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On The Cover

Each decoration in the Perkins' home is considered a treasure; some collected during travels, others family heirlooms.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

Editor's Note

Hello, Red Oak Folk!

I love December. I can't help it. Sure, it's cliché, but there's nothing about carols, ornaments or gift-giving that I don't like. Generosity of spirit and celebration of the world's most wondrous birth make it my favorite time of year. Throw in my only son's birthday and I tear up just thinking about December.

No matter your personal beliefs, now is an opportunity to reflect on another year gone by. What did you learn? What was your favorite moment? How will you spend this last month of 2010? Whether caroling, decorating, giving of yourself, or marking the birth of someone who changed your life, make this month the cherry on top of your decade.

Help me share more stories of folks who are a gift to Red Oak by sending your suggestions to angel.morris@nowmagazines.com.

The best-read stories are in *Red OakNOW*!

Angel Morris
Red OakNOW Editor



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Stage Mom

— By Angel Morris

Actor Paul Newman said, “To be an actor, you must be a child.” In that case, Noelle Beaver is molding tomorrow’s thespians today.

Artistic director for Phoenix Repertory Players, a not-for-profit organization producing free children’s theater, Noelle brings classic training to local youth. Formally trained at Duxbury Musical Conservatory of New England, Noelle was also a performer with Pricilla Beach Theatre Troupe in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

“I have been involved in theater one way or another since before I could walk. My father was a pastor, and the congregation was like an extended family to me. Every Sunday they would just expect that I would be performing something or singing something, and I loved it,” Noelle said. “When I was older, the conservatory and theater troupe were fantastic training grounds and very nurturing for me. I got to sing and act, both of which I love to this day.”

Noelle moved from Plympton, a small New England Colonial town, and eventually settled with high-school-sweetheart-turned-husband, Brandon, in Red Oak 11 years ago. They recently moved to Ovilla. “Making the transition from Massachusetts to Texas was quite an experience, but everyone I met in Red Oak was wonderful and so welcoming. The very first day we moved in, neighbors saw us bringing in our moving boxes and rushed over to help,” Noelle recalled. “I was especially embraced by the homeschooling community here.”

Noelle and Brandon educate their five children at home, incorporating plays into their routine. “When my oldest daughter, Avery, was about 8 years old, I saw she could act. I was encouraged to go ahead and direct *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* with ECCHO (Ellis County Christian Homeschool

Organization), and we actually invited homeschool groups from around Texas to our one-act play contest with a UIL judge.”

Taking first place in that competition sparked the idea for Phoenix Repertory Players (PRP). “There is an enormous amount of interest in local theater, and we saw a need for just such a troupe. We cater to kids from ages 4-18, many of whom are educated at home or attend a school that allows for flexibility in their schedules, and we don’t charge a penny. The kids sell ads to cover all the costs of each production,” Noelle said.

With Managing Director Rebecca Perry writing scripts, making props and managing the business side of PRP, Noelle is free to teach acting and direct plays. “Rebecca works so hard behind the scenes; she is the true driving force of our theater troupe, and we couldn’t exist without her. That enables me to really focus on the directing,” Noelle said. “Directing for me is like having living art on stage to do with as you will. It is taking a story and visually presenting it the way you want others to regard it. Theater is this living organism that evolves with each





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actor and each production and each audience member.”

Working with child actors is especially rewarding for Noelle. “It thrills me to see kids come to auditions — those who are supposedly shy and soft spoken, those who have never had any play experience, those who say they just want to work backstage — and then to see them gradually gain confidence to the extent that they end up getting leads in my plays and end up turning out these incredible performances. Then I can’t get them to be quiet to save my life!”

Coming off the success of November’s production of *Sleeping Beauty*, which toured Red Oak and Waxahachie, Noelle said she is ever amazed at the quality of PRP’s plays. “Phoenix Repertory Players really puts out quality productions. Anyone who attends our productions will not see some kids on stage blandly spouting out some lines. We incorporate complex blocking and staging with just plain-old great acting,” Noelle said. “These kids are amazing; I make them put in 100 percent, or they get recast and they know that from the start ... and they do it in spades. I admire them so very much.”

Noelle’s passion inspires her casts to bring performances to life. “I don’t like to whitewash stories. I like to take the gritty things about a story and make them pop. Theater is a brilliant way to do that,” she said. “This can happen because there is this live give-and-take that occurs between the actors and the audience. It is an indescribable thing to have an audience on the edge of their seats, wanting to know what is going to happen



next or seeing jaws drop at some crazy thing we did on stage as if they were saying, 'Did that just happen?'"

And for children, the experience can be more rewarding than ever imagined. "The actors can feel the energy from the audience. I have had kids tell me that after being in our plays, they felt liberated and more confident and expressive," Noelle said. "Acting pulls children out of themselves."

While attracting members primarily from the homeschool community, PRP auditions children from all educational backgrounds. Its leaders donate their time and efforts and welcome volunteers. All of Noelle's children — Avery, 15; Ronin, 10; Arwen, 6; Avalon, 3; and Tyrnan, 1 — have been involved in PRP in some fashion.

"I love that my family is tremendously involved in all aspects of Phoenix Repertory Players. All of my children act and are in our plays. Well, Tyrnan mostly just rides in the baby backpack while I direct, but he gets a front row seat to it all," Noelle said. "My husband has written productions for us and is so supportive. I get to do what I love most — theater — and experience it with those I love most — my family. It doesn't get any better than that, for me."

Noelle said her ultimate goal is to teach child actors a key life lesson. "What I hope for is that after each production my students come away knowing what it is to really work hard for something and then accomplish it exceedingly well. And, believe me, I make them work. They will all attest to that." **NDW**

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At Home With Jim and Jimmie Perkins

— By Sydni Thomas

A World of Christmas

Turtle doves cooing from the backyard, colorful bulbs lighting the pathways and the inviting glow from the windows of Jim and Jimmie Perkins' Oak Leaf house could make any stranger feel as though they had come home for Christmas. As Jim picks favorite Christmas tunes to play throughout the home from his extensive LP and CD collection, Jimmie is in the kitchen preparing dressing, a recipe that has been in Jim's family for years. As the cat waits by the Christmas

tree devising a plan of attack on the red ribbon that entwines it. "Christmas is my favorite season," Jimmie said. "I believe it is a time of joy and should be inviting to children. When decorating for the holiday I enjoy using toys, but also creating a sense of elegance in every room."





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Each decoration in their home is considered a treasure; some found in the far-away lands they have visited, others passed down as family heirlooms and quite a few treasures crafted by Jimmie. "It isn't about decorating our home," Jimmie said. "Each piece is a treasure that has come into our lives, and we make room for them as we get them."

"If we ever got anything, odds are we still have it," Jim said.

The couple has cruised the Amazon, navigated the Australian Outback and

touched the fine silks of China. Overall they have traveled to 53 different countries, and their home is filled with treasures from each. When their children, Marsha and Braxton, graduated from high school, Jim and Jimmie decided it was time to start traveling. After 9/11 the couple restricted their traveling to the United States.

"Before 9/11 we would pack all of our clothes in one suitcase," Jim said. "We'd buy new suitcases once we got there and fill them with our finds and ship back the things that were too heavy. We were in China the day that the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests began and had just purchased a large rug for our living room. Through the turmoil we never thought we'd see it again, but six months later it showed up in Houston."

While traveling the world, Jim and Jimmie did not come across a lot of Christmas decorations but, inspired by their travels, Jimmie created a scene of ceramic Santa Clauses from across the world. Jimmie started making ceramics through a class offered at church. After mastering the art, she began teaching the classes. Now she makes them for fun and

has no intention of selling her art. Each room of the home displays a ceramic made by Jimmie. When Christmas is over and the decorations are put back in the attic, her ceramic teapots, Chinaman figurines and wolves decorate the living room once again. "My love for teapots and dishes inspired me to start creating ceramics," she said. "I used to dry flowers and make arrangements, too, until Ashes came along. He would eat my arrangements when I wasn't looking."

Family heirlooms also decorate each room. The scent of cedar fills the guestroom from Jim's grandmother's hope chest that is more than 100 years old. A vintage pressing iron, a 19th-century glass bottle and several antique gadgets line the cabinets of the kitchen. The walls of Braxton's room, now Jim and Jimmie's sitting room, are covered with clues from their family's past: the gun Jim's father used in World War I dating back to around 1908, old photographs and a war bond. "My dad was a postmaster when I was small," Jim said. "He signed the war bond in 1943 when I was only 8 years old."

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display, most of which were purchased on a trip. On the hour, more than 25 different clocks chime, sing or whistle throughout the house. Jim's collection of clocks began when a friend gifted him a clock that now hangs in the master bathroom. His collection includes a barometric clock, an anniversary clock that has to be wound on the same day every year, a German cuckoo clock and a heavy marble clock from Birmingham. After 30 years, the couple hardly notices the noise. "In the middle of the night when the clocks go off, I never wake up," Jim said. "In fact, the only way I'd wake up is if they didn't chime. We have at least three in our bedroom."

The couple's love of the Christmas season is as apparent in their bedroom as the chiming of the clocks to a stranger. Next to their bed hangs a collage of photographs taken of Marsha and Braxton with Santa Claus, each with a smiling face and no tears. "My daughter wouldn't have anything to do with Santa Claus until she was 3," Jimmie said. "She even went with her brother [to see Santa] when she was in junior high. He was never upset because he always had his sister."



Jimmie, who says she had the best job in the world, was a stay-at-home mom to Marsha and Braxton. Jim is a retired electrical engineer from Lockheed Martin. They met in 1958 and have been married for 51 years. It was not until 1977 that they began building their home in Oak Leaf after some friends moved there. "Jim is not a builder," Jimmie said. "This was a one-time project, and he did a great job! We knew this is where we wanted our home and where we wanted to raise our children. They had friends all over and were able to roam around."

The home sits on two acres, has around 12 outdoor benches, a butterfly run and a swing set built for their children and later used by their grandchildren, Chase and Zandy. With every turn, one of Jimmie's ceramics decorates the pathway. Her ceramic and flower-arranging workshop sits next to Jim's greenhouse. He does all



of the property's landscaping, from the flowerbeds to the water garden. "For 30 years, my Saturday afternoon job was to lay a rock down," Jim said. "When we built the house the land was a motorcycle run. It was wild and wooly, with rocks, hills, trees or briar. I bulldozed it and built up the land to resemble tiers."


The day after Thanksgiving, Jim can be found out in his yard doing his holiday landscaping duties of hanging lights and signs. Inside, Jimmie is hard at work decorating trees, laying out her ceramic Christmas village and baking pecan pies. "I like celebrating the seasons as they happen," Jimmie said. "I don't do my Christmas shopping early. Decorating doesn't happen until after Thanksgiving and it is all put away by New Year's. I enjoy each season as they come." **NOV**



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
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Wrapped Up in Quilting

— By Angel Morris



Peggy Terrill has found herself in the lost art of quilting.

While some might think quilting is a lost art, Red Oak's Peggy Terrill knows otherwise. Relatively new to the craft, Peggy proves interest in quilting is still around today.

"About five years ago, my husband gave me a sewing machine for Christmas, and while I was taking classes to learn how to use it, I signed up for the Block of the Month Club," Peggy recalled. "I think the techniques are so much more up-to-date, the designs are so modern and the tools and equipment are so helpful from the days when my mother and grandmother used to quilt. Of course, some quilters still do it the old-fashioned way, which is good to keep that technique alive, too."

Active in the Creative Quilters Guild (CQG) of Ellis County and slated as the group's next president, Peggy was destined to love quilting long before she acknowledged the craft.

"My mother, who has quilted all her life, is 94 years old and still loves quilting. She asked my sister and me several years ago if we were going to carry on the tradition of quilting in our family and we both said, 'No.' We had no interest in it at the time,"

Peggy said. "After getting the sewing machine, I approached my sister and told her I would piece a quilt if she would quilt it; I love sewing on the machine, and she loved doing handwork. She said, 'OK,' and that's how it began."

Wrapped up in quilting from that moment on, Peggy found kindred spirits in the quilter's guild. "Because I had a lot to learn the first year I joined the CQG of Ellis County, I volunteered to help with the annual quilt show. The next year I was asked to be quilt show co-chairman, then the next year I was chairman," Peggy said. "This year I'm chairman of the hospitality committee for the guild and, in July, I was asked to be president of the guild for two years. It's such an honor to be asked, and I'm still in a daze thinking I said, 'Yes.' I'm so looking forward to the new position, and I hope I'll do a good job."

It was her outstanding work on this year's quilt show that made her a shoe-in for CQG president, members said. The show's chairman sent 1,500 e-mails to quilters around the world asking for eight-inch blocks including the quilter's name and locale and depicting the theme,

"Stitches Around the World."

"We received 252 blocks and made three quilts, and I was one of the lucky people who received 81 of the blocks to make a quilt. For a year, we three owners of the quilts are displaying them at different venues to showcase our craft and the worldwide interest from quilters," Peggy explained. "I made a block with my name, Red Oak, Texas, and the year and it's included in one of the quilts. The quilt I have in my possession has blocks from many different states, as well as Canada, Switzerland and Africa."

While Peggy marveled at the blocks from around the globe, she said there is no other place than Red Oak she would want to call home. "We moved to Red Oak 24 years ago to have a more country atmosphere and to be closer to family that lived in DeSoto at the time. I was born and raised on a farm in Oklahoma and appreciated the similar lifestyle Red Oak offered," Peggy said.

She fondly recalls a time in the '80s, when all of her family from Oklahoma visited and attended Red Oak's Founder's Day. "We went to the parade, threw candy

and yelled like little kids, and then spent the whole day at the park. It was fantastic!”

Such memories depict the importance of family to Peggy. “My most valuable asset is my family who always supports me in whatever I do — my husband, Norman; our two sons, Mike and Rick; a stepdaughter, Tanya; and a stepson, Randy,” Peggy noted, also mentioning two grandsons, Chris and Jason. “My mother, two brothers and sister still live in Oklahoma, but we are a very close-knit family and have many get-togethers throughout the year.”



Perhaps this type camaraderie is another reason Peggy is attracted to quilting. “I love taking the classes and learning new techniques through the tips from other quilters,” she said.

Some of her own favorite pieces are a quilt she dubbed *Chocolate Meringue*, made for her husband, and a Christmas table runner she worked on for 12 hours. While she also loves to cook and “play in the garden,” Peggy is beginning to gear up for the guild’s July 2011 quilt display, “Two for the Show,” and encourages those with an interest in quilting to get involved.

“Not all items are large quilts. Nowadays quilters are making jackets and wearable art, bags, table runners and placemats. There’s a world of small items you can start with until you feel comfortable to try a larger project,” she said. “Quilters are always willing to help other quilters, so pick a pattern, visit the local quilt shops, join a guild and before you know it, you’ll be a quilter, too. Just be brave and start!” **NOW**

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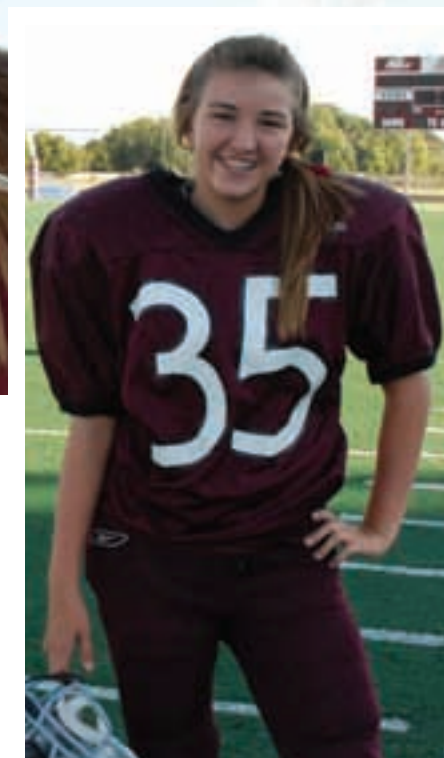
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PLAY LIKE A GIRL!

— By Sydni Thomas



The Red Oak Junior High eighth grade football team had a secret weapon this year. When 14-year-old Carly English took the field, surprised murmurs of, “Is that a girl?” spread like wildfire on the opposing team.

Carly is an all-around athlete who especially loves soccer. She started playing at age 4 and now plays club soccer. On average, Carly dedicates at least 15 hours a week to her sports, equivalent to most teenagers’ part-time job. “It’s all about the athleticism,” Jason English, Carly’s dad, said. “Any sport that requires it, Carly will be participating in it.”

Carly tried out for football this year when her friends and coaches on the football team mentioned her skills would make her a great kick-off and field goal kicker. “My friends gave me the idea to do it because they know I play soccer,” Carly said. “After thinking about it, I decided being a kicker would be fun, and the coaches were welcoming. I’m not the first girl to ever have played for a Red Oak team, but I was the only one playing this year.”

She started the first game of the season on the C team. By the second game, she had moved up to the B team.

She joined the A team in the third game and remained there. “Carly kept moving up teams after each game as she improved,” Jason said. “She was on the C team first to see how she would handle a game. Now she is kicking between 30- and 40-yard field goals.”

Twice a week after football practice, Carly rushed to soccer practice for her Solar Red team, a Division 1 Lake Highlands select team. Carly joined Solar Red when she was 6 years old and has played for it eight years. She will begin playing elite soccer soon, where she will compete at the highest level for a youth league.

On Sundays, Carly participates in the Olympic Development Program (ODP). Top players from all over the country try to score coveted spots on ODP teams. As a member of the team, Carly has traveled the United States playing soccer and participating in specialized camps with coaches from the best universities and teams. “There are about 40 of us on the team,” Carly said. “Even though we practice every week, we only play games once a month. We travel a lot for these camps. They are held on the weekends and we play soccer all three days.”

“Only around 1,000 kids are invited to each of these camps,” Jason said. “The training is phenomenal. The best coaches are there and each player practically gets one-on-one training from them. It’s like going to college and getting a personal professor.”

During summer months, Carly also participates in the Texas A&M soccer camp. This past season when her own age division proved to not be challenging enough, the camp moved her up a division. While the girls may have been older and larger, Carly, at the age of 12, held her own and was awarded MVP for the 16 and under age division. “I love the Aggies and hope that one day I get to play for them,” Carly said.

There is not a sport Carly is afraid to try.

Sports**NOW**

She played volleyball in the seventh grade, but when it conflicted with the opportunity to play football this year, she let it go. Now that football season is over, she plans on trying out for the basketball team. In the spring, after basketball, she will run track. Last year she competed in the 400-meter, 200-meter and 100-meter, as well as relay events. "Carly is a sprinter and a long distance runner," Jason said. "It's weird to be both, but she can somehow do it. Her sister was the same way."

Carly comes from a family of athletes. Being the only girl on an all-boys sports team is not new to her family either. When her mom, Mary English, attended Red Oak High School, she was a member of the boys' baseball team. There was a softball team at the time, but Mary was an advanced athlete and needed



the challenge. Jason has owned Big J's Extreme Fitness for almost 16 years. He was also a professional body builder for 10 years. Carly's sister, Courtney, now 18, is still athletic and plays soccer for Hill College. "We are very competitive people," Jason said. "Athleticism runs in the family."

Carly may or may not follow in her mom's footsteps and take up baseball and softball in high school. For now her eyes are still on football and soccer. Next year, she will be in high school and plans to play football if the team will let her kick. She also hopes that with hard work she will be able to join the varsity soccer team her freshman year. "This opportunity would not have been possible if it weren't for the coaches and my teammates," Carly said. "They, along with my family and friends, have been supportive from the beginning."

"The coaches have been great," Jason added. "She's learned a lot from them, and she has a promising future." **NOW**

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From left:

David and Doug Hunt manage the family-owned business, bringing state-of-the-art storage opportunities to local businesses and individuals.

The Space Place

Access Self Storage gives customers room to grow. — By Angel Morris

Access Self Storage owner, Doug Hunt, chose his current location with the goal of expanding south of I-20 and addressing a shortage of storage facilities that offer state-of-the-art amenities and exceptional customer service. “After looking at a number of locations in Waxahachie and Red Oak, we settled on the Ovilla Road plot for its sense of community, access to a major thoroughfare and the city of Red Oak’s support and encouragement,” Doug said, noting that his brother, David, also runs the family business.

The first Access Self Storage opened 37 years ago in Garland and still operates today. The company offers high-quality, affordable storage to personal and commercial customers. Each of six Metroplex locations includes seven different storage sizes and climate-controlled capabilities for sensitive materials. Each also offers on-site truck rental.

Access facilities feature state-of-the-art security systems,

including electronic-controlled entry, 24-hour surveillance and residential managers. Business customers enjoy a permanent mailing address and package delivery, as well as fax service and available workspaces.

“Our goal has always been to provide unparalleled service and convenience by offering affordable storage, truck rental and moving supplies in one location,” Doug said, noting the company’s motto: “Your one-stop moving and storage solution.”

While principles of self-storage have remained relatively unchanged, services offered have grown. Modern properties are designed with wide drives to allow access for larger vehicles and use wrought iron fencing and controlled-access systems to ensure security. Up-to-date surveillance options allow managers to watch facilities with a proficiency unseen until recently. Additionally, climate-controlled options have revolutionized the way customers think about storage. “What

Business **NOW**

can I store?" is no longer a concern.

"We set ourselves apart by focusing on customer service and exhibiting a commitment to the communities we serve, in addition to offering a high-quality product. Our managers have been known to stay open late to accommodate customers' needs and are involved in local chambers," Doug said. "Our marketing department spends the majority of time, not in selling the company, but in supporting local charities and organizations."

Access Self Storage facilities routinely host community events and work with their neighbors to raise money for charities. In the past few years, Access facilities have partnered with the Lancaster Outreach Center, the family of Police Officer Craig Shaw, the Chapel Choir of First Baptist Church-Dallas, the Homeless Veterans Services of Dallas, the Greater Dallas Homebuilders Association, Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children and other organizations in community support and relief efforts.

Access Self Storage has been recognized by the Consumers' Choice Awards, the Lancaster Outreach Center and the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce for its charitable endeavors.

Doug also participates in the Texas Self Storage Association (TSSA), which hosts an annual convention for the mini-storage industry. Along with educating those in the storage business, TSSA also raises money for the Shriners Hospitals, specifically for burn centers. Doug is a pivotal player in raising money for burn centers by gathering donations. He served on the TSSA Board of Directors from 1993-2007, filling the offices of treasurer, vice president and president for the 1999-2000 term. He has served as co-chairman and chairman of the TSSA Fundraising committee since 2005. TSSA has raised more than \$250,000 for the Shriners Burn Hospital.

"I absolutely love every aspect of the business. I am in and out of the locations regularly, filling in when necessary and talking your ear off," Doug said. "I love the people connection, the opportunity to be a part of several different communities and the challenge of keeping all the balls in the air." **NOW**

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Laura Kelly is dancing with the stars every day. Star students, that is. As Red Oak High School's drill team director and also a classroom teacher, Laura shows that dance translates into many educational forms.

"In actual dance class, it is very creative, and I really get to see students become more comfortable with movement as well as come to appreciate all the dance shows on TV these days," the freshman-level dance and English teacher said. "With English, I love to teach literature, have discussions and feedback and see students' reactions to what they have read. It's more of a written and verbal dance."

Laura, herself, began dance lessons at age 4. "I grew up taking studio dance.

LIFE'S A *Dance*

— By *Angel Morris*

I took a small hiatus to try soccer and basketball, but those never panned out, and I went back to dance in high school where I ended up captain of the Hawkettes," Laura reflected. Laura attended local schools

students would relax. Just like you sense your movements in dance, students sense your tension. Now I feel I have a casual teaching style that really focuses more on asking *Why?*" Laura said.

Laura said today's teacher not only faces state-mandated requirements, but also the challenge of keeping up with the latest technology to reach students. These devices create opportunities for teachers, but also unique challenges. "Many students today do not understand that it isn't OK to write l8r (for later) in an academic setting because they are so accustomed to doing it in their texts or other forms of communication. I think teaching students

that they have to learn how to balance their social world with their academic world is important," Laura said.

While she admits to struggling with balancing life's demands — including her roles as a Project Success and Friends for Teachers representative — Laura said she is most proud of earning her master's degree while working full-time and being a wife and mom. She credits her colleagues with setting a good example.

Some of these colleagues were even Laura's teachers, once upon a time. "I love teaching with teachers that have taught me and my husband. I also love that I know so many parents because of living here for so many years."

That same history, however, gives Laura a unique perspective in the district. "I am actually in a bittersweet moment right now; I love the new high school and all the technology that has come with it, but being a Red Oak graduate, it is sad to see how different things are now from when I went to school," Laura noted. "People



from the age of 7, after her family moved to the city in 1982, so culminating her ROISD school career as drill team captain seemed only fitting.

Moving on to college, Laura initially sought a business degree. "But I taught dance to pay my studio fees at the time and that prompted me to switch to majoring in education. I also performed in musicals through Cedar Valley College Theater during that time," Laura said.

Laura earned her Bachelor of Arts in English at The University of Texas at Arlington and her Master of Education from Lamar University. Her teaching career began with seventh and eighth grade classes from 1998-2001, followed by high school French from 2001-03. She was drill team assistant from 1999-2002 and became director in 2003. Putting her dance training to use made teaching easier for Laura, no matter the subject.

"I started teaching at age 23 and really had to relax in the classroom so the

Education**NOW**

always ask if it's weird teaching where I went to school and working with, in some cases, parents I went to school with. I have always found it to benefit me if the parents know me because they know my expectations more than others."

While Laura sets the bar high for her students, she also realizes the importance of "just being there" for the kids. "I feel I have always had a gift of listening without judging. Some students share so much of their difficulties and challenges with their teachers and coaches that you really have to just listen and let them just get all their frustration out on the table before they can focus on what you need them to do," she said.

And being supportive of students comes back to her. "I love the support that my drill team community of parents and students has afforded me over the years through challenges life brings. I have



some of the closest relationships with students, even after they have graduated," Laura said.


Laura said she hopes to take her career to the next level in the future, perhaps moving into school administration. In the meantime, Laura is content with life with her high school sweetheart and husband, Sean Kelly, and their two daughters Makyla, 7, and Addyson, 20 months. The family enjoys baseball and camping and, perhaps most importantly, doing things that teach them new lessons.

For Laura, life is a dance you learn forever. "Education is the best field to be in, and if I won the lottery, I think I would go back to school and take anything and everything I could to keep learning," Laura said. "What is better than being a lifelong learner?" **NOW**

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In The Kitchen With Kim Prikryl

— By *Angel Morris*

Kim Prikryl spent childhood summer vacations with her grandma learning to cook and bake. “Her kitchen always had wonderful smells. She eventually lost her sight, but still taught me by taste, touch and smell,” Kim recalled. “At age 9 I made my first meal — a Southern breakfast of bacon, eggs, hash browns, biscuits and gravy.”

Now that her own children are grown,

cooking is a hobby. “It’s relaxing. And I love when my kids come home for the holidays and say, ‘Mom, something sure smells good!’ My husband is a good cook, too, and we enjoy trying recipes with each other,” Kim said.

When her parents moved nearby, Kim became their personal “Meals on Wheels.” “They get a lot of leftovers!” she laughed. **NOW**



CHICKEN SALAD

4 chicken breasts (bone-in yields better flavor)

1/2 cup chopped onion

1/2 cup chopped celery

2 tsp. salt

1 16-oz. can crushed pineapple, drained

1 cup mayonnaise

1 cup sour cream

1 cup red grapes, halved

1 cup green grapes, halved

1 cup slivered almonds

1. Boil chicken with onion and celery.
2. Chop cooked chicken and mix with all ingredients; chill mixture. Great on croissants or wheat bread!

COWBOY CANDY SPREAD

1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened

1/2 20-oz. jar candied jalapeños with juice

1. Chop jalapeños and mix with cream cheese.
2. Serve with crackers or tostada chips.

BLUEBERRY MUFFINS

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1 pkg. Duncan Hines® Moist Deluxe White Cake Mix

2 Tbsp. all-purpose flour

1 tsp. baking powder

3 large eggs

2/3 cup milk

1/3 cup Crisco® oil

1 cup fresh blueberries, rinsed (or frozen blueberries, thawed and well-drained)

1. Preheat oven to 375 F.
2. Line 24 muffin cups with paper liners.
3. Combine dry cake mix, flour and baking powder in a large bowl.
4. In a smaller bowl, beat eggs, milk and oil together with fork and add to dry ingredients until moist.
5. Fold in blueberries; spoon batter into muffin cups, filling 1/3 full.
6. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown.

BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

1 lb. sausage

6 eggs

2 cups milk

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. dried mustard

1 cup sharp shredded cheese

3 slices bread, cubed

1. Brown and crumble sausage. Drain the grease.
2. Beat eggs; add milk, salt and mustard.
3. Gently stir in cheese, sausage and bread.

4. Butter a 9 x 13-inch pan and pour in mixture.

5. Refrigerate overnight or at least 6 hours.

6. Place in cold oven, then bake at 350 F for about 45 minutes.

SAUSAGE BALLS

1 lb. sausage, cooked and crumbled

1/2 lb. sharp cheddar cheese, grated

2 cups Bisquick®

1. Preheat oven to 425 F.
2. Mix all ingredients together.
3. Form into 1-inch balls and place on cookie sheet.
4. Bake about 12-15 minutes.
5. Cool slightly and serve.

PINEAPPLE ICEBOX PIE

1 can Eagle Brand® milk


1/4 cup lemon juice

1 20-oz. can crushed pineapple, drained

1/2 pint whipping cream

1 graham cracker pie crust

1. Mix milk and lemon juice. Let stand until it thickens.
2. Pour pineapple into milk and lemon juice.
3. Fold in whipped cream and pour into pie crust.
4. Chill and serve.



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How Do You Prepare for the Future When the Present Looks Unclear?

— By *Nickie Weyrauch*



While no one knows the answers to the big questions, many are seeking answers for the small questions that can help them stay afloat during this tumultuous time. One good resource during this difficult time is having a personal financial representative. The current economic crisis is likely to have a greater impact on someone closer to retirement age than

someone in their mid 20s. By being proactive and meeting with your personal financial representative, you can ask the tough questions and get the information you seek to help you reach your financial goals. If you don't have a personal financial representative, this is an excellent time to get one.

In addition to working closely with your personal financial representative, there are several things you may begin doing today to brace for the current economic storm:

Emergency Fund: Building an emergency fund should be a top priority. With today's economic uncertainty, having an emergency fund is more important than ever. Some financial professionals recommend keeping emergency funds that will get you through one year of unemployment.

Protect Your Assets: Meet with your insurance agent and make sure your homeowners or renters policy is current and adequate to meet your needs. Make sure you have a clear understanding of what your policy does and doesn't cover. Also, now is a good time to put together a home inventory, which helps speed up the claims process.

Life Insurance: If your employer provides group life coverage but not individual life insurance coverage, you might want to look into purchasing an individual life insurance policy outside your place of employment. Nearly half of Americans do not have an individual life insurance policy — which means some may not be covered by a life insurance policy should they lose their job.

Maintain Your Car: Keep current on maintenance and repairs. It may become harder to get credit on a new car, so you may be driving this one for a while.

Pay Off Debt: Think about your credit card interest rate. If your credit card interest rates go up, that means you'll be forking over more cash to pay off your debt.

While we may not know how, when and where this economic crisis will end, careful planning and preparation can go a long way to make weathering the storm a bit smoother. **NOW**

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This material is intended for general consumer educational purposes and is not intended to provide legal, tax or investment advice.

Nickie Weyrauch is an Allstate personal financial representative based in Red Oak.

Happening **NOW**

December 2-4

Red Oak Festival of Trees: First United Methodist Church of Red Oak, 600 W. Red Oak Rd. Dozens of creatively decorated Christmas trees, wreaths, stockings, gift baskets, centerpieces and other festive holiday decorations on display. Pictures with Santa, entertainment, children's activities and a holiday bake shop are featured and all holiday items will be sold by silent auction at event's end. Free admission. Hosted by Red Oak ISD Education Foundation, Red Oak Lions Club and FUMC. For more information, call (972) 617-4320.

December 4

Cow Patty Drop Project Graduation Fundraiser: 1:00 p.m., Red Oak Junior High Football Field, 200 Live Oak St. Ticket holders (\$10 each) earn a chance at winning up to \$1,000 in this event that will help fund the Class of 2011 post-graduation event.

December 4-5

Model Railroad Open House: 1:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m., at the home of Bob and Freda Brand, 2509 Lake Ridge Road, Glenn Heights. Young and old alike are invited to view the couple's two-layer, mountainous train layout over 40 years in the making. Call (972) 230-8101 for details.

December 11

Annual Christmas Event and Parade: 5:00 p.m. Parade begins at Red Oak Municipal Center, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. Holiday festivities continue at the municipal center immediately following the parade. Hosted by Red Oak Parks & Recreation Department. Call (972) 576-3414 for more details.

Christmas Toy Drive: 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Citizens National Bank, Uptown Waxahachie. This event, sponsored by the Honda Goldwing Riders GWRRA Chapter W-2, benefits the children served by CASA of Ellis County (Court Appointed Special Advocates). Cash donations and unwrapped toys for children and teens will be greatly appreciated! Make checks payable to CASA of Ellis County and mark for: W-2 Toy Drive. All donations are tax deductible.

December 20-January 3

Red Oak ISD Winter Break. Teacher in-service day January 2; students return to classes January 3.

Note: The following calendar listings are subject to change for holidays. Contact each entity directly for December schedules.

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First and Third Mondays

Glenn Heights City Council meetings: 7:30 p.m., city council chambers, 1938 Hampton Rd., Glenn Heights. Call (972) 223-1690 or write citysecretary@glennheights.com.

Second Mondays

Red Oak City Council meeting: 7:00 p.m., Red Oak Municipal Center, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. Contact City Secretary Cynthia Olguin at (972) 617-3638 or colguin@redoaktx.org.

Second and Fourth Mondays

Ovilla City Council meeting: 7:00 p.m., City Hall, 105 S. Cockrell Hill Rd. Contact City Secretary Pamela Higgins at (972) 617-2489 or phiggins@cityofovilla.org.

Third Mondays

Red Oak ISD School Board meeting: 7:00 p.m., Red Oak Elementary cafeteria, 200 Valley Ridge Dr. Call (972) 617-2941 or visit <http://www.redoakisd.org/>.

First Tuesdays

PrimeTimers Senior Group meeting: 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Oaks Fellowship, 777 S. I-35 East in Red Oak. Open to all seniors. Fun, food and fellowship. RSVP (214) 376-8208.

Second Tuesdays

Oak Leaf City Council meeting: 7:00 p.m., Oak Leaf Municipal Center, 301 Locust Dr. Call (972) 617-2660 or visit <http://www.oakleaftexas.org/city-council> for details.

First and Third Tuesdays

Red Oak Lions Club meeting: 7:00 p.m., 207 W. Red Oak Rd. For more information, call (214) 864-8014.

Every Wednesday

Family Story Time: 10:00-11:00 a.m., Red Oak Public Library, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. All ages welcome. Call (469) 218-1230 or visit www.redoakpubliclibrary.org.

Wednesdays and Thursdays

Red Oak Senior Citizens Club meetings: 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., 207 West Red Oak Rd. Games, exercise and activities. Call (972) 576-2777 for details.

First and Third Thursdays

Glenn Heights Lions Club meetings: 7:00 p.m., Bienvenidos Restaurant, 920 N. I-35 E., Lancaster.

Red Oak seniors' luncheon for all citizens 55 and over: Pre-register Tuesday prior to the event you wish to attend. No cost to senior residents; \$5 for senior non-residents. Call Misty at (972) 576-3414.

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For a physician referral or for more information about weight loss services at Baylor Waxahachie, call **1.800.4BAYLOR** or visit us online at BaylorHealth.com.

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