to the elementary schools.

As an educator, he maintains an "open door policy" with tremendous emphasis on teamwork. "All decisions made in Red Oak will be made in the interest of our students," he reiterated. "It's important that we are always fair and equitable, and I want it to be known that I'm always willing to listen to issues and work as a team."

For this superintendent, teamwork is the key for success. While he is thrilled with his new position, his real task is to put together the best team possible for the families of Red Oak. "I really do see myself as part of a greater team," Scott said.

When the day is done though, what does this licensed CPA do for fun? He is an aircraft pilot and enjoys getting behind the cockpit whenever he can. "I haven't been flying in a long time," he chuckled, but when a friend asked if he was interested, he jumped at the opportunity. "I said, 'Let's go look at the schools.' I wanted an aerial view of Red Oak." Indeed, he can look beyond the walls and into the future. **NOV**

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Around Town NOW



Students and staff at Shields Elementary School, top left, held a pep rally for several Hawks to show their support as they move into the playoffs. Tellers at the bank, top right, dressed up as cowgirls for the Halloween holiday. Several members of the ROJH cheerleading squad and sponsor Penny Fowler, middle left, participated in the 25th Annual Komen Dallas Race for the Cure. Traci Gamel, above center, met a new friend at a recent Chamber event. Two gentlemen, above right, glimpse the past in Glenn Heights. Beth Hurst and baby Lauren, bottom left, recently visited a local business. James Cox, bottom right, enjoys selling his produce.



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Look Who's Cooking

— By Melinda Hines

IN THE KITCHEN WITH KRISTI JUREK

WHITE CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES WITH DRIED CHERRIES

2 1/2 cups uncooked old-fashioned rolled oats
2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
2 sticks (1 cup) butter
1 cup granulated sugar
1 cup packed light brown sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
1 12-oz. pkg. white chocolate chips
1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts
1 cup dried cherries or cherry flavored dried cranberries

Heat oven to 375 F; process oats in a food processor to a fine powder. Combine oatmeal, flour, baking soda, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl; set aside. Beat together butter and sugars in bowl of an electric mixer on medium speed until combined; beat in eggs and vanilla until fluffy. Reduce speed to low; add dry

ingredients, about 1/2 cup at a time. Stir in chips, walnuts and dried cherries. Drop by tablespoons on greased baking sheets. Bake in batches until golden, about 10 - 12 minutes, rotating baking sheets after 5 minutes. Remove to wire racks; cool. Makes 5 dozen.

MOM'S ENGLISH TOFFEE

3/4 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup butter
2 Hershey Chocolate Bars
chopped walnuts, to taste

Combine brown sugar and butter in saucepan. Over medium to medium-low heat, bring mixture to a boil. Let boil lightly for 7 minutes stirring constantly (burns very easily). Spread hot mixture onto a well-buttered 9 x 13-inch pan with a metal spoon. (Work very fast as mixture hardens quickly.) After it has set for a couple minutes, break up the chocolate bars and place on top of toffee. Allow the pieces to melt; smooth the warm chocolate over the toffee and sprinkle with chopped walnuts. Allow toffee to cool completely and break into pieces.

CREAMIEST PEANUT BUTTER FUDGE

4 cups sugar
1 cup packed brown sugar
1/2 cup butter
1 12-oz. can evaporated milk
1 7-oz. jar marshmallow crème
1 16-oz. jar creamy peanut butter
1 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract

Combine sugars, butter and milk in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly for 7 minutes; remove from heat. Stir in marshmallow crème until melted. Stir in peanut butter and vanilla until smooth. Pour mixture into a greased 9 x 13-inch pan; cool and cut into squares. Makes 24 squares.

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6 candy canes

Mix pudding mix and milk as directed on the box using an electric mixer. Add peppermint extract and food coloring to blended pudding, mixing in with an electric mixer. Fold whipped topping into the pudding mixture. Place cookies and candy canes in a gallon-size plastic Ziploc bag. Roll over the cookies and candy with a rolling pin until they are crumbly. Shake bag to combine. Layer cookie and candy crumbs then pudding mixture in tall parfait glasses, starting and ending with crumbs. Makes 6 - 8 servings.

PUMPKIN PECAN LOAVES

LOAVES:

3 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
3 cups sugar
2 tsp. baking soda
1 1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. ground nutmeg
1 15-oz. can solid pack pumpkin
1 cup vegetable oil
4 eggs, slightly beaten
2/3 cup water
1/2 cup chopped pecans

CARAMEL GLAZE:

1/4 cup butter or margarine
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup whipping cream (or half-and-half — works about the same)
2/3 cup powdered sugar
1 tsp. vanilla

LOAVES: In a bowl, combine the first 6 ingredients. Combine the pumpkin, oil, eggs and water. Mix well. Stir into dry ingredients just until combined; fold in the pecans. Spoon into 2 greased 9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pans. Bake at 350 degrees for 60 - 65 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks. **GLAZE:** Combine the butter, sugars and cream in a saucepan. Cook until sugar is dissolved. Cool for 20 minutes. Stir in the powdered sugar and vanilla until smooth. Drizzle over cooled loaves. Makes 2 loaves.

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Stretch IRA Trust: How to Maximize Generational Inheritance

— By John D. Hale, Attorney at Law

If you own an IRA (Traditional or Roth), or another qualified retirement account, such as a 401(k) or 403(b), you can make elections that can maintain the tax-deferred status of your IRA over the lives of you and your heirs. This new Multi-generational IRA (sometimes called a "Stretch IRA") can be worth millions to your spouse, children and grandchildren.

With a traditional IRA, you must begin taking the annual required minimum distribution (RMD) at age 70 1/2. Withdrawing only the RMD allows the remaining IRA dollars to grow tax-deferred to the maximum extent possible.

Example: Jack and Jill, both ages 65, have a traditional IRA with a balance of \$250,000 earning 8.00 percent. During their lifetime, Jack and Jill take only the RMD. They have a 45 year old son, Kyle and a 20 year old granddaughter, Laura. Assuming Jack passes away at 82 and then Jill at age 85, Jack and Jill would have received a total of \$355,321. The IRA value at Jill's death would be \$585,288.

Jack and Jill designated Kyle (son) and Laura (granddaughter) as equal beneficiaries of the \$585,288 IRA. Kyle, now age 65 and Laura, age 40, have some important decisions to make.

Smart Decision: Kyle and Laura decide to stretch their IRAs. Now, instead of using Jack and Jill's life expectancies to determine the RMD, Kyle and Laura's life expectancies can be used. This means that less money will be distributed, allowing the IRA to grow substantially. Over the next 21 years, Kyle will receive \$583,114 in total after-tax distributions. Over the next 44 years, Laura will receive \$1,948,520 in total after-tax distributions. Collectively, Kyle and Laura will have received \$2,531,634 after tax.

Not So Smart Decision: Kyle and Laura both take a lump sum distribution of \$292,644 and close the IRA accounts. Unfortunately, they will both have to pay \$89,517 (at a 33.00 percent tax rate) when they file their next tax return. Collectively, Kyle and Laura will receive \$406,254 after tax. (That is less than 20

percent of what they would have received had they simply stretched the IRA.)

If you are serious about helping your children and grandchildren, a Stretch IRA is probably the most effective way to build generational wealth. Stretching an IRA is not automatic, nor likely. IRA beneficiaries almost always make the mistake of withdrawing more than the RMD, thereby losing tax deferral on the withdrawals. In most situations, such as the case with traditional IRAs, the withdrawals are income taxable. This is called a Stretch IRA blowout.

A Stretch IRA blowout most often occurs because: 1) the beneficiary does not understand the rules and choices of how they receive distributions under their newly inherited IRA; 2) the IRA custodian simply sends a check to the beneficiary; 3) a non-spouse beneficiary attempts to rollover the IRA; or 4) the beneficiary is a spendthrift.

The solution is a Stretch IRA Trust. A Living Trust will not work. The Stretch IRA Trust can ensure that the IRA is stretched according to plan. It can also provide protection against your beneficiary's creditors or in the event of divorce. **NOW**

John D. Hale is an attorney based in Red Oak.

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Health NOW

The Picture of Health: Advanced Imaging Technologies Women Should be Aware Of

In their busy lives, women can sometimes neglect their health, but waiting until symptoms develop can be dangerous — especially when it comes to serious illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer or even osteoporosis. It is important to know what tools are available to “take a peek inside” before a serious problem develops.

Here are six common imaging procedures — available at the Baylor Imaging and Diagnostics Center at Red Oak — of which you should be aware:

Mammography: Annual mammograms are recommended for women over the age of 40 to check for breast abnormalities that could potentially be cancerous. Women in Ellis County now have access to digital mammography.

“With digital mammography, the image is ready in seconds. Physicians can adjust the brightness and contrast to help detect small calcifications, masses and other changes that may be early signals of breast cancer,” said Ronny Rose, director of radiology services at Baylor Medical Center at Waxahachie.

CT or Computerized Tomography: A CT scan is a more advanced version of a traditional X-ray. CT scans use a large X-ray camera that circles the body piecing

together images, known as “slices,” to create a three-dimensional view of the inside of the body.

“The images produced by our 16-slice CT scanner are phenomenal. It’s almost like having an internal camera that shows us exactly what’s going on in your body,” Rose said.

Calcium Scoring: Calcium is vital for good bone health and aids in many cellular functions throughout your body, but a significant calcium buildup in the heart and coronary arteries can be an early sign of cardiovascular disease (CVD). A diagnostic test known as a computerized tomography (CT) heart screening can detect the amount of calcium buildup in your arteries by computing a “score” to help determine your risk of CVD.

“Patients with a high score should see their internist or cardiologist for a stress test,” said Mark Fulmer, radiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Waxahachie.

Chest CT Scans: We all know that significant exposure to tobacco smoke puts us at risk for lung cancer. Once a smoker quits, their risk for lung cancer is lowered significantly, but unfortunately, the damage has already been done to their lungs.

“CT scans of the lungs can detect pea-size cancerous growths before any symptoms develop. Studies have shown that CT scans are beneficial for detecting lung cancer at its earliest stages,” Dr. Fulmer said.

Ultrasound: Ultrasound imaging has

been around for many years and continues to become more advanced. Using high-frequency sound waves, ultrasound can produce images of the organs and blood vessels and can be used to identify the source of pain, swelling or infection, or provide the first pictures of a growing baby during pregnancy. Physicians may recommend ultrasound scans to check for thyroid problems, and it is often used in addition to mammograms or to view the inside of the pelvis to check for cervical or ovarian cancer.

Bone Densitometry Scans: Of the 40 million Americans who suffer from osteoporosis, 80 percent of them are women according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation. A simple bone density scan can detect osteoporosis early on and determine your rate of bone loss long before any fractures or breaks occur.

“A bone density test is recommended for all women over age 65, those considered at high risk for osteoporosis and women who suffer from frequent fractures,” Rose added.

For more information about any of these imaging procedures and those available at the Baylor Imaging and Diagnostics Center at Red Oak, consult with your physician. **NOW**

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December 2007

Community Calendar

Third Mondays

The Oaks Fellowship Leadership Forums, 7:30 a.m. at the Waxahachie Civic Center. For more information, visit their Web site www.leadershipforums.net or call (214) 376-8208.

First and Third Tuesdays

Training Academy for Dental Assistants' free informational sessions begin at 5:30 p.m. For details, call (972) 842-2999.

Red Oak Public Library Preschool Story Time, 1:30 - 2:30 p.m. Call (469) 218-1230 or for information visit RedOakPublicLibrary.org for information.

Red Oak Lions Club meeting, 7 p.m. at 207 West Red Oak Road. (972) 617-3577.

Second and Fourth Mondays

Texas Ladies Networking meets from 11:45 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Ryan's Grill in Waxahachie. For more information, call (214) 587-1221.

Every Monday

Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered recovery ministry, meets at First Baptist Church of Red Oak, 103 West Red Oak Road. For more information, call

(972) 617-3591, or visit their Web site at www.RedOakCelebrateRecovery.com.

Second Thursday

A cancer dialogue support group, sponsored by American Cancer Society, meets at 7 p.m. at First United Methodist Church of Red Oak, 600 West Red Oak Road.

December 1

North Ellis County Outreach's Angel Tree gift drive. Trees located at Jefferson, Prosperity, CNB and Vintage banks in Red Oak. Unwrapped gifts due back by December 17. Call (972) 617-7261 for more information.

Toy drive for children in need. Bring your unwrapped toys to the Red Oak Police Department at 547 N. Methodist before December 20. All toys will be handed out by Santa on Christmas morning. Call (972) 617-7632.

December 8

City of Red Oak's "Old Fashioned Christmas" located at Downtown Red Oak Plaza featuring a street dance, live music, hot drinks and treats. Event and parade start at 5 p.m. For more information call the

Parks Department (972) 576-3414.

December 15

Jeremy's Golf Center Jr. Golf Team Tryouts, 10 a.m. at 2636 Patrick Road. (972) 351-9223.

Open house at Bob Brand's train barn, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. For more information, call (972) 230-8101.

December 16

Holiday Car Cruise-in to benefit the Presbyterian Children's Home in Waxahachie. Event starts at 1:30 p.m. from the Midlothian Brookshire's with police escort. Distribution of gifts and a party held at 2 p.m. All vehicles classic, show or everyday drivers are welcome. Please e-mail joe.rakoczy@sbcglobal.net.

December 19

North Ellis County Outreach Angel Tree gift distribution. Volunteers needed for this event. Please call (972) 617-7261.

December 24

The Oaks Fellowship Christmas Eve service. Three services at 4 p.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. Call (214) 376-8208 for information.

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