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*December 2008*

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## Editor's Note

### Happy Holidays!

'Tis the season to do something you have never done before! Maybe try roasting marshmallows in the fireplace, or you could go completely wild and have a s'more party!

Many of our local communities will be hosting events and plays of all kinds this month. Be sure to go experience all of the warmth and excitement this season has to offer. No matter what you do, though, make sure you are with friends and family for they are the best gift of all.

Sincere Wishes,  
*Diana Merrill Claussen*  
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# In Perfect Harmony

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

Growing up in a family of missionaries and singers, local artist Kristi Northup always knew her life would have a spiritual purpose. “When I was 4, I started playing piano before I started to read,” she said. “My parents were both ministers, and we would travel and sing as a family. So, I have always sung. Playing the piano and singing went hand-in-hand and were always second nature for me.”

Later in life, “My best friend and I had a dream of being Christian rock stars and college roommates,” Kristi said. They achieved their roommate goal together. Kristi later achieved a solo career. During college, “Everyone else assumed singing was what I was going to do and, for a long time, I

really resisted,” she said. “For a while, I wanted to be a senator or a coroner, but later realized it was OK for me to want to sing. It took a long time for me to accept that singing was probably why God created me,” she said.

Although Kristi had never had any vocal training, she majored in voice when she went to college. There she obtained her music and urban ministry degree. “A part of me wanted to work in a people-oriented field,” she said. It was during her college days when Kristi had what she called a divinely inspired “epiphany.” “I was on the college music team and had this major turning point where I felt like I was supposed to be teaching, speaking and pursuing music. Music became a means to an end.”

Kristi’s music has been credited as the catalyst for many new beginnings. With an emotional rawness, Kristi’s silky smooth voice has a way of mesmerizing and touching the souls of her listeners. With each clear and honest melody, Kristi not only shares her heart, but inspires audiences of all backgrounds. Her music is real and shines straight from her heart. She is able to accomplish that ‘realness’ by writing her own songs.

Kristi shared how she receives inspiration for her own songs. “I carry a notebook with me everywhere I go and write down any random idea I get.







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Sometimes, I'll see people and situations and get an idea for a lyric. Then I'll make the music fit around the lyric. I am always looking for thoughts that I've never thought before or things I've never said before."

Kristi's listeners are usually emotionally touched by her performances. "Sometimes, I even get choked up when singing the reality of how I feel," she said. "I think people appreciate me being real because people relate to that. I just try to be in the moment, and if there is something I'm feeling, then that's what I let out. I think and feel and then always try to write the type of songs that are prayers to peoples' hearts."

Accomplishing this goal has been Kristi's main focus since she met someone who not only encouraged her to attain her goals, but inspired her to follow her vocal dreams. That man is her husband, Wayne. "The guy that I married made a major difference," she shared. "I met Wayne on my first day of college, and we were friends all through school, but it took him four years to get the nerve to ask me out," she smiled. Wayne and Kristi love music and, "He is always listening to it and has a good ear for a good sound," she said. "He is my biggest fan and the best kind of music critic I could have around."

After they married, the pair set off on a lifelong journey to accomplish their evangelistic and musical dreams. "Kristi recorded her first music CD when she was 25 years old," her assistant, Christina Vincent said. "When I met Kristi, her husband was an evangelist and she would lead worship [music]." Together, the pair and their ministry have traveled across the nation to inspire many.

Kristi is honored to be able to use her singing gift to touch lives. One ministry trip Kristi annually attends goes to New Orleans during Mardi Gras. "In New Orleans we host a music and dance outreach," she said. Kristi can also be seen working at her family's ministry, singing at special



events, giving performances at The Oaks Fellowship in Red Oak and Mesquite and giving music lessons. "I always tell my students they need to practice both the music and the spirit," she said. "The music only matters in relationship — in how it affects people. It has to be about people."

Kristi got into the music industry on her own terms. "I have never really wanted to be on a label because they tell you what to wear," she smiled. Having your own say is important to artists, especially when it comes to your work. "Plus, I'm too much of a free-spirit to do that, [go with a label]."

### **"It has to be about people."**

I'm not saying I would never be with one, but it's just not my goal."

Although Kristi's main music genre is Christian, she has been known to write songs for her family and even lullabies for her daughter, Libby. Kristi has three music CDs under her belt and a very fun Christmas CD with all of the season's classics. "The Christmas CD is totally different from my others because it is all jazz music," she said. "I want to hear the classics at Christmas," she exclaimed.

She also likes the freedom and opportunities that independent artists now have. "Now is a good time for independent artists, so I am making the most of that," she said. Those opportunities have a lot to do with technological advances. "There are so many options to get your music out because of the Internet and that gives you a lot more control of your destiny, who you want to be and what kind of music you want to write," Kristi shared. "I hope that I sing or say something that actually makes a difference to the lives of others."

During December Kristi will be performing a series of Christmas concerts. As another way to share her music during this season, Kristi has an annual tradition she plans on following. "We always go caroling in our neighborhood and with our friends," she said. **XXX**

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## At Home With Gary and Rhonda Autrey



# The Get-together House

— By Jaime Ruark

Christmastime is a favorite holiday for many because it is a time for family and friends to celebrate and spend time together. Stories are told, smells of delicious foods and sounds of shared laughter fill the air as special memories are made. For the Autrey family, that Christmas feeling of togetherness is not just felt in December. Year-round, Gary and Rhonda's front door is open, revolving for visitors who are never truly visiting because they are made to feel right at home. The doorbell is really more of an ornament, as it is rarely used at this get-together house.

A beautiful Christmas tree, adorned in gold, pink and blue ornaments, flowers and bows, greets guests in the foyer. Lighted wreaths above the windows cast a warm glow, and garland over the mantle of the stone fireplace and along the stairway accents the warm beige walls of the living room. CoCo and Susan, the two smallest members of the family,

also greet guests with happy little barks, anxious for a friendly hand to pet them.

Like many families, the Autreys have special Christmas traditions, from Christmas Eve movies to sausage, gravy and biscuit breakfasts and opening presents brought by Santa. The couple's gorgeous daughters, Abigail and Jana, love to come home from college for the holidays to enjoy Gary's homemade hot chocolate as the family cuddles up to watch *It's a Wonderful Life*. Abigail has never actually seen the ending, despite yearly viewings. The movie is Rhonda's favorite. "She makes us watch it every year, and we always fall asleep in the middle of it," Jana smiled, adding that on Christmas morning she is the first to awake, ready to go downstairs to see what Santa has brought. "He still comes, even at their age; he just wraps the presents now so the fun is a bit more







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—Wandalyne McClure  
Retired DISD Instructional Specialist  
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prolonged," Rhonda noted.

One of Abigail's favorite Christmas memories still sparkles in her mind. "When he came down the chimney, Santa left behind a little sparkly trail of confetti everywhere he went," Abigail recalled. Jana remembered another Christmas morning that set the whole family laughing, making it easy to see that this family truly enjoys spending time together.

The 3,800-square-foot house, built in 2003, is both beautiful and functional, thanks to Rhonda, the designer. The floor plan is open, with the kitchen and living room separated by a long bar used for buffet-style parties. "We're family people and we love get-togethers. We wanted everything open for parties so that people upstairs could talk to people downstairs, and people in the kitchen [could] talk to people in the living room," Jana shared. Windows let in light as well as offer a view of the backyard and pool area, where the family loves to spend

time and entertain. Running fountains, a diving board and grill all speak of many happy gatherings. "That grill isn't very old, but it's just about worn out, we've used it so much," Gary, the family cook, said.

Every bit of space is used in a practical way, but there is personality splashed on every wall, especially in the girls' bedrooms where they were given free decorating reign. Abigail's room is a mixture of brights, with yellow and orange walls accented by pinks and greens — her favorite colors. One wall is even painted to resemble bricks, and a pay phone and street signs complete her fun theme. Jana's room is a happy blue, her walls artistically arranged with pictures of friends and sorority sisters. Off to one side is her bathroom, the yellow walls covered with blue stars, and another alcove leads to her computer room.

The house has three bedrooms and five baths, an interesting number until Rhonda explained with a laugh that



bathrooms are where the family actually spends much of their time. "We have our family meetings, our powwows, in my bathroom. I sit on my throne, this little chair I have, and the girls have what we call their peasant chairs, and we just sit and visit all the time," she explained. The master bedroom and bath are decorated in deep purple

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jewel tones. The bathroom is an expansive space with a sunken tub, walk-in shower and television.

Gary, whose two grown sons, Dusty and Cody, live away from home, is outnumbered by the girls of the house, and his office, with its warm, orange walls, becomes his retreat. "My office is my quiet room," he said. The owner

of three guitars, one signed by the country group, Brooks and Dunn, Gary unwinds by playing George Strait or Jimmy Buffet tunes. "We lock him in there when he plays his guitar. When he starts bellowing out the tunes, that's when the girls yell at me to bar the door," Rhonda laughed.

Gary is a history buff who loves antiques and anything with a story behind it, thus the living room is filled with some interesting conversation pieces. A family favorite is the coffee table. Its wrought iron legs hold up what was originally a door from a 1700s sailing ship. An end table is actually an antique potty and a side table, home to Rhonda's bell collection, was an ice box in its previous life. "When I was in college at Sam Houston in Huntsville, [Texas] I was just a poor kid trying to make a living. I worked for a company who was building a golf course, and I was operating a bulldozer. There was an old building in the way, but before I

pushed it down, I walked in it and that old ice box was sitting in there," Gary recalled, explaining that the golf course was being built on what was previously a plantation back in the 1800s. "I dragged it out and asked my boss if I could have it, and I refinished it and brought it back to life."

Gary, who came to Red Oak as a teacher in 1983, currently works as the director of special education for Ellis County Shared Services. He also runs his own real estate business. Rhonda, a Red Oak resident since she was 4 years old, works with infectious disease patients at Baylor Hospital. The couple works hard to provide for their family, and so their house is their sanctuary, a place to enjoy life and leave all stress at the door. This Christmas, if you are lucky enough to count yourself among the Autrey's friends, you will no doubt be invited over for some homemade hot chocolate, as their open door beckons everyone to share in their happy holidays. **WWW**

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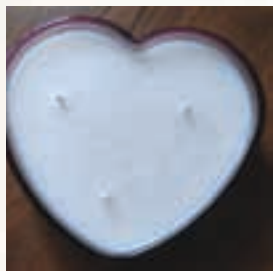
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# ARTS NOW



# Aromatic Chemistry

— By Danielle Parker

Among the best aspects of the holidays are the scents associated with the season itself. The aroma of freshly baked goods in the kitchen, pine from Christmas trees and chestnuts roasting on open fires can warm the home and the heart.

Red Oak native, Dana Daniels, understands the tradition of fragrance and how a little light can create a beautiful atmosphere. Nine years ago, in her kitchen, she began concocting and creating what would soon grow to be Two Sisters' Candles. "My sister and I always complained how we could never find good, quality candles that were not too expensive," she recalled.

Her discontentment drove her to pull out her inner creativity and tap into a technique she had learned as a little girl. "Growing up, I saw my aunt making candles, and I self-taught myself from there," Dana said. "I decided to buy a few supplies, do a little research and make a batch of my own. It took some time to perfect, but next thing I knew, I had made a candle, and it actually smelled great."

Her small beginnings soon matured as friends and family became interested in her new hobby. "I have always been

a crafty person, so this was just another craft for me," Dana said. She has since become known for her wide assortment of handmade, fragrant candles.

The process begins as Dana blends 30 percent soy with 70 percent paraffin and melts the wax. The color and a triple dose of fragrance are then added. She allows the wax to cool just slightly before pouring it into an individual container where it becomes what Dana likes to call "the best candle you will ever burn."

Dana has developed more than 50 fragrances; from tea lights to votives and room sprays to car fresheners, she has become a scent specialist. "I like to play around with different scents," she said. "I'll be working on my candles and get a whiff of a couple of scents together and realize that smells kind of good," she explained.

Several of Dana's fragrances have been a result of trial and error. "I experiment a lot, and I have come up with some pretty good scents," she said. "Some I will never give to anyone, but it doesn't matter. I have fun doing it just the same."

Dana also has fun playing with different containers for her candles.



Each scent is distinct and original, so she feels the candle holder should also reflect that originality. "I started out doing just candle jars, but as the years have gone by, I have gotten a little more creative," she said. "Now I do not just do a grandma-style jar. I place the candles in ... containers [in which] you would not expect to see a candle. I have a variety of different shapes and sizes. Teacups and the state of Texas are my favorites."

Dana specializes in the most aromatic scents with everyday fragrances like sun-washed linen, leather and clean cotton or the distinctive smells of Dreamsicle, cappuccino and white cherry blossom. Understanding how the aroma of a candle can set the mood, Dana works with a professional to give her candles the perfect touch. With this collaboration of technique, a sweet-smelling chemistry is established. "My perfumer, who helps create the fragrance oils, is second to none," Dana said. "When we smell a fragrance that we love, we work to recreate that scent in the candle."



## ARTS NOW

During the Christmas season, Dana likes to whip up a few delightful treats to make the season jolly. "I enjoy creating pleasurable scents that remind people of what the holiday is about," she said. "There is something about the smell of cinnamon and spice that just makes everyone that comes in the home feel special."

While making candles occupies much of her time, Dana is also a wife of 21 years and a stay-at-home-mom, who homeschools her two teenage children. "It takes organizational skills," Dana confessed. "I have had to learn to balance school for the children, running a home and making candles. It tends to get messy in my kitchen. I have to juggle making candles and making dinner. I have to make life balance; otherwise, I will have rose petals in the rosemary chicken!"

**Dana has developed more than 50 fragrances; from tea lights to votives and room sprays to car fresheners, she has become a scent specialist.**

For Dana, her craft has become something she is passionate about. "I love what I do," she said. "It is fun and while there are times it can be strenuous, I enjoy playing in the kitchen and making candles. And what's better is it brings joy to others as well."

Candles have a way of warming an entire home with a sweet, simple scent. To be able to add ambiance, atmosphere and aroma to someone's world is what Dana said lights up her life. "I love it when friends and family tell me they love my candles," Dana said. "I know this is a great candle, but when someone else enjoys it, that is truly the best feeling."



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# Powerhouse

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

When Seth Evans was in fifth grade, he made the decision to get in shape. He decided to work out with his dad, Scott. “We would go to Lancaster Recreation Center and that’s how he first got started,” Scott said. “Seth first began doing lightweight cardio and then in seventh grade slowly increased, lifting heavier weights.” Seth later became involved in both football and boxing.

Seth’s sports programs enhanced his workouts and greatly increased his athletic ability. “Football workouts were nothing compared to my boxing workouts,” he said. “I liked the fact that my boxing teacher pushed me.” Both athletic experiences helped to propel him into his favorite sport of all — powerlifting. Since his freshman year in high school, this senior has been putting all of his strength into excelling both in the classroom and at the gym.

The workouts and skills needed in powerlifting are very similar to football. “Football and powerlifting go hand-in-hand,” Seth said. The gear and weight amounts needed to train are vastly different, however. The powerlifting weight classes are similar to the weight classes in boxing, “We have more classes than boxing,” Seth informed. Last year, Seth was in the 275 weight class. At six feet tall, he currently weighs 255 pounds. “During the summer Seth loses weight, but when winter and competitions begin he starts eating like a horse,” Scott smiled.

This season, “I want to get down into the 242 weight class,” Seth shared. “The guys in that group are usually stronger and more athletic competitors.” Each competition features the different lifters categorized into their weight size and the weight of the equipment they are lifting. Seth competes in



three classes and this season, he hopes to increase the pounds of weights he lifts.

“Last year, I lifted 595 pounds on squats, 360 on bench and 550 on dead lift,” Seth said. “I know I can lift more now though,” he added. “When I started powerlifting I had a plan,” Seth said. In recent years, he has won at regional competitions and came close to going to state. This year, he is zeroing in on the state competition, and although last year’s plan got detoured, he is well on his way to accomplishing his goal. “I want to win state,” Seth said. “I have the determination and know how to do it.”

With a good family, team and coaching staff supporting him, this ambitious young man is ready for the season to begin at the end of the month. “My coach is Brian Thompson and he is a real good coach,” Seth said. “Coach gets me excited at meets, but half of the time, he gets more excited than I do,” he laughed.

Seth’s background and training experience have allowed him to take on a coaching role with friends and classmates. One of his friends started training with him, and Seth helped him lose 30 pounds. “My friend also added 80 pounds on his bench [press],” Seth said. From training football friends to girls on the volleyball team, Seth has been known to work with some of our city’s finest athletes.

When it comes to training, Seth follows his coaches’



## Sports NOW

advice. "Start by stretching and start off with light weights," he said. "Later you can work up to heavier weights, just make sure you always have a spotter." Also, use the correct body form and do not try to lift too much weight too soon or you could end up getting injured.

The right lifting gear can make all of the difference as well. "We have suits we wear for powerlifting," Seth said. "Some schools prefer them to fit tightly and, at times, it can take two people to put it on you." The tightness helps the lifter to use the correct form. "If you know how to use the suit, it can help you to increase the amount of weight you lift," Seth added. The suit has also been known to leave bruises on the lifter's legs.

The work is well worth Seth's time and effort, and although he would like to continue to powerlift after high school, he is exploring all of his options. "I have As and high Bs in school," he said. "I also have three dual college credit classes." "He has always had good grades," his stepmom, Becky, said. "People tell us he is a good boy, but we already knew that," she smiled.

During October and November Seth took multiple SATs and he will also take it again in December. After that, "I want to apply to at least 10 colleges [before their application acceptance deadline] in January," Seth said. Although Seth has been told there is only one college in Texas that gives a scholarship for powerlifting, he will still be applying to schools within the state he loves. "Seth has also always talked about being on *American Gladiators*," Scott shared. "I also thought about competing in the World's Strongest competition; that looks fun," Seth added.

As Seth prepares for the season, he will be working on his lifting and eating disciplines. "I love food and I eat a lot," Seth exclaimed. This holiday, "I can't overindulge in eating stuffing, and I love stuffing!" **NOW**

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## Business **NOW**

# With Children in Mind

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

Steve and Dollie Dickison know children. “I am a mother of six,” Dollie said. The Dickison children range in age from 6 years old to the mid-20s. “I also have a 19-month-old grandchild,” she added.

Besides having a heart for children, Dollie also has a love of helping others both personally and professionally. Her background in customer service, teaching and retail are good examples of what she enjoys most. One thing Dollie always wanted to do was have a retail store of her own. “One day, we got a call from a friend who knew we were looking to have a business,” Dollie shared.

The business the Dickisons were interested in was a children’s resale boutique called All About Kids located at 235 East Ovilla Road. They toured the store in March 2008 and were so impressed by it, “We bought the shop the very next day,” Dollie exclaimed. Since they bought All About Kids, the Dickisons’ goal for the store is to continue to specialize in a variety of children’s items. Besides offering clothing, toys and necessities, the store also has numerous items such as car seats, cribs and strollers from which to choose.

“We provide everything from infants to preteens,” Dollie said. “We also offer maternity wear and will eventually take donations of adult clothing for families in need.” Although All About Kids’ specialty is in resale, the Dickisons have also been working within the community to



assist customers, parents and local schools.

“I work really hard at getting a lot of school clothes (in stock), and have heard so many thank yous from parents because we have a good selection of uniforms to choose from,” Dollie said. “Kids grow out of clothes so fast, it makes more sense to buy from us because our clothes are either new or like new,” Steve added. In order to assist families, the Dickisons have started a few programs that benefit both the schools and local children.

“Many local schools have parents that donate their children’s gently-used clothes,” Dollie said. Once the clothes are sold through the store, “We give a percentage of the profit back to that school’s Parent Teacher Association.” All About Kids’ uniform selection includes schools within the Red Oak, DeSoto, Lancaster, Ferris, Ennis and Midlothian ISDs.

The Dickisons give back in their personal lives, too. They are not only foster parents, but they have also started a nonprofit organization. “Our nonprofit assists foster kids and parents,”

Steve said. “Through the organization, we focus on [helping] kids who go back to their biological families.” The Dickisons are the type of people who have a heart for all. “We have a





## Business NOW

lot of dreams; we just take it one day at a time," Dollie smiled.

For now, they continue to provide help to the community. "We also donate surplus items to Penny's From Heaven Outreach," Dollie said. "We also donate clothes and give a percentage of our profits to members of the Ellis County Foster Parent Association," Steve interjected. The couple is glad to assist their patrons in any way they can. "Coming to All About Kids makes



**"We provide everything from infants to preteens."**

sense, especially with the state of the economy and gas prices," Dollie added.

With the holidays just around the corner, you can get quality holiday and everyday clothing for a decent price by visiting All About Kids. The store has a wonderful array of boys and girls holiday outfits and name brands to choose from and they also offer many handmade items such as hair bows for girls of all ages. "We are also carrying gift items for the holiday season," Dollie added.

With their large selection from which to choose, the Dickisons aim to always be customer oriented first and foremost. "I will always be here for our customers," Dollie said.

All About Kids is open on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.; Thursdays and Fridays from 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.; and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Call (972) 617-9009 for more information or to schedule an after-hours appointment. **NOW**

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Education  
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# Listen With Your Eyes

— By Diana Merrill  
Claussen

When Denise Kopp first started attending school to become a math teacher, she would have never imagined she would be teaching something else instead. While in school, Denise decided to take a language elective. The foreign language she chose was not a spoken language, but sign language.

Denise's fascination for learning sign language began during high school when she worked at Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington. "I was always fascinated with signing and would always watch them [hearing impaired visitors] while they were at the park," she shared.

Denise would help her co-workers at the park to assist with deaf customers. At times, Six Flags would host "Deaf Days" and Denise noticed some co-workers were afraid to wait on their hearing impaired guests. So her co-workers would, "Come and drag me away from whatever I was doing to wait on them because they were afraid to."

"While I was in college, I just felt a calling to teach deaf children," Denise said. For an entire year she vacillated between being a math teacher and a teacher for the hearing impaired. She eventually switched her major to deaf education.

During her personal and professional studies, Denise learned how society reacts while trying to understand and interact with the deaf. "I had a sign language teacher who had the class go to a restaurant and only communicate through signing for the duration of our visit," she shared. It was the stares and reactions by the other restaurant patrons who showed Denise, "Just how scared people are of the deaf."

After she graduated, Denise went to work at the Callier Center for Communication Disorders in Dallas for six years. While there, "You would have the same group of students for three years," she said. "I got really attached to them."



Later, she took a sabbatical and had her son, Grady. After five years, Denise went to work for the DeSoto Independent School District as an Itinerant Deaf-ed teacher. Every week, she visited every school within the district. "It put a lot of miles on my car driving around to the schools," she smiled.

"Anywhere there was a hearing impaired child, I would go see them a few times a week to help the child and work with them and their teacher," Denise said. She was not only a student advocate, but a liaison between both the child, educator and, at times, the parents. "I would also help them if they, [student] had things going on in class that they didn't understand."

While teaching hearing impaired youngsters, Denise would often encounter more problems with the parents than the student. "About 60 percent of the hearing impaired students' parents would not learn to sign," she said. "A lot of those kids grow up hurt because their parents never learned to communicate with them." Many of the parents simply relied on the deaf person to read their lips. "In those cases the only people the deaf student would have to 'talk' to would be with their friends and teachers at school."

After her time at DeSoto, Denise decided to homeschool Grady when he started fifth grade. She then also joined the Southwest Dallas Homeschool Association's co-op. "Once the parents in the association learned about what I had done



## Education NOW

for a living, they asked if I would teach a sign class for the co-op. This is the first year I have taught with them and currently have 12 students that I see every Thursday for an hour. Learning sign is very easy, especially since it is so visual," Denise explained.

Denise has taught sign to many ages from 2-year-olds on up and said she

**"While I was in college, I just felt a calling to teach deaf children."**

taught her hearing impaired students almost the exact same way she teaches those who are hearing. "We start with the things they can see and touch like food, toys or clothes, and use everyday words," Denise said. "Next, I show the object and then sign it and as the student develops in this new 'language' we add on to their vocabulary." The process is the same as learning any other language.

To foster understanding and assist the hearing impaired, Denise recently started working with her church's deaf ministry and interprets the services for their parishioners. When it comes to helping her students and others within both the deaf and hearing arenas, Denise shared a few insights on how one can assist a deaf person. "If you meet a hearing impaired person that needs help, you can usually use writing [as a way of communicating with them]," she said. "They also adore text messaging and can read and write enough to get their ideas across."

When it comes to interacting with the hearing impaired, Denise also suggested, "Don't shout. Shouting [louder] doesn't make them hear any better. If the person reads lips and you're shouting, it deforms the shape of your words and then the person can't lip-read. Don't be afraid to interact with them and understand the deaf are just like everybody else; they just can't hear." **NOW**



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# Around Town

## NOW



Cub Scouts from Pack 228, top left, enjoyed an evening together celebrating awards and patches that the boys earned throughout the month. Renee Chase and her husband, Greg, top center, showed their Halloween spirit. Nancy Davis, top right, recently spent the day in Red Oak working with fabric and ribbon. Eastridge Elementary teachers, second row left, celebrated the ROISD Education Foundation's Partner Day. Michele Goodwin and Regina Burton, second row center, modeled jewelry at the Oktoberfest event held at the Ellis County Expo Center. Abby Anderson, second row right, had fun during her fall class party. Trevor Jones, bottom left, won the chance to throw a pie in the face of assistant principal Cassie Fulton. First United Methodist Church's Youth One Group, bottom right, played their own version of Fear Factor.



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## Look Who's Cooking

— By Faith Browning

### IN THE KITCHEN WITH KATIE ALMOND

#### MAMOO'S GRITS DRESSING

6 cups water  
1 1/2 cups old-fashioned grits (not instant or quick)  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1/3 cup butter or margarine  
1 medium onion, diced  
3 stalks celery, diced  
6 slices day old wheat bread, torn in small pieces  
2 to 2 1/2 cups chicken or turkey broth  
2 large eggs, beaten  
7 oz. diced pimiento  
1 1/2 Tbsp. rubbed sage  
2 tsp. poultry seasoning  
salt to taste  
pepper to taste  
Preheat oven to 350 F. Use first 3 ingredients to prepare grits according to package instructions. Transfer grits to large bowl. Melt butter over medium heat, sauté onion and celery until tender. Add sautéed vegetables, bread and next 7 ingredients to grits, stirring well. Consistency should be thick but pourable. Taste and adjust seasoning accordingly. Spoon dressing into lightly greased 9 x 13-inch pan. Bake for about 30 - 45 minutes.

#### MAMA'S FAVORITE COOKIES

1 cup flour  
1/4 tsp. baking soda  
1/2 tsp. baking powder

1/8 tsp. salt  
1/2 cup Crisco  
1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 cup brown sugar, packed  
1 egg, unbeaten  
1/2 tsp. vanilla  
1 cup oatmeal  
1 cup corn flakes  
1 cup coconut

Preheat oven to 325 F. Sift together first 4 ingredients in small bowl. In mixer bowl, cream shortening and both sugars. Add egg and vanilla beating until very light and fluffy (mixer on medium speed). Add flour mixture, beating on low until thoroughly combined. Stir in oatmeal, corn flakes and coconut until just blended. Spray cookie sheet with cooking spray and drop dough by the spoonful. Bake about 15 minutes.

#### PAT'S PRALINE SWEET POTATOES

1 28-oz. can sweet potatoes, drained and mashed  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1/4 cup butter  
2 eggs  
1 tsp. vanilla  
1/2 tsp. cinnamon  
1/2 cup sugar  
TOPPING:  
3/4 cup brown sugar

3 Tbsp. flour

3 Tbsp. butter

1 cup pecans, chopped

Preheat oven to 350 F. Mix first 7 ingredients thoroughly and put in a 8 X 8-inch casserole dish. For topping, mix brown sugar and flour, cut in butter and then mix in pecans. Sprinkle on top of casserole. Bake at 350 for 30 minutes or until topping is thoroughly melted and starting to brown at edges. Serves 4 - 6 as a side dish.

#### DILLED CARROTS AND GREEN BEANS

1 lb. fresh green beans, trimmed and blanched in 4 qt. water and 1 Tbsp. Kosher salt  
1/2 lb. whole petite baby carrots, blanched in 2 qt. water and 1 1/2 tsp. Kosher salt  
2 Tbsp. butter  
3 Tbsp. onion, diced  
1/2 tsp. dried dill (or more to taste)  
Blanch green beans and carrots separately. To blanch: bring water to a boil. Add salt. Add green beans and boil 3 - 4 minutes. Transfer quickly to a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. Beans should remain in ice water for 3 - 4 minutes; drain and set aside. Repeat process with baby carrots. At this point, you may refrigerate for later cooking. Melt butter in saucepan over medium heat; sauté onion until tender. Add beans and carrots; toss gently to coat. Add dill; toss gently to coat. Makes 4 to 6 servings.


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## Finance **NOW**

# What is the Value of My Home?

— By Andrea Walton

Some of you may be asking yourself, “Does my insurance coverage fit my needs? Do I have enough coverage to replace my home in the event of a serious loss? What affects my premium?”

These questions create a need for you to regularly review your homeowners insurance and to consider other questions such as: Have you recently remodeled or improved your home? Has the rate of inflation risen since your last appraisal? What influences the building construction costs in your area?

As you consider these issues, it is important to understand that real estate values measure the market value or selling price for a home. For insurance purposes, it is important to estimate the current replacement cost, which is the amount needed to hire a contractor to repair the damage or to rebuild the home to its pre-loss condition. Dwelling replacement costs used by insurance companies do not include

the value of the land. Market conditions in your area may impact the amount it will cost to rebuild your home if you experience a loss.

Building contractors or professional replacement cost appraisers are a good source for obtaining an estimated replacement cost for your home. Estimates from these sources should reflect your home’s specific features and details.

Once you know the estimated cost to replace your home, you can decide how much insurance coverage fits your needs. You should also consider other policy endorsements such as back up of sewer and drain coverage, or additional coverage for personal articles with high values such as jewelry, fine arts and collectibles.

You may want to consider higher personal liability coverage or the need for flood insurance that is provided by a separate policy. In addition to the



amount of coverage you decide to purchase, your premium is impacted by optional endorsements you select, your claim history, the amount of your deductible, company longevity and multiple policy discounts such as home/auto.

Finally, remember to periodically review your insurance coverages with your agent. That will ensure you have the coverage you need. **NOW**

*Andrea Walton is a State Farm agent based in Red Oak.*

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# December 2008

## Community Calendar

### Every Monday

Celebrate Recovery meeting, First Baptist Church, 103 West Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-3591. [www.redoakcelebraterecovery.com](http://www.redoakcelebraterecovery.com).

### Second and Fourth Mondays

Texas Ladies Networking meeting: 11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. at Ryan's Grill, Waxahachie. (214) 587-1221.

### Tuesdays and Thursdays

Alcoholics Anonymous meeting: 7:00 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 Red Oak Rd. Non-smoking. (972) 617-9100.

### Thursdays

Gamblers Anonymous meeting: 8:30 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-9100.

### First and Third Tuesdays

Red Oak Lions Club meeting: 7:00 p.m., 207 West Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-3577.

### Every Wednesday

Family Story Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., Red Oak Public Library, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. All ages welcome. (469) 218-1230. [www.redoakpubliclibrary.org](http://www.redoakpubliclibrary.org).

### Wednesdays and Thursdays

Senior Citizens Club meeting: 8:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., 207

West Red Oak Rd. Games, exercise and activities. (972) 576-2777.

### Second Thursday

American Cancer Society Support group meeting: 7:00 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 West Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-9100.

### Third Thursday

American Business Women's Association meeting. [www.abwa-empoweringwomen.org](http://www.abwa-empoweringwomen.org).

### Last Thursday

DeSoto Art League meeting. [www.desotoartleague.com](http://www.desotoartleague.com).

### First Saturday

Red Oak Fire Rescue CPR classes: 9:00 a.m. Call early to register. (469) 218-7713. [www.redoaktx.org](http://www.redoaktx.org).

### First Friday

Worship Jam: 6:30 p.m., Bubba Que BBQ's front porch.

### December 5 - 7 and 12 - 14

Bethlehem Revisited live nativity: 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Located at 402 N. College Street, directly behind Central Presbyterian Church in Waxahachie.

### December 6

Christmas Downtown Red Oak. Parade starts at 5:00

p.m. Event ends at 8:00 p.m.

Christmas Market and Gift Show: Waxahachie Civic Center, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

### December 6, 7

The Downtown Waxahachie Victorian Christmas Festival offers market vendors, choirs, carolers, costumed characters, carriage rides, photos with Santa, lighted Victorian stroll, outdoor Christmas movies and much more. Call (972) 938-2101, ext. 198.

### December 14

5th Annual Christmas Cruise to the Presbyterian Children's Home in Waxahachie. Gather at Whataburger in Midlothian from 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. Gift distribution with Santa. Refreshments will be served. Call (214) 587-1643 or (214) 808-4019.

City of Red Oak Christmas parade and tree lighting.

### December 20, 21

A Live Nativity will be presented under a large tent at New Beginnings Bible Church, located at 1970 FM 983 in Ferris, Texas. There will be three shows each day at 6:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Call (972) 842-2800 or visit [www.newbeginningsbiblechurch.com](http://www.newbeginningsbiblechurch.com).

For more community events, visit our online calendar at [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).

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