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DECEMBER 2011

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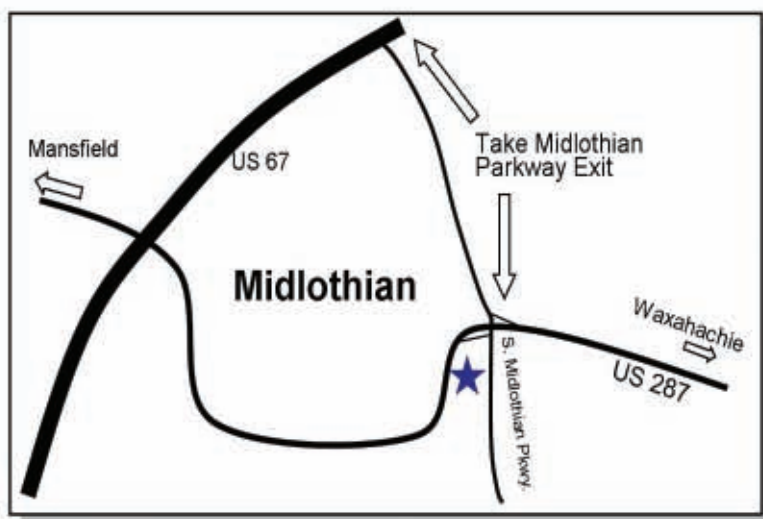
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On The Cover



A decorated Santa represents Frankie Furr's creative style.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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Editor's Note


Dear Friends,

The best gifts I ever received for Christmas were the ones given to someone else. Christmas is traditionally the time for giving and, for most Americans, we give with our hearts. Special treats show up unexpectedly in firehouses and police stations across the country. The children's wards in hospitals become festive with Christmas parties and new toys. Nursing homes welcome carolers. Neighbors share goodies from their kitchens with each other. Perfect strangers greet each other with offerings of good cheer. Long ago on the first Christmas morning, the tradition of giving was set when three wise men brought precious gifts to the babe who lay sleeping in a manger. We still honor the baby Jesus' birthday two thousand years later, and the entire world celebrates together. As the wise men generously gave so long ago, we carry that spirit of giving and love forward today.

Merry Christmas Midlothian!

Betty

Betty Tryon
MidlothianNOW Editor
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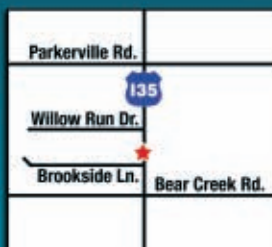
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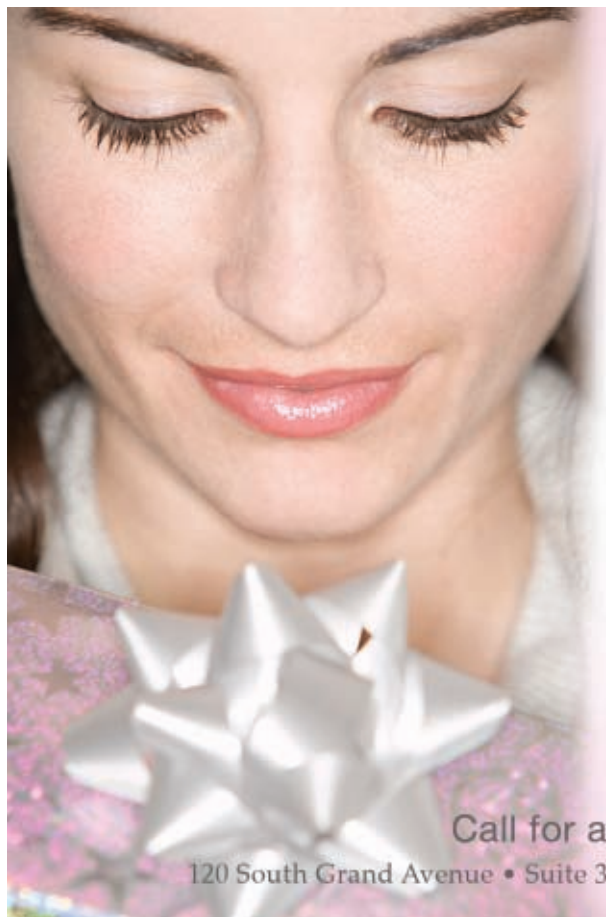
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BETHLEHEM

I N M I D L O T H I A N

— By Betty Tryon

Cries of, “Get your bread here!” and, “Slaughtered pigs sold here!” rang out over the bazaar. The marketplace was abuzz with activity and people. Vendors hawking their goods approached any likely passerby. A young boy wandered by leading a pet goat on a rope. Welcome to Bethlehem by way of Midlothian!





“We try to bring the story to life with all the sets that are built with live actors in costume, with animals, sheep, cows, goats, chickens and camels.”

Jason Exley, pastor of Life Church in Midlothian, and his congregation have constructed a slice of history in their Real Life Christmas production. “We want to make them feel like they are in the middle of all of this commotion in Bethlehem,” Jason said.

This will be the fourth year for Real Life Christmas. It all began in the parking lot of Longbranch Elementary School. The church met there before moving into their current building and received permission to use the parking lot over the weekend.

“We started on Friday when the kids got out of school, because we couldn’t be on the premises until the kids left,” Jason explained. “We started building sets until we lost daylight and ran the first Real Life Christmas that Saturday and Sunday, the first weekend in December three years ago.”

The church decided to name their production Real Life Christmas because, “We bring it to life,” Jason explained. “Our church is Life Church, and we try to use the word life as much as we can. One of the things we are passionate about is engaging our community outside the walls of the church. We try to touch people where they live, so we wanted to bring the Christmas story to life.”

In order to do that, the church does a great deal of work. “We try to bring the story to life with all the sets that are built with live actors in costume, with animals, sheep, cows, goats, chickens and camels,” Jason shared. “We do whatever we can to make you feel as if you are right there in Bethlehem and then carry the story all the way through the



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life of Christ and to tell the story of why Jesus came.”

Real Life Christmas gives the families in the church an opportunity to volunteer together, and that includes Jason’s family of three boys — Ethan, a third-grader, Landon in kindergarten and Preston, 20



months old. “In a lot of our scenes, we have mom, dad, kids all in costume and all working together,” Jason said. “It’s a neat thing to see the whole family unit come out to serve. A lot of times, a mom will be involved in the church, the dad may work as an usher and the kids just kind of are there. We really want moms and dads to pass on a desire to serve to their kids. Real Life Christmas is one of those opportunities our families have to volunteer together.”

The first couple of years, the church produced a CD describing the different scenes that patrons could play in their



cars as they drove through the circuit. Last year, the church wanted to be more interactive and have their guests be up close and personal with the action. So in that vein, they sought to make visitors to Real Life Christmas as comfortable as possible, while keeping the setting unique and authentic. However, before visitors make it to Real Life Christmas, they are treated to hot chocolate and cookies, pictures with Santa Claus (if they want it) and beautiful Christmas carols played by the church band. Blankets are provided and, bundled up cozily, guests are led outside for a hayride through the Christmas scenes.

The scenes are set up throughout the property of Life Church. "On the hayrides, we have a storyteller or narrator, dressed as one of the wise men, who narrates the story as you go through. People love that!" Jason shared. "We dropped crushed asphalt and made this huge path on the field next to the church. The circuit the hayride takes is physically one big U, and that's where all the scenes are built. We are able to use the hillside to put the crosses and have the empty tomb at the bottom of the hill."

Six different scenes tell the story of the life of Christ. The scenes begin with the angel telling Mary she is going to have a baby. The second scene demonstrates how there was no room at the inn. The third is the stable scene where Jesus is born in the manger and

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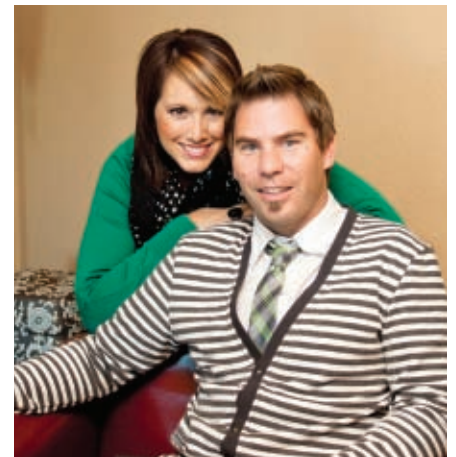
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the wise men and shepherds keep the family company. The last few scenes move away from the Christmas story and finish out the life of Christ, beginning with Jesus' trial in Pilate's court. Jason described the remaining sets. "There is a scene of Jesus on the cross, and you drive by the three crosses that are seen off in the distance. We haven't had a brave enough actor to be Jesus hanging on the cross in December, yet. Maybe this year



we'll surprise everybody," he smiled. "The narrator tells the story — He came and was born to die. We talk about what happened on that Good Friday when Jesus died, about how the earth shook and the veil was ripped."

The final scene is the empty tomb. Here, the organizers employ touches that are more theatrical. Jason continued, "We have a smoke machine pushing smoke out of the tomb and a big, bright light. Mary and Martha come running out of the tomb yelling to all of our guests on the trailer, 'He's not there! He's not there!' And they keep running off into the distance. Standing in the bright light is an angel, as the narrator on the hayride talks about the resurrection of Jesus. That is where Real Life Christmas ends."

Keeping close to tradition to have the production early in December, this year it will be the second Friday, Saturday and Sunday of this month. The production of Real Life Christmas serves another purpose this year. "We decided to roll our sleeves up, work together and give a message of hope to our community," Jason stated. "In this economic recession, I know people are looking for hope, and I want them to know they can find hope in all the churches here in Midlothian." **NOW**



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RIDING for a RE



Every year at Christmas, kids around the world wait with anticipation for the moment when they get to rip into a fresh loot of toys, clothes and candy. Unfortunately, numerous children do not get to share in the joyous event. For any number of reasons, many youngsters in areas foreign and domestic do not get presents. Eddie "Fast" Herbert and a group of local bikers are once again doing their part to stop that trend in Ellis County. For



MASON

— By Zachary R. Urquhart

the 27th year, the Gryphons, a motorcycle club exclusive to Ellis County Harley owners, will host the Ellis County Toy Run on the second Sunday in December.

Doug “Dirty” Clark chartered the Gryphons with six other members in 1988. “We wanted to promote a more positive image of bikers,” Dirty Doug said of the founding. There are three current members from those original seven. Dirty Doug, Joe “Loco” Rawlins and Bob “boB” Gerlich, who commonly use their street names rather than their given ones, have been putting on the toy run since before the Gryphons existed.

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"We took on the Ellis County Toy Run in 1985," Dirty Doug stated. "We were just trying to help out an event that was helping our kids."

A few years later, Dirty Doug and the other guys turned an informal group into the Gryphons. Fast Eddie is a more recent member to the club, having joined around 10 years ago. He currently serves as president, a position that changes each year in the Gryphons. Fast Eddie is looking forward to leading this year's toy run but also to passing along the responsibility after this year. "This thing is so big," he said. "We have to get help from other clubs, and there is so much that goes into it all."

People often think the Ellis County Toy Run is a simple event that is put together in a few weeks each year. "The truth is, it takes almost all year to plan each toy run. We have to do everything from getting volunteers to finding toys and donations. We usually line up the Sokol Hall in Ennis, Texas, pretty easily, but then we still have to buy hot dogs and cold drinks."

Fast Eddie and Dirty Doug reiterated the need they have for all the people who help plan and organize the yearly occasion. The reality is, this great charity event is not actually "owned" by the Gryphons, but, rather, hosted or presented by the group. "Back when we were getting started, it was the Ellis County Abate Toy Run. They were



looking for help getting it together about the same time the Gryphons were founded, so we took it on. But this is the Ellis County Toy Run presented by the Gryphons.”

The event itself is simple enough in flow and structure. Motorcycles meet in downtown Midlothian starting around 8:00 a.m. They leave at 11:00 a.m., and one of the largest local motorcycle processions is underway, with as many as 3,000 bikes. Local police and sheriff’s department officers handle crowd control, including shutting down stretches of Highway 287. “Traffic has to stop, more or less, and sometimes people get upset. All we can do is smile and say, ‘Merry Christmas!’”

The parade of bikes makes its way to the Sokol Hall in Ennis, where the program part of the event unfolds. Dirty Doug explained, “One thing that is different with this ride is the program. We wanted to make sure the kids had something special besides just getting gifts. We have food, entertainment and, at the end, they get their Christmas presents.” At the hall, people come with donations of toys and money, and the Gryphons present gifts to kids. “As each kid comes through the line, we have some Secret Santas ask what they want, so we can figure who should get what,” Fast Eddie said. “Each kid ends up getting a few gifts, and the money we get is given to the senior citizens. We figured a long time ago that the two groups that need help the most are kids and seniors.”

In recent years, Dirty Doug has seen a big change in the toy run. “I can narrow it down to one word — acceptance.” In the past, the Gryphons’ hardest task was finding someone to take the gifts they collected. Having been part of it from the start, Dirty Doug added, “We

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were just seven people who wanted to do something positive. The problem was that many people and groups didn't want to accept toys because of who we were."

The toy run is so clearly focused on helping kids that people slowly realized there was no legitimate reason to offer anything other than support and encouragement to the club. "This is a neutral run," Fast Eddie explained, "which means no business is conducted. There are no vendors allowed at the event, and anyone with a bike is welcome to join in."

Because of the event's ever-growing acceptance, the Ellis County Toy Run has grown to enormous proportions. The growth of the Toy Run means, among other things, that the Gryphons take in more toys than they sometimes know what to do with. "Our house becomes the distribution center. We have one room for boys' toys and one for girls' toys. Then, we take all the stuffed animals and fill a room from wall to wall and floor to ceiling. It's quite a sight," Dirty Doug's wife, Jimmie, admitted.

The Gryphons get a list of kids who could use some Christmas cheer from the Ellis County Human Resources Department. Based on that list, 75 kids get to attend the program at Sokol Hall, where they are the "guests of honor." Even after distributing several presents to each of the kids in attendance, the Gryphons have hundreds or even thousands of toys left to distribute. "We give toys to the local Head Start Programs. Then, we each take gifts and pass them out, through our churches, to our firehouses, wherever," Fast Eddie explained. "Sometimes, we might know of a friend or a neighbor who's going through a tough time, and we'll give their kids a little something."

At a young age, most people learn the adage, "never judge a book by its cover." Fast Eddie and the Gryphons' toy run are living, annual proof that just because people might be perceived in a certain way, you cannot discount their good heart and good deeds. Really though, Fast Eddie, Dirty Doug and the rest of the Gryphons are not worried about how people look at them. They're focused on meeting needs in Ellis County. Fast Eddie summed it up best when he said, "At every level, the amazing thing about it is that people step up, period." **NOW**



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A Style All Their Own

— By Zachary R. Urquhart

Tucked away in one of Midlothian's newer developments, Doyle and Frankie Furr live in a surprisingly spacious three bedroom house that backs up to a meandering creek. Rather than cram bedrooms into their 3,500-square-foot home, Doyle and Frankie ensured plenty of living and gathering space throughout the layout. Upon walking into their home, Doyle and Frankie instantly welcome even the most casual of guests. Their floor plan and decor complement the inviting nature they share. With a unique style that tends to blend artistic genres together in seamless harmony, the Furrs live in a house adorned with a style all their own.

At Home With Doyle and Frankie Furr



Doyle and Frankie built their hidden haven in 2005, about the time Doyle retired from 30 years of working for the city of Dallas. "Alex, our daughter, was getting near high school," Doyle said. "MISD really brought us here, and we found a solid, quiet place to call home."

Even without their Christmas decor, Doyle and Frankie's house is a wonderful place to visit for the garnishment. "We love art," Frankie said.

Doyle offered further explanation, "Frankie will spend her lunch money on art, so we had to make sure we had art niches to reflect that." What is most unique about Doyle and Frankie's art collection is the mixture within a clearly defined style. The couple has Japanese art, clothing and Raku, an easily recognizable style of Japanese pottery. They also feature many African paintings and sculptures. With their assortment of




foreign influence, they still manage to keep somewhat of a contemporary flare throughout.

"We like to mix old and new things together, for the eclectic look we love," Frankie added.

During the Christmas season, Frankie gets to do one of the things she loves best—decorate. The main entrance of the house is bookended by a pair of African sculptures, and Frankie adds decoration to them, as well as most of the sculptures and several wall-hangings. In the center of the house is a formal

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living area that reflects their casual style. The furniture has been rearranged to accommodate a white-flocked Christmas tree and touches of the season.

What they may lack in formality, Doyle and Frankie easily make up for in family values. The door to their daughter, Alex's, room is decorated with a vibrant-colored wreath to welcome her home for the holidays from Arkansas State University, where she is in her second year and performing very well academically and playing soccer.

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Approved Home Health Care provides a variety of nursing and therapy services to patients and their families in Ellis, Johnson, Tarrant and Dallas counties and surrounding areas. They are locally owned and operated by hometown folks with over 50 years combined home health experience.




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The decoration continues throughout the rest of the house. In keeping with their eclectic and mixed year-round accoutrement, they include many styles and motifs in their Christmas decorations. "We have these flattened mushrooms we like to mix with purple and gold ribbon, peacock ornaments and garland for trimming the windows and fireplace," Frankie explained. "The centerpieces on the dining tables and island are contemporary and full of vibrant color and sparkle. My favorite is the arrangement with the contemporary-style reindeer. When making the arrangements and wreaths, I always like to add a little panache for interest or to make a bold statement."

The heart of the home is the large kitchen that opens into the family room and breakfast area. Frankie adds garland and decorations to the island, hangs ornaments from light fixtures and on the pantry door. They keep various art pieces displayed as well, from paintings and metal sculptures on the walls to the reproduction of *Café Terrace at Night* by Van Gogh in tile as a backsplash behind the range.

Frankie has a crafting area upstairs, but feels separated from the family up there. "So I do a lot of crafting downstairs," she said. Frankie will officially retire from the U.S. Department of Education this month, and she is looking forward to spending more time perfecting her jewelry-making techniques and her crafting skills. "Jewelry making and crafting is an avocation that will become a vocation upon retirement," she laughed.

Though Frankie has a passion for jewelry design this time of year, her focus is her homemade Christmas decorations and crafts. During the Christmas season, Doyle and Frankie display many of the things they have accumulated in the past several years. Many of the decorations are Frankie's own creations.

The couple's favorite holiday tribute is their expansive ornament collection. Doyle, Frankie and Alex exchange ornaments every year, so their personalized and sentimental decorations are abounding in number. "We have lots of special ornaments; usually they represent whatever we were into that year," Frankie said. "We have things from movies, sports, everything. There are no

rules. We just all get ornaments for each other.”

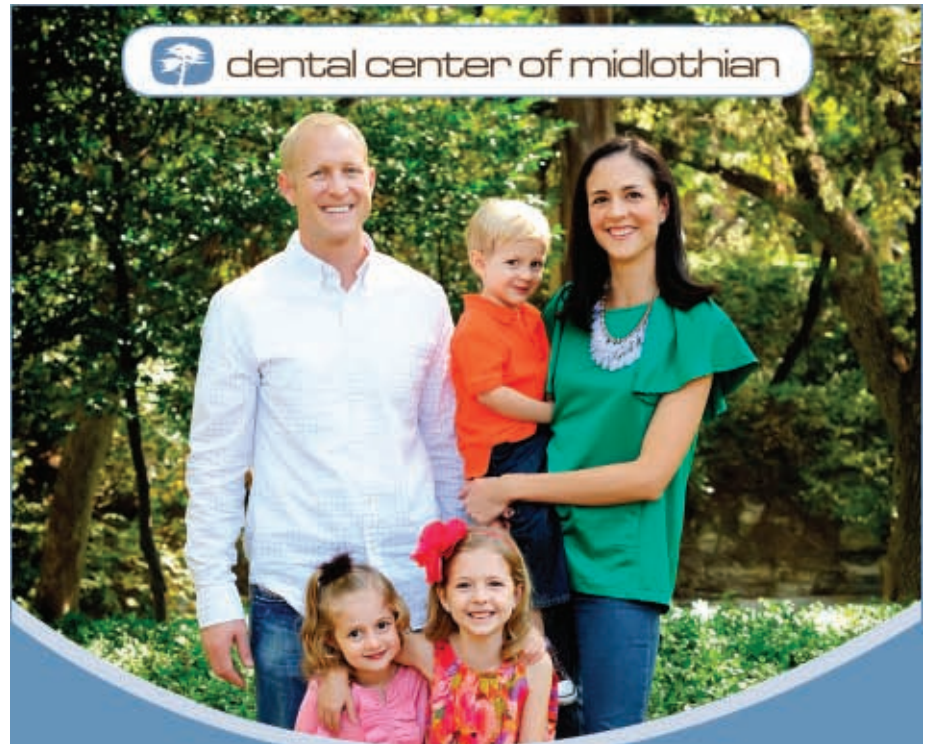
“About 90 percent of our ornaments have a story to them,” Doyle stated. “One of our favorites is a memory of Christmas 1992.”

Frankie explained that Doyle is always prompt in selecting his ornaments, as was the case Christmas of 1992 when they were all sick. It was Christmas Eve and Frankie had to go to the pharmacy. She remembered she had not gotten an ornament for their exchange. “The selection was limited, but I selected one that reminded me of a building in which a pharmacy might be housed and wrote on the bottom, ‘Everybody’s sick, 1992.’” This one is a sentimental favorite because it’s a constant reminder of the value of family and “not putting off for tomorrow what you can do today.”

Frankie is not alone in reminiscing, though. Doyle has his own tree full of soccer ornaments, representing the passion for the sport that Alex and he have shared throughout her life. “He wouldn’t tell you, but he has his own sentimental man-cave,” Frankie smiled. “He has pictures and portraits, and that’s where he keeps his soccer Christmas tree.” He is also an amateur photographer, and many of his best photographs reflect the action of this competitive sport.

Doyle and Frankie’s holiday style can be described in one word — impossible. With their widely varying artistic interests, their house is decorated in a style like no other. They place elegant, contemporary art pieces next to traditional garland and lights. The individuality they possess is perhaps best summed up in their central exterior Christmas enhancement. “When approaching at Christmas,” Doyle said, “you are welcomed by stick figure snowmen wearing sweaters and wreaths.”

The image of contemporary snowmen wearing Griswold-like Christmas sweaters says it all. Doyle and Frankie have no “one style” in the decoration, whether at Christmas or anytime of the year. It’s that absence of one stylistic motif, though, that gives them such a unique flare for decorating. The couple has an eclectic decorating style that is all their own, incorporating a comfortable mix of historic and contemporary style with a mixed cultural background. **NOW**



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The Sporting Life

— By Zachary R. Urquhart

Three-and-a-half years ago, Steve Keasler was waiting in a terminal to board a plane headed for Japan. This was neither a family vacation nor an important meeting with corporate big shots. Steve had progressed in his 20-year coaching career to the position of assistant golf coach at The University of Texas. Yes, the one in Austin. Boarding a transcontinental flight was nothing new for him, as



Steve recalled. "Being a part of that team was a blessing," he said. "I got to do things and go places that I would not have been able to otherwise."

His phone rang before he could board the plane. The caller was Randy Bullock, then athletic director (AD) for Midlothian ISD. He wondered if Steve would be interested in taking over his position. As part of the UT golf team, Steve was a piece of a championship program and could potentially be in line to take over a college team of his own one day. Prestige means responsibility and, more importantly, traveling. Steve and his wife,



Wendye, have two children, and travel to Japan meant a great experience, but one spent without family. "I had asked around about some high school jobs," Steve said, "but nothing official or anything."

After starting his career in Callisburg, a 2A school between Gainesville and the Oklahoma border, Steve had stops in Grand Prairie, Southlake Carroll and UT. Steve traveled often, especially at the college level. "I was starting to miss games and recitals," he admitted, "and I wanted to change that." He thought about getting to a position where he could be more of a traditional family man. With that in mind, he earned his master's in administration, giving himself the option of seeking an AD position. The timing of the call from Randy meant that he had a 10-day Japan trip to decide what he would do next. Ultimately, family won out, and Steve took over as Midlothian AD, starting in August 2008.

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the positions of AD and head football coach. Steve was taking over a program where that was not the case. Though he had coached at high levels within Texas high schools, he had no experience leading an entire program. "I worked for the greatest sports organization in the world," he explained. "I got to see DeLoss Dodds [University of Texas AD], a sports administration genius." Steve learned many lessons from DeLoss and still calls his former boss when he needs insight.

Though Steve does not coach any sport, he is in charge of every member of every sport and also works closely with the band, drill team, city organizations and all of the various booster clubs throughout Midlothian. "I get to have relationships with everyone in the district," he stated. "It's more than just the coaches and athletes. I work with everyone at different times."

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programs, one-on-one contact with everybody would be a stretch, but Steve tries hard to be at practices and games throughout the year, so the kids recognize him as someone who is there for them. He also helps put together a monthly publication that spotlights some of the academic and athletic accomplishments of the students.

Helping kids is the main reason Steve got into coaching in the first place. "I was one of those kids where athletics enhanced my experience with education," he added. Steve has learned that the kids he sees are more than athletes or students; they are people with stories. Steve realized this early on in his career. "It was my first week of practice ever. I was working a drill with the lineman, and all of a sudden, pickup trucks rolled onto the field," he remembered. "My guys hopped into the beds and drove off without a word or warning. I was dumbfounded, but one of the other coaches came up beside me and explained, 'This is a small town [Callisburg]. They're volunteer firemen.' He told me to wait and the kids would come back." As expected, the team returned after fighting a fire that needed their attention. That day, one of his first ever as a coach, Steve learned that you have to know your people to lead them. That lesson applied to his junior volunteer firemen 20 years ago, and it still applies to his staff today.

Although Steve has countless duties, large and small, his most clearly defined role is in the hiring of new coaching personnel. "A key responsibility in my job is to hire good people," he stated.

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If he has done that, he does not have to worry about the rest of it, at least not as much. For assistants, the head coach of the program has a great deal of input, though Steve will meet with any prospective candidate, a policy he adheres to strictly. For any head coach, however, Steve will be the primary interviewer, as well as having the largest say in the final hiring decision.

Steve can particularly recall the stress of hiring a new head football coach two years ago. Though Midlothian had had limited football success in recent years, the opening for a new coach brought Steve plenty of input from the town. He would have people seek him out, and a few even came to his home to offer advice on who should take over the program and why. Steve realized an important thing at that point. "The people here care deeply about this town," he said. Steve hopes to turn that passion into accomplishment and prestige for Midlothian ISD.

Steve indicated that his goals are simple. "I want to have people in the area, then the state, then the nation talk about Midlothian athletics with respect for our sportsmanship, appreciation for our community and fear from our competition."

For Steve, achieving this goal starts with building trust and he has already seen some of that hope and trust being built. At a recent parent-coach meeting, one of the parents got up during the Q&A portion and expressed sincere gratefulness for the presence of the current staff, especially Coach Lee Wiginton. His comments received a standing ovation from a roomful of Midlothian parents. "To know that I had a part in bringing that kind of feeling to these folks," Steve confessed, "means a lot." Steve is ready for the challenges involved, and he is committed to reaching his goals. But most importantly, just like all his former students, athletes and coaches, he is a person with a story. **NOW**



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A Work *in* Progress

— By Cindy Malone

Diane Pittard's house is picture perfect, as it should be, since Diane, a photographer and painter, designed it. Designing her house came naturally, as did her love of and talent for photography.



Although Diane experimented with all kinds of art, including painting, early in her life, she began taking pictures as a hobby several years ago. As family and friends began to see her work, they started to comment on her photographs' artistic nature. Diane had a gift for making sure the shadows were in the



right places and the colors blended in a way that told the story she wanted to tell with each photograph.

Most of Diane's favorite photos are not the kind of photos often featured in magazines. Showing off her prize-winning photos on the staircase of her house, she mentioned, "You see how that one is a little blurry, almost



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Mark and Kathy Spiegel of Midlothian announce the engagement and approaching marriage of their son, Charles Edward Robert Spiegel to Courtney Renee Bradford, the daughter of Marvin and Angela Bradford of Longview.

The bride-elect is the granddaughter of Sarah Martin Shelton of Mount Pleasant, James and Peggy Shelton of Sulphur Springs, Bill Bradford of Mount Pleasant and the late Jan Bradford. She is a 2007 graduate of Mount Pleasant High School. Charles and Courtney met while attending Blinn College.

The prospective groom is the grandson of Mary Laverne Snyder of Houston, the late Charles Albert Snyder and the late Edward Robert and Diana Spiegel. He is a 2002 graduate of Midlothian High School and employed as branch manager of Regions Bank in Whitehouse.

wedding scheduled for March 17, 2012 at Stone Creek Ranch

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creepy? I didn't even realize that had happened, until later. My camera moved during the shot." From then on, she was hooked on taking unconventional type shots. She would take pictures of moving objects, from far distances, or move the camera herself to give the allusion of mistiness or mystery. But her photographs are far from dark and



dreary. "I love color," she explained, "bright, bold, primary colors. I just prefer them a little ... loose."

When photographing people, Diane prefers artsy shots, like those taken from the back, where the story is told with "arms, hands, hair and the tilt of the head." The story of her three daughters, their love for each other and their special bond hangs in a painting Diane made from a photograph above her mantel. They are sitting, arms around each other, leaning toward each other and facing away from the camera.

Four or five years ago, Diane started oil painting. Others started to notice how much like paintings her photographs were. "I met Jana Jennings, my best friend. She was a painter," Diane recalled. "We both thought artistically and immediately became close." Jana and Diane have enjoyed several classes and workshops together. In one of these classes, Diane painted a human face. She was surprised that she had done so well. But not as surprised as her husband, whom Diane said took one look and asked, "Are you sure you painted that?"

Diane began to learn how to use her



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special eye to blend colors and patterns on canvas. Her “looseness” of edges and lines is a prominent feature of her paintings, most of which come from photos she has taken. “I don’t have to control the paint,” Diane explained, “I like it to surprise me!”

In the past few years, Diane has been an active member of the Ellis County Art Association (ECAA), which is a group of local artists who get together for everything from socializing, to figuring out ways to spread the word about art and classes, to critiquing each other’s work, to just painting together. Recently, this small group sat together at a farmer’s market just to paint. “I think kids need to see art,” Diane said. “Even if one kid thinks, *Hey, I want to try that!* we will have been successful.”

Diane, always eager to learn something new, has recently decided to try her hand at watercolor. “Since I love loose painting, I love watercolor. It’s the hardest to control and has its own set of rules,” Diane said, while showing off some of her newest watercolors. “But even harder than painting in watercolors, is moving back and forth between the two mediums of oil and watercolor.” So, Diane has begun to take watercolor classes, as well.



As if her many pictures aren’t motivation enough, Diane has an entire family worth of motivation all living happily in Midlothian. She has three daughters, all married and successful, within a few miles of her and her husband. They have given Diane not only the inspiration for several of her award-winning paintings, but five amazing and beautiful grandchildren, each of whom have been memorialized in at least one painting. One of her granddaughters, Peyton Rigsby, is a blooming artist herself. Diane tries to help her, teach her

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and motivate her, but mostly she is just there to encourage her.

Diane is quick to give credit to her grandmother, who was always the one telling her she was talented. She remembers being a young girl and her grandmother “prodding me along, telling me my art was good, making me think I could do it — do anything, really.” So like a loving grandmother, Diane tries to give the same thing to her granddaughter. “I just want to give to Peyton the same confidence, support and love that my grandmother gave to me,” Diane said. “I’ve never been afraid to try anything, and I know that came from my grandmother. I hope to give that feeling to all of my grandkids.”

Diane’s studio, in which she works and tutors, is upstairs right next door to her husband’s music-producing studio. He works on his CDs with his earphones on, while Diane cranks up the music and gets lost in her work. There is a window that lets in all the natural light she needs. The room is covered in shelves that hold paintings, some of which are not finished. “When I learn something new,” she explained, “I look back at a painting and think, *I should add this or that*, and I move the painting to the unfinished section. Some of them I will never get to; they are just steps in my progression.”

Completely unassuming, Diane shows off just as much work that isn’t hers as work that is. Diane prides herself in having an eye for artwork at garage and estate sales. Some may be worth money, but more importantly, each piece she collects has something that appealed to her. Her house is decorated with an eclectic assortment of artists and paintings.

“I like to sketch with pencil or charcoal. I like painting, photography and watercolor. I really like everything artistic,” Diane beamed. “I try to do at least one artistic thing a day.” That may include taking professional-looking photographs of her paintings to use as greeting cards for anyone who mentions they liked the original.

Never satisfied, Diane is ready to embark on her next adventure. “I would like to try writing children’s books. My grandchildren have given me so much inspiration with their funny stories and quirks,” she said with a smile, “plus I have a million ideas for illustrations.” **NOW**

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HELP FOR A LIFETIME

The Realtors at J Houston Realty Group build lifelong relationships as they serve their customers.

— By Betty Tryon

When Michelle Ozymy and Melanie Brewer went into business together for real estate, they decided the best position for their business and their clients was with J Houston Homes. “The vision of what we wanted to do in our business and the vision of what their company already does is the same,” explained Melanie. “Their whole mantra of building lifelong relationships with their customers is something we already do. We take the extra step and don’t just represent them on the purchase or sale of their home but all of their real estate needs.” In recognizing the similarity in both businesses’ philosophy, Melanie and Michelle joined J Houston Homes and named their business J Houston Realty Group.

Part of filling all real estate needs goes beyond buying and

selling of homes. Michelle and Melanie’s partnership with J Houston Homes, allows them to network with all the companies affiliated with the home builder. “It allows us to provide our clients with all kinds of services,” Melanie said. “For example, we were at a closing the other day and there was a water leak in one of the houses. We were able to get a plumber with J Houston over there right away. It has been fantastic for our clients.” Assistance is available, even years after the initial real estate deal. If the homeowners want new carpet or help in staging their home, instead of rummaging through the phone directory for a name, the realty group is able to provide them with competent professionals from their business referral directory.

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Along with the business referrals they can give their clients are the person-to-person referrals that their satisfied customers can pass along to others about the realty group itself. "We do our business primarily by referral," Michelle stated. "So, we already have a relationship with the person we are in contact with, and that has made all the difference."

Their business strategy must be working because for the last three years, the group has had the No. 1 agents in Ellis County. The group averages over 100 homes a year. "We have been very blessed. We know that," Melanie said. "Interest rates are so low that a seller is going to take a little bit of a hit on the sale of their home. But, they are going to purchase another home at a low rate. They are purchasing with such great pricing that the combination of those two things are such a win for buyers."

"I don't think we will ever see that again," Michelle interjected. "We believe that our business has been blessed by God and by building lifelong relationships. Building relationships with our clients is the key that sets us apart. You will want someone that you feel comfortable with to help you with what

*"We really want
to be someone's
Realtor for life."*

is a stressful transaction for most buyers and sellers because, typically, it is the most expensive thing you ever buy."

"We really want to be someone's Realtor for life," Melanie stated. "We are very customer service oriented. Building lifelong relationships and giving to the Kingdom are the reasons we wake up every day and do what we do. We see this as a way to be involved in our clients' lives. We are very vocal that we are a Christ-based business. We do things based on our belief in Christ, and that is our measuring stick of how we run our business." **NOW**

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Blue for Christmas

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

Elvis Presley's rendition of "Blue Christmas" touches many people in December. It may seem to be an anomaly to think of being blue or depressed when everything external overflows with color, lights and good cheer, but some people look at the red and green lights and still feel blue. They suffer from a very real disorder called seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

SAD is a depression disorder that is sometimes called the winter blues. It makes its appearance usually in the fall and lasts through the winter. A rare form of SAD can occur in the summer. This discussion is for the winter version. People who have this are miserable and exhibit many symptoms that interfere with the quality of their lives. SAD may be affected by geographical location according to the availability of light in that region. For example, it is estimated that 1 percent of Floridians are affected whereas 10 percent of residents in Alaska are affected.

Some of the symptoms are a feeling of depression, hopelessness, a tendency to eat too much that results in weight gain, lethargy, a decreased interest in doing activities previously enjoyed and increasing isolation from others. It is important that a physician diagnose this disorder because the symptoms may point to a different psychiatric problem. However, if SAD is the disorder, appropriate treatment is available. The cause is unknown but the

correlation between the availability of sunlight and timing of the season cannot be ignored.

Since lack of sunlight may trigger this, it makes sense to utilize light therapy to increase exposure to light. Light therapy, sometimes called phototherapy or bright light therapy is the exposure of affected persons to a special lamp under controlled situations to mimic sunlight. During treatment, you merely sit under a lamp for a time period determined by your health care professional once or twice a day. Eyes are open with the body turned toward the light. Common thought supports the belief that light triggers chemicals in the brain that affect a person's mood and makes them feel better by lessening the symptoms of SAD. In some cases, antidepressants are prescribed.

If you think you are susceptible to seasonal depression and are having thoughts of suicide, please seek help immediately. Even if thoughts of suicide are not an issue with you, do not sit alone in a darkened room feeling blue. There is light and help a phone call away. **NOW**

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



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Drs. David and Natasha Marcial

The sciatic nerves are the largest (and longest) nerves of the body, reaching about the size of your thumb in diameter, and running down the back of each leg. When these nerves are irritated or affected by the inflammation of nearby soft tissues, doctors refer to this as sciatica.

One of the most common causes of sciatic leg pain is the vertebral subluxation complex. It can be accompanied by the bulging or herniation of the soft pulpy discs which separate each spinal bone. This can irritate or put pressure on the sciatic nerve roots as they leave the spinal cord. The result can be an intense pain shooting down either or both legs.

Sciatica, like other health problems that can be traced to the spine, often responds dramatically to the restoration of normal spinal function through conservative chiropractic care.

Pain is caused when the sciatic nerve roots are irritated, scraped, twisted, stretched or pinched as they exit the spine. Causes of the impairment may be chemical, physical or the emotional stress of everyday living. A full-blown sciatic flare-up can involve the entire sciatic nerve path, resulting in symptoms of lower back pain, burning, cramping or numbness that radiates into the thighs, legs, ankles, feet and toes. Pain may also be limited to various points along the nerve, such as the buttocks, knee area and calf.

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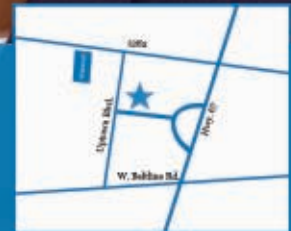
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Calendar

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December 1-4

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December 2

Lone Star Christmas Celebration: 7:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m., Midlothian Conference Center. Music and barbecue dinner honoring the fire and police departments. Cost: \$25 individual; \$50 couple.

December 2, 3

The Navarro College Players present *Reindeer Tails*: 7:30 p.m., downstairs common area, Building 2, Midlothian Campus of Navarro College. Free admission.

December 3

Dynamic Yoga & Fitness Studio by Yoga 4 Love Holiday Market Extravaganza: 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. 558 Bluebird Ln., Red Oak, TX. Call (469) 437-1334.

December 4

City Wide Praise and Worship Night: 6:00-7:00 p.m., MHS Arena. This event is sponsored by Manna House and the Ministerial Alliance, featuring Corby LaCroix and the Declaration Band.

December 5

Downtown Midlothian Christmas Holiday Light Up Parade: Line-up: 5:00 p.m. Parade: 6:00 p.m. Rain Out Date: Monday, December 12. Use the theme, "Santa's Workshop," to decorate. There must be lights on your float. Mr. and Mrs. Claus will be at the end of the parade. We request no other Santas, please. Winners will be announced online and in the next week's paper. www.southernstarchristmas.org.

December 9

Family Christmas Movie Night Sponsored by the Midlothian Rotary HS Interact Club, MISD Libraries and MHS Japan Club: 6:00 p.m., MHS Auditorium.

December 10, 11

First United Methodist of Midlothian Chancel Choir & Friends present a Christmas musical, *I'll Be Home for Christmas*: 7:00 p.m., Family Life Center. Cost: \$5 per person; \$20 max per family. World War II veterans and their spouses: free.

December 10-12

Real Life Christmas, Life Church Midlothian. Live animals, enjoy scenes from Bethlehem: 620 N. Highway 67. (469) 537-8651.

December 11

Carols and Candles: 6:00 p.m., The Lighthouse Church, 1400 N. 9th Street. Join us for our annual candlelight service and Christmas party.

December 15-17

The Waxahachie Community Theatre presents, *You Better Watch Out*. **Thursday and Friday:** 7:30 p.m. **Saturday matinee:** 2:30 p.m., McCafferty Hall, Southwestern Assemblies of God University (SAGU), Waxahachie. Advance tickets: \$8 per person (ages 5 plus). Tickets available for purchase from any cast member or online (with an additional \$1 service fee) at www.waxahachiecommunitytheatre.com or by calling the box office at (972) 646-1050. Tickets at the door: \$2 more. The venue is not wheelchair accessible. Contact Kasi Jones at (972) 646-1050 or via e-mail at wct.texas@gmail.com, for more information.

December 25

Merry Christmas!

December 31

Happy New Year!

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your event details to btryon.nowmag@sbcglobal.net.



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In The Kitchen With Cindy Edinger

— By Betty Tryon

For Cindy Edinger, cooking is personal. “Cooking to me relates directly with family and friends. The smells and taste of dishes and recipes can transport you back to your childhood and/or a family gathering, church potluck dinner, family reunions — and, immediately, you think of a loved one or friend.”

Cindy's parents taught her to cook, and she practiced her newfound knowledge on her two little brothers. She assures that they are still alive and well today! Cindy loves collecting church cookbooks, and her favorite cooking spice is Spice Islands Beau Monde. “That is one little bottle I will not do without. It is great on chicken and soups. I challenge you to try it. It's great!” **NOW**

Cindy's Breakfast Quiche

4 eggs
1 1/2 cups milk
1/2 Tbsp. salt
Dash of crushed red pepper
2 cups shredded cheese
2 Tbsp. flour
8 slices of bacon, cooked crisp
1 large unbaked pie shell

1. Preheat oven to 350 F
2. Combine eggs, milk, salt and red pepper.
3. In a separate bowl, toss cheese with flour and bacon.
4. Combine cheese mixture with egg mixture; pour into pie shell.
5. Bake at 350 F for 45 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.
6. Serve with fresh fruit. You may use ham or sausage as well.

Avocado Chicken Salad

Chicken Salad:

4 large avocados
4 cups cooked chicken, diced
2 cups white rice, cooked
3/4 cup onion, chopped
2 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 cup Hellmann's Mayonnaise
1 tsp. lemon pepper
1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped

Avocado Dressing:

1 large avocado, peeled and mashed
with 2 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 cup Hellmann's Mayonnaise
1/2 cup sour cream
1/2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
1/3 cup onion, chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced
1 tsp. salt

1. Prepare salad by slicing 4 avocados in half. Scoop out and dice the pulp. Save shell for later use. Sprinkle pulp with lemon juice to keep from browning.
2. Mix pulp with remaining ingredients and chill.
3. Make dressing by placing all ingredients in a food processor and blending until smooth; chill.
4. Serve chicken salad in reserved avocado shells with dressing on the side.

Poppy Seed Chicken

5 chicken breasts, boiled
Spice Islands Beau Monde seasoning
1 10 3/4-oz. can cream of chicken soup
1 8-oz. tub sour cream
1 Tbsp. poppy seeds
4 cups Ritz Crackers, crushed
1 stick butter, melted

1. Boil chicken breast with Beau Monde seasoning.
2. Cool and cube chicken into bite-size pieces.
3. Coat a casserole dish with nonstick spray.
4. In a bowl, mix chicken, soup, sour cream and poppy seeds together.
5. Crush crackers and mix with melted butter. Pour mixture into casserole dish and press evenly. Reserve some of mixture to sprinkle on top.
6. Pour chicken mixture into casserole dish. Sprinkle with reserved Ritz mixture. Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 30 minutes.


Apple Dumplings

2 large Granny Smith Apples
1 1/2 cups sugar
2 tsp. cinnamon
2 cans crescent rolls
2 sticks butter
2 cups 7UP soda

1. Core and slice apples into 8 slices.
2. Put apples into a baggy with sugar and cinnamon; shake until coated.
3. Roll one apple slice in each crescent roll strip. Pinch ends to seal and place in a 9 x 13-inch pan.
4. Melt butter in a saucepan; add sugar mixture from bag and heat until smooth. Pour over dumplings. Add 7UP. Bake at 350 F for 45 minutes. Serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

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