

Southwest

Cedar Hill | DeSoto | Duncanville

M A G A Z I N E

DECEMBER 2015

NOW

A Season of Change

Jason and Laurie Ruiz are learning to embrace different roles

Here and Back Again

At Home With Dean and Melissa Stewart

2015
Holiday
Shopping
Guide

Beyond Softball Tricks

Empowering the Educator

Making Merry

Finding the Why

In the Kitchen
With Irma Zapata



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Accelerating Expectations 2020

15 Programs of Choice

What do you want to be?

DeSoto ISD currently has 15 programs of choice for students to select from for academic pathways to college and careers. "We took aggressive steps to provide pathways of choice for every student," said Dr. David Harris, Superintendent. "Our district offers every opportunity of area private, charter and magnet programs, plus students remain with their neighborhood friends and have the support of the DeSoto community."

All programs are built within our current campuses, thus an application process is in place to fill the available spots each year in each program. The very competitive Collegiate Magnet Program (CMP), along with the Early College HS program, will hold several informational meetings and post information online. Students in both programs can earn up to an Associate's Degree while still in high school. The elementary and middle schools will host several meetings as well and one larger event for all programs to be explored before opening their application process.

DHS CMP/ECHS:

Informational Meetings (2 were held in Nov.)

December 3, 6:30-7:30 p.m. @ East Middle School, 601 E. Belt Line Rd.

Application Window (online only): November 20 to January 29

Elementary and Middle School Magnets:

Night of the Open Door - all programs will be on site

Th., January 21, 6:30-8 p.m. @ DeSoto High School, 600 Eagle Dr.

Application Window (online only): January 22 to February 5

15 DeSoto ISD Programs of Choice

Grades 9-12

- Collegiate Magnet Program
- Early College High School
- International Baccalaureate Program

Grades 6-8

- iSTEAM3D Magnet Academies (each MS)
- West Male Leadership Magnet Academy
- East Medical Magnet Academy
- McCowan Fine Arts Magnet Academy

Grades PreK-5

- Northside Business & Law Magnet Academy
- Ruby Young Medical & Environmental Sciences Magnet Academy
- Woodridge Fine Arts Magnet Academy
- Cockrell Hill Linguistics Magnet Academy
- The Meadows STEAM Magnet Academy
- Frank D. Moates Digital Arts & Technology Magnet Academy

Calendar

- November 23-27
- Tuesday, December 1, 6:30 p.m.
- Saturday, December 5, 6 p.m.
- December 7-11
- Tuesday, December 8, 7:30 a.m.
- Saturday, December 12, 11 a.m.
- Sunday, December 13, 6 p.m.
- Monday, December 14, 6:30 p.m.
- Friday, December 18
- December 21-January 1
- Monday, January 4

Thanksgiving Holiday
1st Tuesday ISD Town Hall, Northside ES
DeSoto Hometown Parade
Assorted STARR Testing Dates
Coffee & Conversation, Woodridge ES
Female Leadership Forum, McCowan MS
DHS Choral Concert, Hampton Rd. Baptist Ch.
Board Meeting
Early Release all schools
Winter Break, students return Jan. 5
Teacher Preparation Day, no school

NEWS TO KNOW

DISTRICT WINS i3 GRANT

The U.S. Department of Education announced that DeSoto ISD is one of 13 recipients of the Investing in Innovation (i3) 2015 grant competition, earning another \$2.9M for student learning in the district. That brings the total of major grants and energy savings over the past several years to \$22.8M – a total just under 30% of the annual operating budget.

"DeSoto ISD takes an aggressive stance on pursuing grants and other funding sources in an effort to better level the educational playing field for our students," stated Dr. David Harris, DeSoto ISD Superintendent of Schools. "Every grant we receive or dollar we save means more funding for student learning. This funding will allow us to scale up our innovative iSTEAM3D initiative to serve an additional 1,800 DeSoto ISD students over the next three years."

LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

This winter the district will host the first Girls Leadership Conference on Saturday, December 12 and the 2nd annual Male Leadership Summit in the spring. If you are interested in being part of one or both of these events, contact DeSoto ISD at 972-223-6666.

1ST TUESDAY TOWN HALL MEETINGS - 6:30 P.M.

- Tuesday, December 1 - Northside Elementary

CITY PARADE DEC. 5

Join DeSoto ISD for the annual DeSoto Hometown Holiday Parade on Saturday, December 5. The parade travels down Hampton Road by City Hall.

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ON THE COVER



Warm wishes for a wonderful holiday season.

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Managing Editor's Note

Silver bells, silver bells!

Can you hear the cheerful, celebratory sounds? Sleigh bells ring. Jingle bells jangle. Bell choirs leave crowds speechless in concert halls. Church bells draw worshipers to the Christ Child. And Salvation Army bells awaken our consciousness to the needs of those around us. Whatever the reason for their ringing, I love the bells of Christmas! I hope your heart sings to their melody throughout the

holidays and as the calendar page turns over to 2016!

Changes often come with the New Year, as people set resolutions and goals. Next year, *SouthwestNOW Magazine* will also see some changes, as we welcome new community editor, Jo Monroe, to our team. She comes with many years of experience in the editorial field, and we are thankful to have her. Feel free to send her your story ideas at joanne.monroe@nowmagazines.com.

Ring-a-ling, hear them sing!

Becky

Becky Walker
Managing Editor
NOW Magazines

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Christmas

AT HILLCREST

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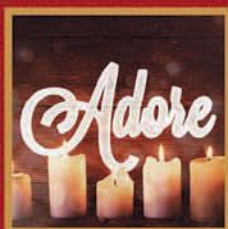


Believe in Christmas

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6 • 3:00 & 6:00 PM

Deeply embedded in the story of Christmas is a word that takes us from simply hearing about the birth of Christ to allowing our lives to be transformed by His love. It is with an expectant heart that we *believe*. With this belief we find hope and peace through the Son that God sent down to earth. Familiar carols and captivating new songs combine to make this a Christmas worship experience you won't want to miss.

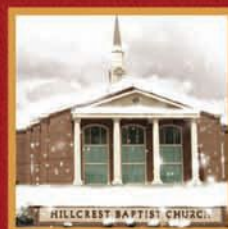
Join us following each performance for Christmas desserts.



Adore

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13 • 5:00 PM

Join us for a night of worship led by our Children's and Student Ministries. Come see our children and students tell the Christmas story in their own special way.



Christmas Worship

SUNDAYS IN DECEMBER

9:00 & 10:30 AM, 10:45 AM (SPANISH)

*December 27: One service only at 10:00 AM

Celebrate with us each week in December with uplifting worship from our worship ministry and inspired messages from Pastor Mike Simmons.



Nathan Woodward // In Concert

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20 • 5:00 PM

Nathan Woodward takes the smooth sound of classical saxophone and breathes new life into some of our favorite Christmas carols. Join us for this special concert as he presents music from his new Christmas album, *Emmanuel*.



Christmas Eve Service

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24 • 5:00 PM

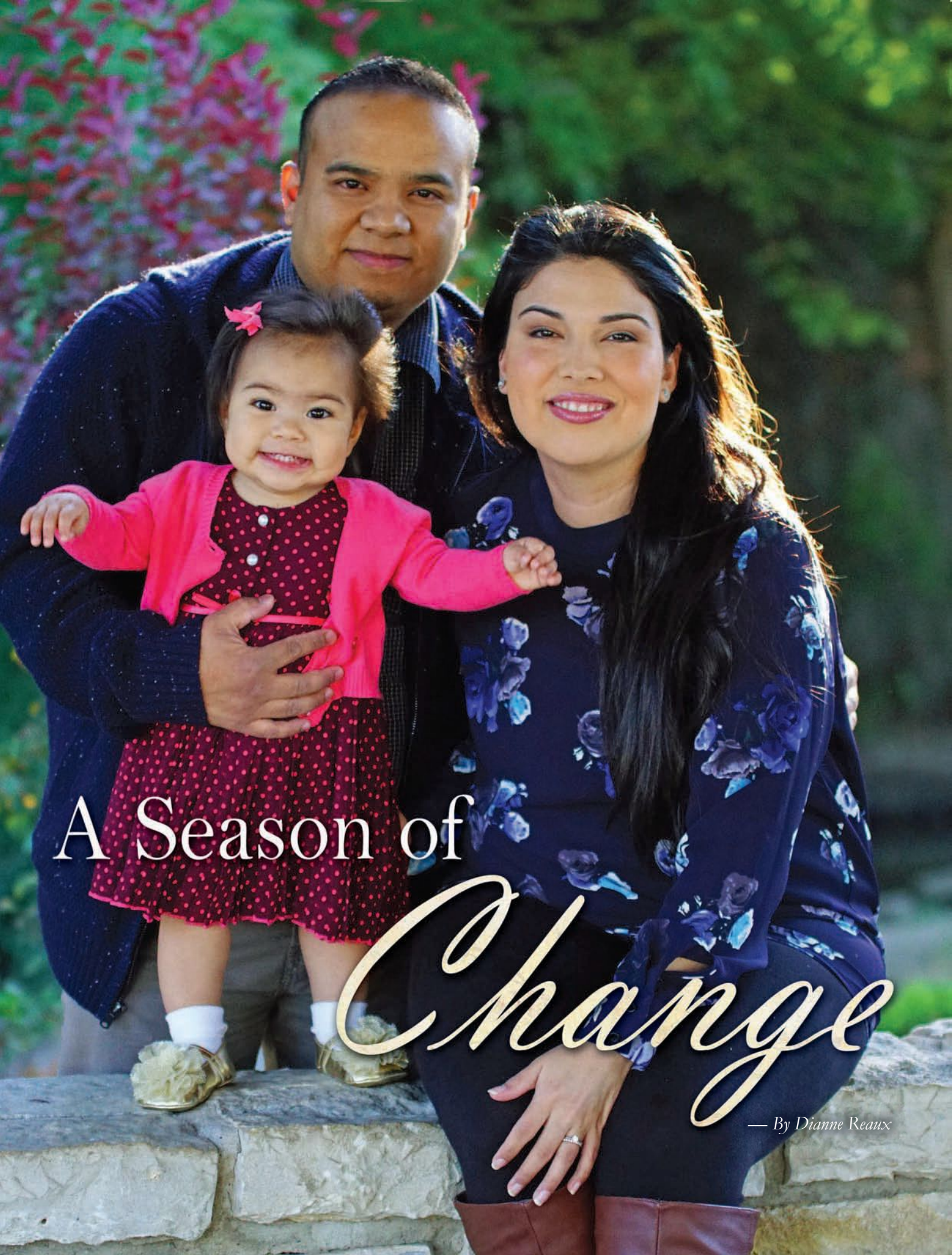
Make a special family memory this year and join us for our annual Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. You'll experience a time of worship and prayer with family at Hillcrest Baptist Church, celebrating the birth of Jesus.

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A Season of

Change

— By Dianne Reaux

When Jason and Laurie Ruiz graduated from high school, they both attended Southwestern Assemblies of God University, a Christian university in Waxahachie. The school offered a strong music program and music ministry, both of which were passions for Jason. "Laurie and I knew each other, but we didn't actually hit it off until several years later, when she hired me to take photos of her family," Jason explained.

"I think he always had a crush on me," Laurie stated, smiling. In fact, Laurie was right. In 2012, Jason asked Laurie out on Valentine's Day, but she declined his offer. Although the Valentine's date didn't work out, Laurie continued thinking about Jason. A few months later, she decided to contact him. Since time had passed, she thought she needed a good reason — and she had an idea.

Laurie called Jason to see if he would be available to take family photos as a surprise for her mother's birthday. "OK, I'll be honest," she said laughing, "it was an excuse to see him!" The photo session was a success, and eventually, the two began to text each other, and then they had their first date.

"We met at a restaurant in Cedar Hill," Laurie stated.

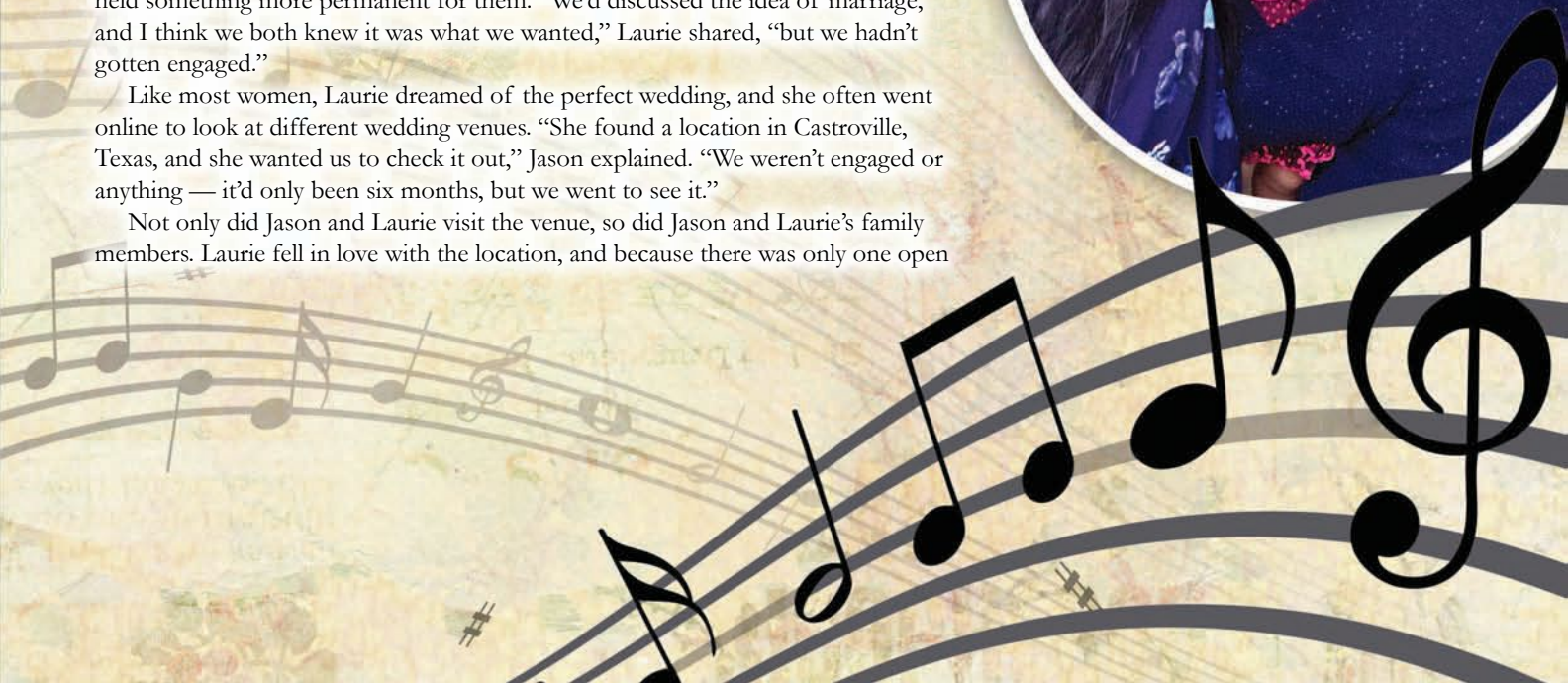
"Afterward, we went out for coffee because she didn't want the date to end," Jason boasted, as they both laughed.

"You never know what it's like until you find the right person," Laurie shared, "but after our third date, I knew I wanted to marry him."

They began talking frequently and started making excuses to see each other. After about six months, Jason and Laurie started to feel as though the future held something more permanent for them. "We'd discussed the idea of marriage, and I think we both knew it was what we wanted," Laurie shared, "but we hadn't gotten engaged."

Like most women, Laurie dreamed of the perfect wedding, and she often went online to look at different wedding venues. "She found a location in Castroville, Texas, and she wanted us to check it out," Jason explained. "We weren't engaged or anything — it'd only been six months, but we went to see it."

Not only did Jason and Laurie visit the venue, so did Jason and Laurie's family members. Laurie fell in love with the location, and because there was only one open



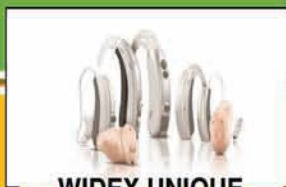


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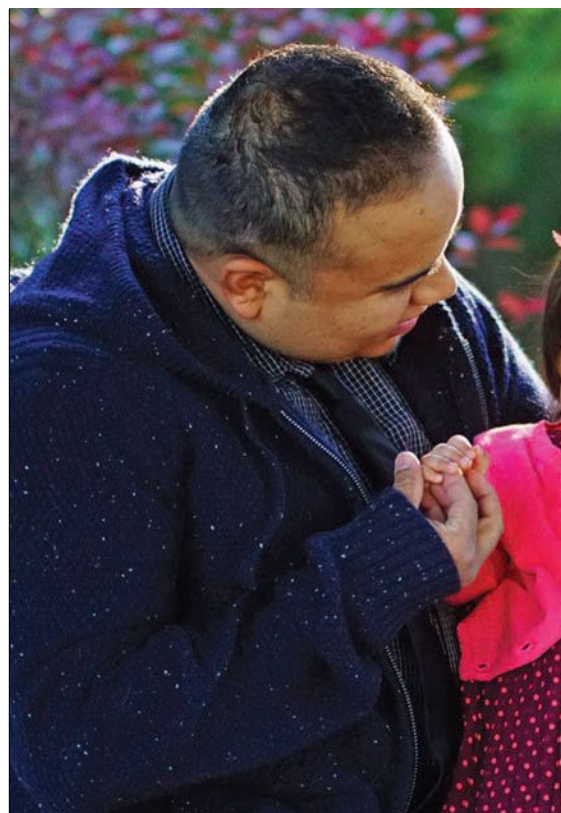
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date available during the summer of 2015 at the venue, they booked it. Laurie remembers thinking, *Oh, my gosh — we're getting married!*

Jason recalled being fine with booking the venue, but not with the fact he hadn't yet proposed. He immediately began planning how he would surprise his "unofficial" fiancée. He elicited support from the administrators of Lucy Mae McDonald Elementary school, in Ferris, where he'd worked as a music teacher for eight years.

Friends and family members were in on Jason's plans. In stealth mode, they all watched Jason's proposal unfold from



their seats in the back of the auditorium. Laurie sat in the front of the auditorium during what she thought was simply a musical production being given by Jason's students. But just before the last curtain call, Jason performed a song for Laurie, and when he finished singing, the stage curtain parted. And with a little creativity and a lot of cooperation from his 200 second-graders, Jason's proposal revealed a stage full of young students holding a huge banner saying, "Will you marry me?"

"I was shocked," Laurie admitted. "I cried. Our relatives cried, and audience members I didn't even know cried!"

After getting married, the couple settled down in DeSoto, and continued attending Trinity Church in Cedar Hill. "At SAGU, I was involved in a music ministry called Spirit in Truth," Jason shared. Their group would minister to different churches in the community, and Jason felt a connection with Trinity Church. "It was the atmosphere," Jason stated simply. "Everyone was really friendly, and it had a really diverse culture — it just felt like the right place."

After joining the church, Jason and a few of his former colleagues started worship nights in Spanish, which lead to a Spanish worship service every three

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months. But a core group of members wanted an ongoing Spanish service. "We had Spanish interpreters, and church members would wear wireless transmitters, so they could understand Pastor Hennesy's sermons. We saw an opportunity to reach an even larger part of the Spanish community," Jason said, explaining the group's idea to begin a Spanish church.

Their efforts started off small but grew rapidly, and now they have two Spanish services on Sundays, at 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. "Because of the overall growth in membership at Trinity, the church added an additional sanctuary, and eventually our Spanish congregation moved in there," Jason explained.

Sharing his passions for music and ministry through involvement with the worship team was amazingly rewarding. "I've always sung and been a worship leader," Jason explained, "and when I'm on stage, and sing, it feels like it's what I was created to do."

In October 2014, Jason and Laurie welcomed their first child, Elliana. "And she's the joy of our lives!" Laurie exclaimed. Laurie was blessed to have four months of maternity leave, and when it was time for her to return to her job as an occupational therapist, the young couple had a decision to make. A

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major factor in their decision was their business, Jason and Laurie Photography, which had gained traction over the years. In June 2015, Jason resigned from his teaching position and took a break from his duties as a worship leader.


"I never thought I would be a stay-at-home dad, but this is the decision Laurie and I made together," he stated. And being at home has given him a new respect for all of the hard work that goes into being a stay-at-home parent. "For me, it's been the greatest thing I've been able to do so far," Jason shared proudly.

"It was a hard decision not to be a stay-at-home mom myself, but we did what was best for our family," Laurie shared. "Having Jason at home with Elliana has been good for us. I believe God takes us through different seasons to stretch and strengthen us as a family — this is a season of change for us, and we are embracing it." **NOW**




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-Marco Rivera

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BEYOND SOFTBALL TRICKS

— By Beverly Shay

The sun was out, and the sisters were messing around in the yard. Marisa, as always, had her bat and ball, practicing hits off the batting tee, oblivious to the fact her 18-year-old sister, Emily, was about to make her famous. Marisa was kicking the bat up with the back of her heel, passing it from hand-to-hand behind her back, kicking the tee to bounce the ball up and then kicking the ball into the air and batting it every time. "It took about 20-25 times recording to get it right," Emily admitted. "I thought it would be cool to put it to music, so I chose a song and recorded her on the phone.



Sometimes, Marisa did everything perfect, but I didn't catch it on camera." Having fun together as sisters has paid off big time for Marisa, a 17-year-old junior who attends Townview School of Health Professions, maintains a 4.0 GPA and will graduate as a dental assistant.

Emily, although only 4 foot 10 inches, once played softball as well and used to throw harder than Marisa, but after pitching her freshman year she stopped playing softball at Duncanville High School in favor of participating in the marching band. Now Emily focuses on playing the flute, which she has done since sixth grade. "My grandma liked how the flute sounded, so she kind of picked the instrument for me," Emily smiled. Emily is interested in criminology and also entrepreneurial business. She enjoys SkillsUSA, where she is learning graphic design. "We went to Corpus Christi for state competition for three days," she



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shared, a glint in her eyes. “We won a blue ribbon, which is the highest score, for ‘marketing’ a restaurant. We called it Revo’s Italian Bistro and designed menu cards with Photoshop fonts. It was so much fun!” Now they are preparing to go to nationals, with an expanded version of “their restaurant,” which will include a billboard.

The girls’ interests are in some ways reflective of their parents. Their father, Alfred, has worked with Farmers Insurance, where his dad was an agent for 40 years. “I worked for my dad all through high school and college. I eventually took over the agency when my dad was diagnosed with cancer,” Alfred explained.

Tina, the girls’ mom, has been a dental hygienist for almost 25 years in Cedar Hill and currently works at Duncanville Dental. She played soccer for 30 years, beginning at age 4, while living in Paraguay. Alfred also played sports — everything from basketball, volleyball and football to track and soccer. He also played trumpet in the band while growing up in Oak Cliff. Marisa took piano classes at school, as well as dance lessons for several years. So you can see the girls come by all of their interests as a family. Tina also loves cooking, baking and face painting and creating costumes for her girls each Halloween. “We were mostly food items,” Emily recalled. Supreme pizza slices, ham sandwiches, sushi rolls, turkey on a platter — until Emily

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informed her mom she didn't want to be a food product any more. They were also chickens, zombies and an iPod.

Marisa loves the School of Health Professions at Townview. Basically, she loves school, especially the sciences, anatomy and physiology. "I guess I love everything medical," she concluded. Marisa is also involved in HOSA (Health Occupation Students of America). "We learn the history of HOSA plus a wide range of medical facts and trivia, and then we compete against other schools. Last year, as a sophomore, when I served as social committee chair, we made it



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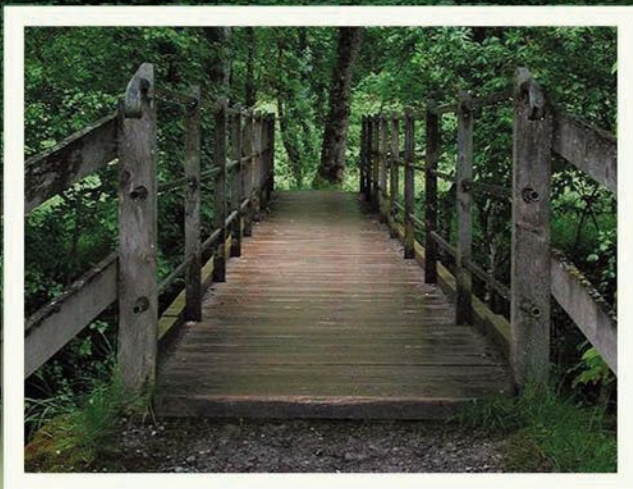


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to area. This year, as a junior, I am the community service chair, and we are aiming for state and nationals. Next year, I want to run for president of HOSA,” Marisa smiled. Because her school doesn’t offer a sports program, Marisa plays softball for Cedar Hill High School and also on a select team.

With Alfred owning his own business, traveling with Marisa is possible. Good thing too! This past summer, Marisa was only home two-and-a-half weeks, spending 41 days on the road, playing select ball with her current team, Texas Glory Adkins 18U Gold-Allen, ranked 16th in the nation. Unlike most softball girls, Marisa is small — only 5 foot 4 inches and 120 pounds. “I’ve always played club sports — soccer at age 4 and volleyball at age 8, where I was a setter,” she reminisced. She began playing softball at age 10, and immediately fell in love with the sport. “My whole life is softball, school, church and family!”

Marisa already had her scouting video available online, but because of her size, only a few college recruiters were looking at her. Thanks to the video Emily made, which Marisa reluctantly agreed to post, she has garnered a lot more attention. More than 7 million people have seen her six-second YouTube video, and she’s been retweeted over 9,000 times. Not to mention being interviewed by *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News* and Fox 4 here in Dallas and Fox News in New York. ESPN’s flagship program *SportsCenter* featured her in their Top Ten videos, where Yankee great, Derek Jeter, tipped his hat to her!

All the attention led to recruiters taking another look at Marisa, who batted

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.500 last season. "She has good speed and can slap and hit for power," Alfred said. Marisa is right-handed, but she bats from the left side. She's quick to credit a lot of her skill to working with her coaches, select coach Keith Allen and Rodney Hitt, her catching and batting coach for the past four years. In September, Marisa made a verbal commitment to play softball for Texas Woman's University in Denton. "When we visited the school, Marisa met the coaches, a husband/wife team, and really liked them," Alfred remarked. "She loved the whole school and was thrilled she'll be able to continue pursuing her education and goal of becoming a dentist."

Alfred is thankful for his girls' God-given talents and the blessings God has given to each of them. "I want my girls to enjoy their time in college. I am always praying for direction and guidance," he admitted. Tina, too, acknowledges God's guidance and purposes. Looking at Marisa's skills video for the recruiters, Tina is pretty excited Marisa is being recognized not just as a sensation, but as a serious ball player.

While the six-second video may have gone viral, this young woman, like her sister and parents, has a lot more on the ball than a few tricks. Following her verbal commitment to TWU, she tweeted her priorities: "Jesus and softball. Texas Glory Allen 18U. TWU commit." **NOW**

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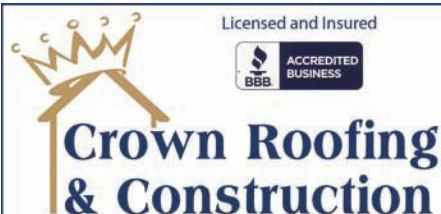
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Here and Back Again

— By Beverly Shay



Melissa Stewart spent many childhood days and years loving her grandparents, George and Dollie Switzer, and roaming around the very property where she now lives. After moving to Alaska in 1992, Melissa worked as a banker, a federal loan specialist and as a commercial loan officer.

Dean Stewart grew up in Tacoma, Washington, and immediately joined the Army after graduating in 1972. Twenty years and nine days later, he retired from his work as a personnel sergeant. "I was sent to Vietnam right out of basic training," Dean recalled. "Three months later, the Peace Accord was signed, and I was sent to Kentucky." Before arriving in Alaska, Dean served in Okinawa; Washington; six





weeks in Iran during the time of the Ayatollah Khomeini; El Paso; Würzburg, Germany; and Louisiana. His last four years in the military were spent at Fort Richardson in Anchorage. In 1997, Dean and Melissa met while both working for USDA-Rural Development in Palmer, Alaska.

"Alaska is so beautiful and open. You can ride a four-wheeler all day encountering no boundaries for hundreds of miles," Dean reminisced with obvious pleasure. "I loved fishing for salmon and halibut, hunting grouse and ptarmigan. We had fine symphonies and opera in Anchorage, but it was still like living in a town of 200 — you felt you could get to know everybody."

Although Dean and Melissa had collaborated on several projects, the sparks first began to fly at a training convention they both attended in North Carolina in 2001. "The trip was a whirlwind," Melissa recalled. "Flying to Dallas, I left my daughter (then age 7) with my grandparents, then on to Charlotte, only to find my luggage had been lost. I felt pretty grubby walking into the lobby in my traveling sweats."

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"I didn't even notice," Dean recalled. "For me, it was like I'd never really seen her before." The two ended up driving around in Dean's rental car. "And love began to blossom," he admitted.

Melissa did not experience as defining of a moment as Dean. But flying back to Dallas for a visit with her grandparents after the convention, she was sad the week was over. She knew she wanted to keep seeing Dean. Once she was back in

Alaska, Dean was intent on having more of a relationship with her as well.

Sitting on one of two leather couches in their living room, the center of their newly built home, the Stewarts recalled the 45-day engagement prior to their May 28, 2005, wedding. "Everybody but Melissa had seen the ring I had been carrying for years," Dean smiled. Finding a home and wanting the mortgage to go through prompted wedding plans.

"For five-and-a-half years, we lived the American dream in Alaska. But Melissa was tiring of filling the car with gas in 40-mile-an-hour winds at 15 F."

Visiting family in Texas for Thanksgiving 2010, they found her grandparents (89 and 88 at the time) were really slowing down. "It was a very emotional departure," Melissa recalled. "Dean said maybe we could figure a way to care for them." Six weeks later, Melissa

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was living in her grandparents' old house, built in 1901, where she'd spent so much of her childhood. She had a new job, and amazingly, their home in Alaska sold quickly even though it was the middle of winter. As Dean left Alaska, quitting his government job of 19 years, the temperature was 17 below. But by the time he got to Oklahoma, pulling their travel home behind the Suburban, it was 80 F.

"Living just feet away from my grandad and grandmother has been the biggest blessing," Melissa stated. Her grandparents, who have been married for 73 years, built a new house in 2002. With the old house really getting older, Dean and Melissa decided to build a new 2,700-square-foot house, which they moved into in August 2013. Finding out they couldn't have two houses on the same lot, Dean tore down the old house, saving some wood and doors to repurpose into furniture for their new home on its 2.3 acres. Dean is stripping down two doors to make a headboard for their bed. A wide door with her grandmother's mirror now hangs between the kitchen and the bathroom. "It's funny watching the grandkids try to open the nonfunctional door," Dean remarked.

Dean and Melissa spend Christmas Eve with as many of their four children and 10 grandchildren as can be together. The grandchildren love all the space. Five grandkids live in Ft. Worth, one in San Angelo, one in Canada and three in California. "We try to spend Christmas Day just with my grandad and grandmother and other local family now," Melissa stated.

Each morning, Melissa cooks breakfast for her grandparents and Dean before she heads off to work at her Edward Jones office in Duncanville. Dean fixes Melissa's lunch and has dinner ready for her and her grandparents in the evenings.

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"My favorite part of the house is the kitchen," Dean admitted. Open to the living and dining rooms with wide arches, two ovens, warming drawer, wine cooler and gorgeous granite countertops, it's the perfect place to whip up culinary delights.

Dean also enjoys the office with its family photos just off their gracious entryway with its two-tiered chandelier. Stained concrete takes you from the entry into the living room, where Maggie, their Pekingese, sprawls on its cool comfort. Throughout the home are beautiful paintings, prints and pottery they have collected in Alaska and travels to Scotland, Barbados, Paris, Florence, Budapest and Puerto Vallarta.



Melissa's favorite place is their shower, nearly a room in itself. The beautifully tiled, walk-in shower features a rain nozzle above and a jet nozzle on the wall. Around the corner is a jetted tub and separate sinks. Beyond is a truly magnificent closet with three tiers of hanging area and, yes, a sauna Dean brought from Alaska. "I don't know what I was thinking! I mean, what can I do? Sit in the sauna and then go out into the — heat?" he laughed at himself.

Their bedroom, one of two, is gracious and roomy with a Northern Lights design on the quilt. On either side of their bed are simple but elegant tables displaying Dean's talent with wood. A beautiful print of a bald eagle graces one wall, keeping an eye on them.

No longer privy to the Northern Lights or long summer nights, they really enjoy evenings on their back patio with its outdoor fireplace and unique bricked wood bin. "Even though we're not far from Cedar Hill's hub," Melissa remarked, "we have our own little woods with the old tack room and barn to give us a country sanctuary." **NOW**

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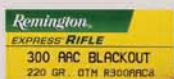
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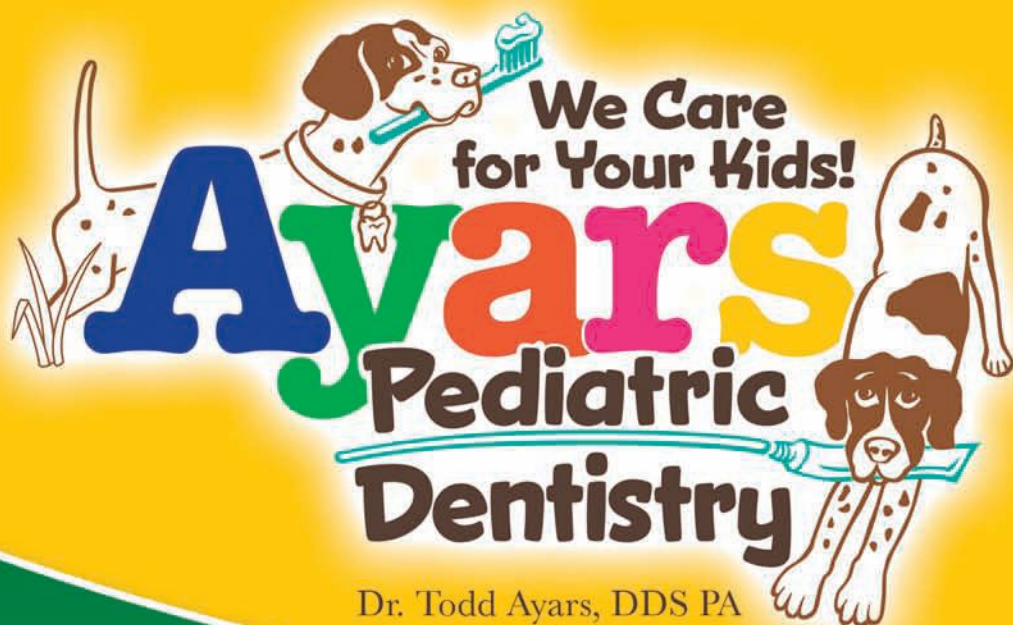
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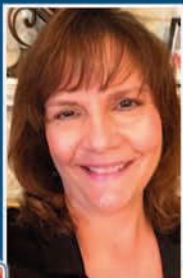
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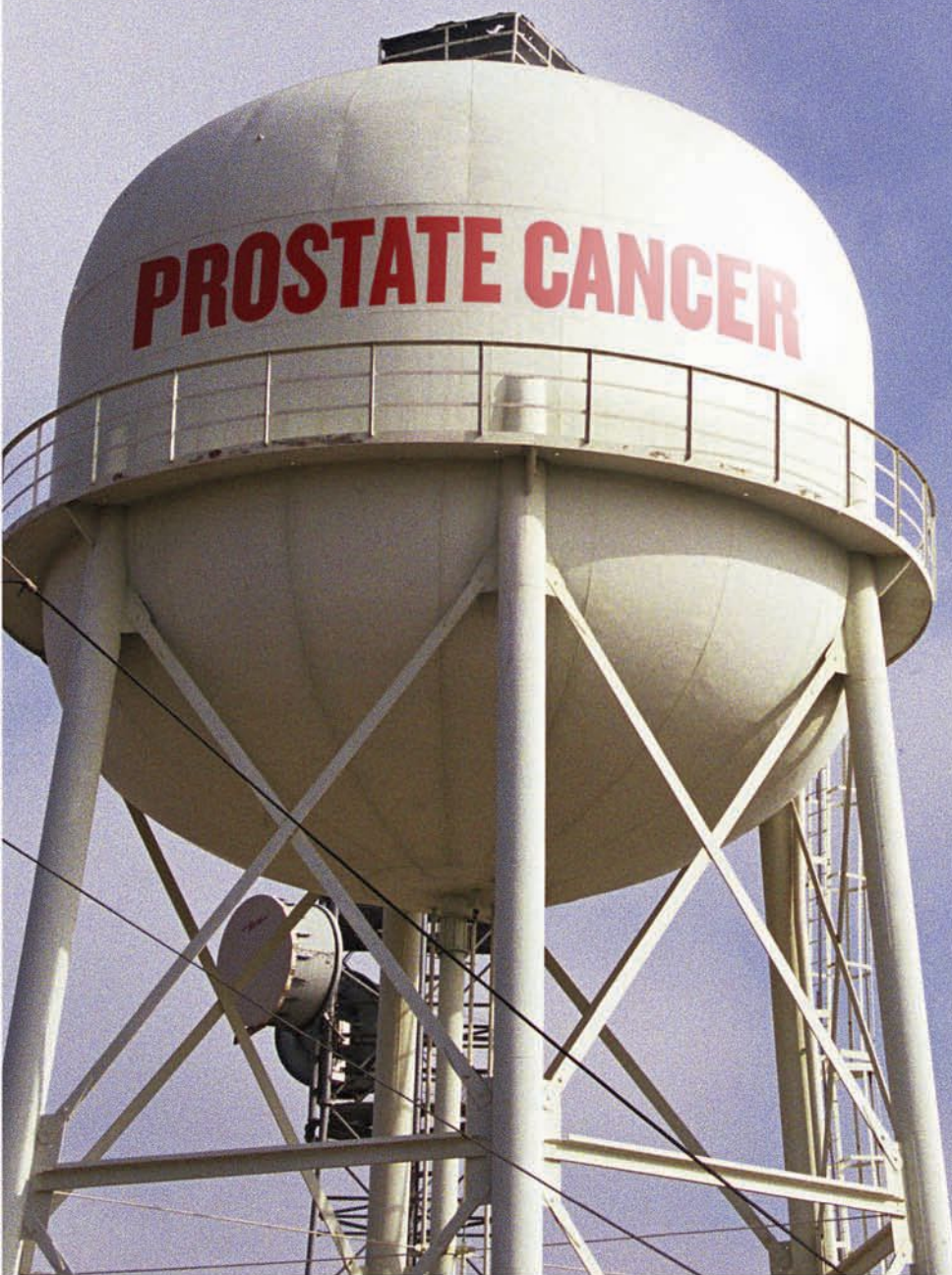
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Empowering the Educator

— By Katrina D. Lewis

For those who rise early to review lesson plans, stay up late grading papers and spend their days seeking innovative new ways to inspire impressionable young minds, teaching is never “just a job” — it’s a calling. And thanks to Duncanville teacher Natalie Chase, those who’ve answered this calling have a way to support one another and remain inspired themselves.

A 2009 Teacher of the Year recipient, Natalie earned her master’s degree in educational administration from the University of North Texas at Dallas after earning her bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies from Stephen



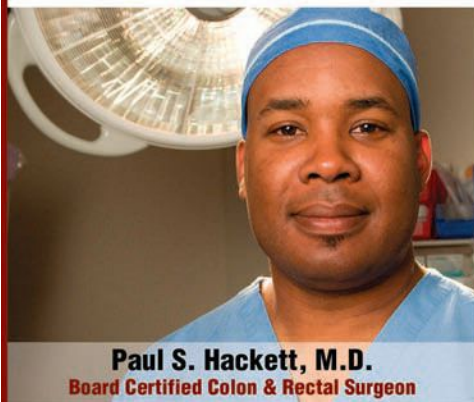


F. Austin State University in 1999. Entering her first classroom 17 years ago, she's found her educational niche teaching second- and third-graders in the Duncanville Independent School District, where she's spent her entire teaching career. "I love teaching," she said. "I love being able to make a difference and build relationships and partnerships with parents."

As passionate as she is about helping shape young minds, teaching was not exactly at the top of her list of original career plans. "To be honest, teaching was third on my list," Natalie said. "It was actually a lawyer, something with the FBI maybe — and then teaching. When I went to Stephen F. Austin for my orientation, I talked with them about it, and they said, 'Do you really want to be in an office?' I thought, *No, I don't want to do that.*" So she figured if she couldn't be a lawyer, she'd rather be able to teach lawyers and doctors and chose to pursue the field of education.

"Everyone was totally shocked. Even my mom couldn't believe I changed my mind. I really just want to make a bigger impact, and I truly feel like I'm answering my calling. I love teaching, and I love school," she shared. "Every year, I try to figure out what I can do differently or what can I change — what's something else I can try. I feel like teaching and making a difference in the lives of kids is truly one of the reasons I'm on this earth."

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Though she never felt the “burn out” that so many hardworking educators contend with, Natalie did understand the feeling of being in a rut. During a 2008 shopping trip, she decided to do something about it. She strongly felt that something needed to be done. “I felt like I needed to do more to encourage teachers. I felt like I was not necessarily in a low place, but I was getting into a rut of teaching where it was becoming like a business,” Natalie candidly shared. “So I needed to change my perspective by asking, ‘What can I do?’ And I figured if I was feeling that way, there were other people feeling that way as well. I thought about how I could encourage myself, as well as other teachers or anyone in the educational field.”

Driven to find a resource that would offer guidance and encouragement, Natalie soon found what she was looking for was not as easily found as she’d hoped. “I couldn’t really find anything that was a good fit for me,” she said. “One of the things about teaching is there is not enough time in the day.

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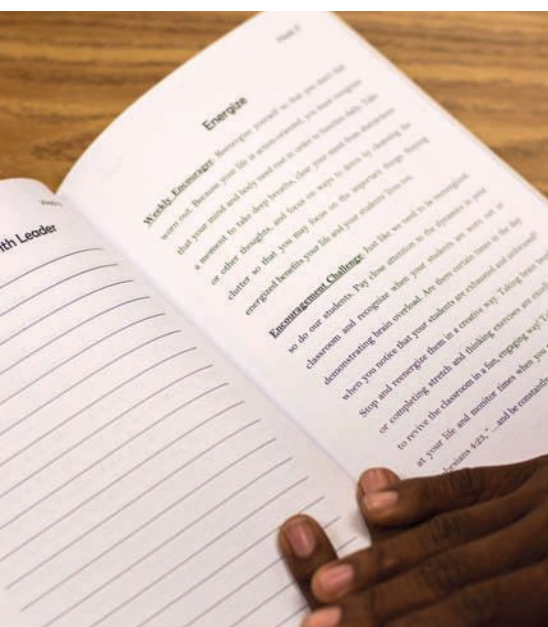
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I wanted something to be short and specific. I wanted to find something where you can actually journal and be challenged to try something. So, God placed it on my heart to do a teacher's encourager."

The seed planted in her heart manifested into a book titled *The Teacher's Encourager: Weekly Encouragement for Educators*. Natalie's final product is a long labor of love, which was released in June. "It's a weekly reflective devotional for teachers that encompasses a short encouragement piece, a challenge to try for the week and a reflection piece that lets you reflect on how the challenge worked for you," Natalie said. "And I tried to focus it on professional life and personal life. Some weeks focus on



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relationships with students. Some focus on personal relationships, and some focus on school. I wanted to encompass all of that, because as teachers, those are the things we deal with every day. I wanted to be another voice to let teachers know they're making a difference. And even for myself, on the days I come home and I feel like I'm not, I know that I'm planting those seeds."

Natalie began writing *The Teacher's Encourager*, and walked away from it several times, only to be driven back to finish. Entering the final draft stage, she conducted focus groups, comprised of education professionals, teachers from different campuses and grade levels and librarians. Wanting honest feedback that would help shape her book, she dove deeply into their thoughts on teaching, why they are passionate for it or no longer feel that way, if they would use a devotional and if so, what would it ideally look like. "I held interest meetings and let people read pages and give feedback, as well," she said. What she found was that teachers liked the idea of a weekly devotion, which they felt provided more time to focus on a set of challenges and opportunity to critically think about solutions.

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year. In one devotion, teachers are asked to view themselves and students from a perspective of being diamonds. Teachers are encouraged to notice the “diamonds” in their classrooms, advised on how to help them “shine” and go beyond what they see in front of them, as diamonds are formed under pressure. For the challenge portion, teachers are called to help students choose and formulate two goals and an action plan and create two of their own. For the weekly reflection, the sample devotion asks teachers to think about how they encouraged their students and how they met their own goals.

Since its release, the book of encouragement has had amazing reception. “Many people have said it has really blessed them,” Natalie said. “They like how it challenges and stretches them. My family is just excited that I actually did it!”

In the future, Natalie would like to author companion pieces for *The Teacher's Encourager*, focused on students and administrators. But for now, she's



content to provide a resource for fellow educators that will spur them to reignite their fervor for educating young minds, and which will also serve as a tool for new teachers so they never lose theirs. “There will be days that are not so easy. But every day is a new day to make a new start and to make great things happen,” she said. “Don’t give up. We are making a difference.”


Natalie enjoys spending quality time with her husband, Terrence, and their two children, Miles and Sydney Chase. Together, God and her family are her driving force to accomplish greatness in the opportunities that present themselves on a regular basis. **NOW**

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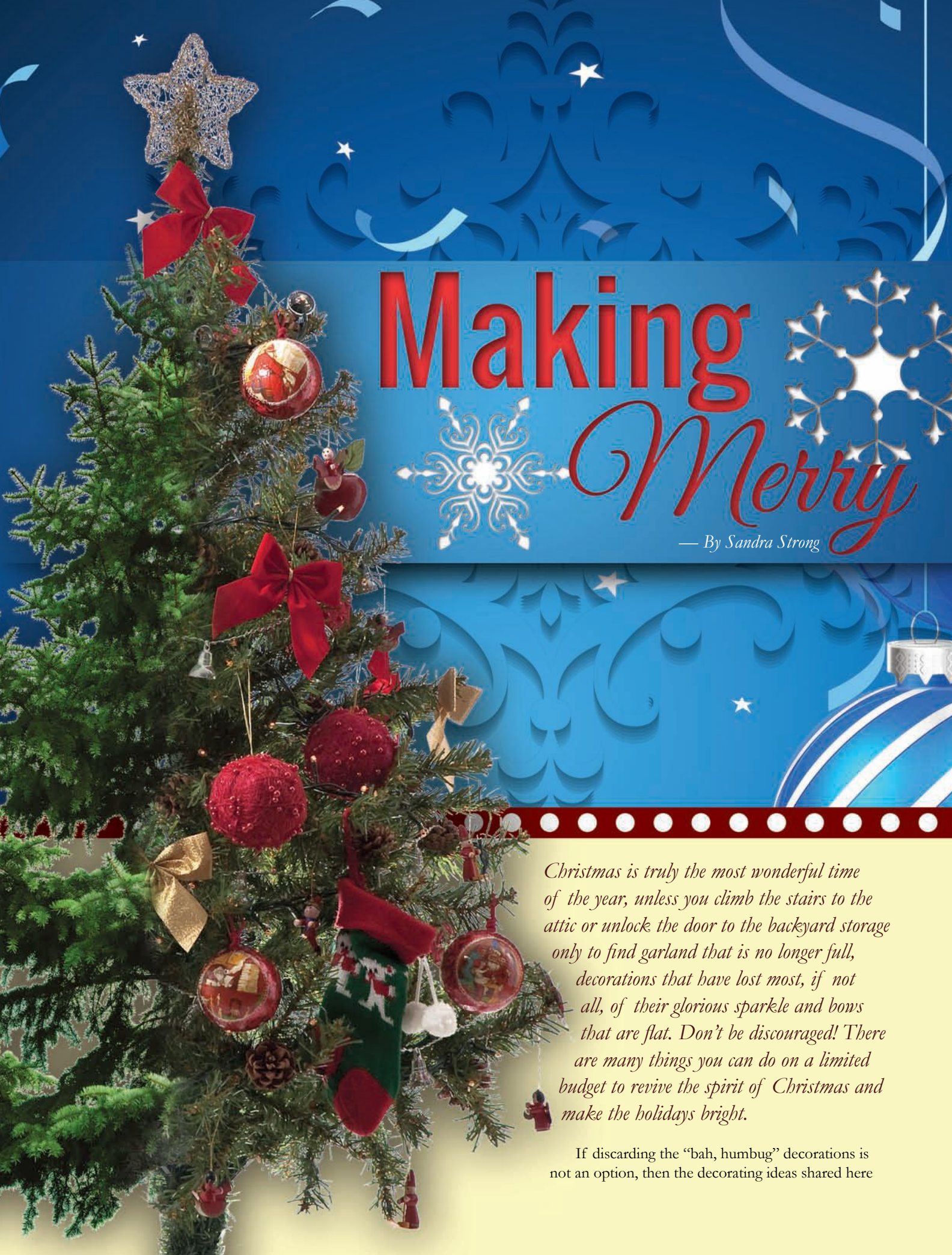
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Making Merry

— By Sandra Strong

Christmas is truly the most wonderful time of the year, unless you climb the stairs to the attic or unlock the door to the backyard storage only to find garland that is no longer full, decorations that have lost most, if not all, of their glorious sparkle and bows that are flat. Don't be discouraged! There are many things you can do on a limited budget to revive the spirit of Christmas and make the holidays bright.

If discarding the “bah, humbug” decorations is not an option, then the decorating ideas shared here



will, hopefully, be the help you need to restore your holiday favorites to their original glory. Each suggestion can be accomplished alone, but why not get everyone together for some good, old-fashioned family time. You might even start a new Christmas tradition.

Decking the Halls

Here are a few ways you can revive your garland. The easiest option is to take two strands of old garland and twist them together from one end to the next, securing both ends with floral wire. Once secured, the two strands will need

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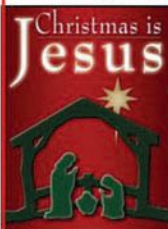
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to be entwined, one with the other. This process calls for patience and plenty of time to do it properly. As you entwine the two, you will touch each small limb on the garland strands, merging them together as you work from one end to the next.

To further fill out the garland, you can also add a string of twinkling lights and some holiday ribbon. These options can be added and removed from season-to-season in order to give the decorations a new punch each year. You might use white lights with blue ribbons one year and decide to go all out with red lights and Scotch plaid bows the next. One year, you may even decide to forgo the ribbons and bows and tie themed ornaments and festive greenery to the garland. As your taste in holiday decorating changes from year-to-year, now, so can your fluffy strands of garland.



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Trimming the Tree

Some homes boast one tall, regally standing, fresh cut tree, while other homes have trees of varying shapes and sizes in every room. Regardless of how many trees you display, there are some easy guidelines you can follow to ensure the tree-decorating process is one that lends to good memories, instead of huge holiday headaches. Patience will, once again, be important as you plug in the pre-lit tree or the string of lights to begin wrapping the tree in their warm



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glow. Last year, the pre-lit tree worked. You may find that it doesn't this year. The process to find the one bulb that has caused the lights to go out is difficult and, many times, impossible. In this case, you have three options — throw the tree out the backdoor, string working lights over nonworking lights or grab a trusty pair of scissors and start cutting the lights from the tree.

For those who opt for a tree that is not pre-lit, your struggles could be just as great, especially if the light Grinch somehow got into the lights that were organized and working when you stored them neatly away the year before! If you find this is the case, get a large cup of hot cocoa, have a seat and let the untangling begin.



Ornamental Revitalization

Ornaments on a Christmas tree are what keep the memories alive within the branches each year. The engraved spoon commemorating baby's first Christmas, the paper star those same little hands made once they got to kindergarten and vintage glass decorations that have been passed down through the generations evoke emotions each time the tree is trimmed. Sometimes, these same decorations need to be rejuvenated to bring back their original beauty.

Silver polish and a buffing cloth will shine up the spoon in no time. All it takes to add a button or some glitter back to the paper star is a few small dots of Elmer's glue. The vintage decorations will

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need something altogether different — something called TLC. Vintage and antique ornaments need to be stored in a dry, climate-controlled area. Hot temperatures have a tendency to tarnish and fade the colors, while colder temperatures cause these same ornaments to become brittle. The way these family heirlooms are stored is quite important in ensuring their holiday lasting power. Wrapping them in white tissue paper before placing them gently in their storage container helps keep them in one piece until you are ready to enjoy them again.





Outside the Box

Decorating outside the box takes on new meaning as children marry and have children of their own. Although it sounds like something Scrooge would do, some may choose to not put a tree up until children understand that the tree is to look at and not to touch. One unique idea, which has been passed down through the generations, is to take the baby out of the playpen and add the tree in his or her place. This allows the child to still be mesmerized by the tree's beauty, while keeping them safely away from breakable ornaments and the "no-no's" that will surely come with each touch. Another option is to simply downsize the tree, so it can be displayed on a tabletop or the fireplace mantel.

Regardless of what you decide to do, the main focus should be on having family fun. Garland, decorations and bows will come and go, but your Christmas memories can last a lifetime, if they are preserved and cared for properly. **NOW**



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Finding the Why

Dr. Sunjay Wagle believes in a medically managed, custom approach to sustainable weight loss and vibrant health.

— By Beverly Shay

Sunjay S. Wagle, D.C. comes from a family of health care professionals. Playing basketball as an undergrad student at Western University in Canada, he awoke one morning unable to move. “The chiropractor who manipulated my back brought me instant relief,” Dr. Wagle shared. This precipitated his decision to attend Parker University in Dallas, where he earned his doctorate in chiropractic in 1994.

While physical therapy and adjustments are a part of treatment at SPI Nu Beginnings, formed in 2002, Dr. Wagle lists three main thrusts of care. “We offer conservative bariatrics,” he stated, “helping people lose weight without medication or surgery by eating, sleeping, moving and breathing well. Our life-altering program enables weight loss while gaining lean

muscle mass. We also conduct complex neuromusculoskeletal evaluations and rehab for those recovering from strokes, post-surgery, sports injuries or any neurological disease. Pre-surgery strengthening is provided to improve recovery 10-fold. But our main thrust is functional medicine, where we treat people as a whole rather than treating a disease or injury. Treatment goals include stronger immune function, improved nutrient absorption and systemic inflammation reduction.

Dr. Wagle explained most physical problems are rooted in inflammation. “Rather than treating symptoms or masking pain, I want to get at the root issue — the why — causing the dysfunction,” he emphasized. Through diet and exercise, patients are taught to become leaner, stronger and pain-free, thus

really having no choice but to become healthier. "I want to change the very trajectory of their life," Dr. Wagle added. His thorough examination includes: screening for obstructive sleep apnea; metabolic diseases, such as diabetes; and early signs of cardiac diseases sometimes not revealed by simple cholesterol labs and EKGs. "I believe patients should have one medical home where they receive total body care. We look at spines, knees, hips, feet and backs using X-rays and MRIs as needed. Inflammation, the most common root issue, hinders proper functioning of body systems," Dr. Wagle said. "I look at all biomarkers and review ancestral history to aid in tailoring a plan where food and exercise are the medicine and teach patients to breathe from their diaphragms. As they get healthier, they are happier, which increases productivity. The nation's welfare should be measured by gross happiness rather than gross productivity (GDP)."

Our generation is the first to be dying before our parents due in part to increase of fast foods, instant lifestyles and less movement. Active people are healthier and leaner. If you are desperate for change, keep in mind his patients' average weight loss is 19.4 pounds/month for the first two months. "To combat the rise in childhood obesity, we need to heal the homes," Dr. Wagle proposed. "If the lifestyle, eating, sleeping and exercise habits of the home aren't changed, children are less able to maintain better health habits learned outside the home." Sugar in all forms must be removed from our diet because it stresses out our system and ends up stored as fat.

First visits with Dr. Wagle include an "epic" physical exam and comprehensive workup. The second visit includes a physical performance exam with in-depth bloodwork and X-rays, if needed. By the third visit, patients are starting their tailor-made physical and nutritional program. His program has experienced a 97-percent success rate in both weight loss and curbing diabetes. "Within eight-12 weeks," Dr. Wagle promised, "you will be on a new trajectory for a leaner, stronger, pain-free, healthier, happier you! **NOW**

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Marylynne Henry of Friends Place Adult Day Services attends the Good Morning DeSoto Chamber of Commerce meeting.



Students at Duncanville ISD help celebrate construction of the new Hastings Elementary School.



Manager Steve Patterson and employee Nquion Pullard at Cedar Hill Office Max offer service with a smile.



President Laura Terbune draws the winning card at the Good Morning DeSoto Chamber meeting.



First Methodist School students are taught fire safety by Duncanville Firefighters.



Parents and children enjoy a night out at Duncanville Public Library Halloween Party.



An exciting new group of young people were sworn in to the Mayor's Teen Council and the Cedar Hill Police Department Student Law Enforcement Advisory and Development (L.E.A.D.) Council for 2015-2016.

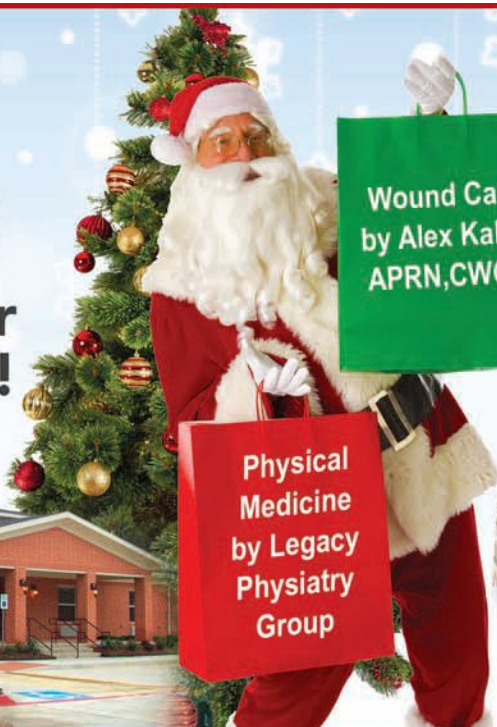


Carolyn Campbell meets with DeSoto Lions Club members to discuss the 43rd Annual Hometown Holiday Parade scheduled for December 5th.



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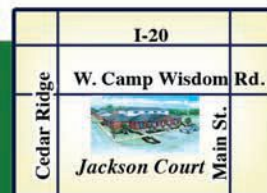


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Time to Harvest Your Losses?

The fourth quarter is a good time to determine if harvesting your losses would be an effective tax strategy.

The fourth quarter is a good time to review your overall asset allocation to ensure it is both tax efficient and aligns with your financial goals. Since some investments generate more taxable distributions than others, it's important to evaluate your investments, after-tax returns, portfolio turnover ratio and historical distributions to get a sense of your annual tax liability. Especially at year end, you have the opportunity now to take steps to help minimize this year's tax liability.

One way to diminish your 2015 tax burden is to harvest capital losses in order to offset realized gains. The deadline to sell securities to realize a gain or loss is December 31, 2015. However, be aware of the "wash-sale" rule. This rule will not allow you to deduct capital losses on the sale of a particular security if you initiate a similar position within a 61-day period (30 days before the sale date and 30 days after the sale date). Note that these rules apply to both taxable and nontaxable accounts. So, for example, you can't liquidate a position in one account and establish a similar position in your IRA within that timeframe.

If your capital losses are more than your capital gains, you can claim a capital loss deduction. You may use your total net loss to reduce your income dollar for dollar, up to the \$3,000 limit per year.

If you have a total net loss that is more than the annual limit, you can carry over that unused portion to next year and treat it as if you incurred it in 2016. If part of the loss is still unused, you can carry it over to later years until it is completely used up.

Here's an example of how to claim the capital loss deduction. Let's say Earl and Samantha sell securities at the end of this year. The sale yields a capital loss of \$7,000, and they have no other capital transactions. On their joint tax return for 2015, they can deduct \$3,000 of the \$7,000 loss. Next year, they can carry over the unused part of the loss, \$4,000 (\$7,000 - \$3,000), up to the limit for that year.

It's important to work with your financial and/or tax advisor to determine if harvesting your losses would be an effective strategy to help reduce your 2015 taxes. **NOW**

Tax-loss harvesting dos and don'ts	
DO 	DON'T 
Do: Sell depreciated investments that don't fit your strategy.	Don't: Undermine long-term investing goals for tax purposes.
Do: Research your records and cost basis carefully before you sell any investment.	Don't: Buy a substantially identical security within 30 days before or after the sale.

Source: Fidelity

*Material prepared by Raymond James for use by its financial advisors.
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Jonathan Pope is a Raymond James Financial Advisor based in Duncanville.



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Straighten Up

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

“Stand up straight!” How many times have you heard that in your lifetime? It could’ve been from your mom, your teacher, dance instructor or a friend. Depending upon who gave the order, you may or may not have tried to accommodate them. But who wants to stand straight when a good slouch seems to work just as well? And, what about that cozy curl into the big chair? Why sit up straight when the opposite feels so right and comfortable? Here is an inconvenient truth: Unless you have been taught and encouraged to practice good posture, you probably need some encouraging reminders.

The correct posture follows the natural curvature of the spine. A good standing posture starts with holding your head up, shoulders back, stomach tucked, knees relaxed, not locked, and your feet a shoulder’s width apart. A good sitting posture begins with your buttocks touching the back of the chair. Have your back and shoulders straight and feet planted on the floor. Your weight should be equally distributed. Use an arm rest. If you need to turn while sitting, do not twist. Turn your whole body. Practice good computer posture by sitting with good posture and keeping your arms and wrists parallel to the floor. Make sure the computer screen is at eye level.

Posture plays a big part in your overall health. One of the areas impacted is your breathing. There is a reason programs

such as yoga and Pilates place so much emphasis on breathing. For the brain to function properly, it is critical for it to receive the oxygen it needs. This improves your critical thinking. Proper posture facilitates that. When you use good posture, your muscles, ligaments and joints are aligned as they should be, and this alignment allows internal organs to be positioned properly inside the body. When your organs are compromised because of bad posture, they can’t function as they should, and that sets up other issues, such as digestion or respiratory problems.

There is less wear and tear on the skeletal system when you maintain good posture, thereby lessening the prospect of injury. Going against this can set you up for arthritis, back pain and body fatigue. Good posture equals a more efficient system. Other considerations would be to invest in a good mattress for the good of your spine at night and an orthopedic pillow. Wear quality footwear. Sit in a solid chair that gives your back the support it needs. There are good reasons for all of this attention to posture. In addition, you will look better and exude confidence when you stand and sit up straight! **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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Through December

TREE OF HOPE, The War Dog Memorial will receive donations collected at PETCO, 433 E. FM 1382, Cedar Hill. For more information, contact Teresa Sims with the Pet Memorial Project, Inc. at (469) 377-0645.

Desoto ISD Fine Arts, DeSoto Public Library: 211 E. Pleasant Run Rd. For more information, call (972) 274-8212.

Through December 24

Santa Photos: Visit www.shophillsidevillage.com.

December 3

Holiday on the Hill: 6:00- 8:00 p.m., Pioneer Park, Historic Downtown Cedar Hill.

December 4

Duncanville's Christmas in the Stars Parade: 7:00-10:00 p.m., Main Street. Christmas tree lighting, watch R2D2 and C3PO's *The Night Before Christmas* at Duncanville TV. For more information, call (972) 780-5074.

VIP Shopping Party & Taste of Ellis County: 6:00-9:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center. Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at Interbank.

December 5

43rd Annual Hometown Holiday Parade: 5:30 p.m., DeSoto Town Center, 211 E. Pleasant Run Rd.

Friends Holiday Open House: Zula B. Wylie Library, 225 Cedar St., Cedar Hill.

The Soaring Diamonds of McCowan Middle School: 10:00 a.m. DeSoto ISD's award-winning majorette dance team will march in the Children's Health Holiday Parade in downtown Dallas and will be broadcast by ABC.

December 8, 15

Pet Photos With Santa: 6:00-8:00 p.m. Dogs and cats must be leashed at all times and kept in an appropriate carriers while at Hillside.

December 10

Community Red Carpet Celebration: 6:00-8:00 p.m., main lobby. Celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Methodist Charlton Medical Center with live entertainment by Duncanville ISD Wind Ensemble. Refreshments will be served.

December 12, 13

Wrap Up Your Holiday: Holiday gift

wrapping. For times, prices and partnering organization information, visit www.shophillsidevillage.com.

December 14

The Polar Express Fest: 6:30 p.m., Zula B. Wylie Library, 225 Cedar St., CH.

December 18

Holiday Senior Dance: 7:00-9:30 p.m., Hopkins Senior Center, 206 James Collins Blvd., Duncanville. Featuring Pete & Patti (variety of music). Cost \$5. For more information, call (972) 298-0667.

December 29

Kwanzaa Celebration: 6:00 p.m., Zula B. Wylie Library, 225 Cedar St., CH. This is a family event. Celebrate and learn about traditional foods of the harvest and enjoy live entertainment.

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to joanne.monroe@nowmagazines.com.



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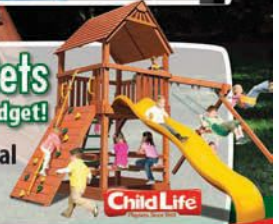


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In the Kitchen With Irma Zapata

— *By Beverly Shay*

Irma Zapata is a second-year culinary arts student at DeSoto High School. “I enjoy cooking because that is the way my family bonds,” Irma shared. “I have learned to cook Hispanic recipes from my grandmother, beginning when I was about 8. In school I have learned to be part of a team, as well as how to cook independently.” Irma follows family recipes, but adds her own touch to the home-cooked meals she has always loved. She takes her time and likes working in a really clean environment.

“I am teaching my little brother to cook also, because I feel it is important,” Irma remarked. On holidays, different family members bring food to share. Irma also likes to walk through nature and draw. **NOW**

Steak With Serrano Chimichurri Sauce

1 bunch fresh cilantro
6 serrano peppers
Juice of 3 limes
1/4 cup olive oil
Steak, amount and type of choice
Coarse salt and cracked black pepper, to taste

1. Cut roots and stems off cilantro and wash it thoroughly.
2. Seed the serrano peppers. (You may want to use gloves, so you do not get pepper juice on your hands.)
3. Place cilantro, peppers, lime juice and oil in a food processor. Blend until it is a nice consistency for a sauce. Place in the refrigerator.
4. Let the steak warm to room temperature. Sprinkle with coarse salt and cracked pepper. Grill the steak to your preference. Serve with chimichurri sauce.

Lemon Bars

Crust:
2 cups flour
3/4 cup confectioners' sugar
Pinch of salt
8 oz. butter, softened

Filling:
5 eggs
1 1/2 cups sugar
1 cup lemon juice
1/3 cup flour

1. *For crust:* Mix flour, sugar and salt; work in butter with fingers until large clumps form. Press into a prepared 13x9-inch pan; bake at 325 F until lightly browned, about 20-25 minutes. Cool for 5 minutes.
2. *For filling:* Whisk eggs with sugar, lemon juice and flour until smooth; pour over the crust; put pan in the oven and increase temperature to 350 F; bake until set, about 20-25 minutes.

Guadalupe River Pudding

Crust:
1 cup flour
1/2 cup butter
1 cup pecans, chopped

First layer:
8 oz. cream cheese, softened
1 cup powdered sugar
12 or 16 oz. Cool Whip (divided use)

Second layer:
1 3.5-oz. box instant vanilla pudding
1 3.5-oz. box instant chocolate pudding
2 cups milk
Or
Assorted fruit, chopped

Optional topping:
Chocolate curls

1. *For crust:* Finely crumble flour and butter together. Add nuts and mix well.
2. Press into a greased 9x13-inch pan and bake at 350 F for 20 minutes. Cool.
3. *For first layer:* Mix together cream cheese, sugar and 1 cup Cool Whip. Beat with an electric mixture until smooth. Spread over the crust.
4. *For second layer:* Mix together pudding mixes and milk; beat until thickened. Drop large dollops of pudding on top of the cream cheese mixture and then smooth out.
5. Or arrange cut fruit on top.
6. *For topping:* Cover with remaining Cool Whip and garnish with chocolate curls if desired.

Arroz con Leche

1 cup rice
1 stick cinnamon
2 cups water
2 cups milk
1 14-oz. can Nestle La Lechera
1 12-oz. can evaporated milk
Raisins (optional)
Ground cinnamon (optional)

1. Rinse rice and place in a large pot. Add cinnamon stick and water; bring to a boil. Add milk, Lechera and evaporated milk. Stir well and bring to a boil. Simmer covered until rice is cooked, about 18 minutes.
2. Arroz con Leche may be served hot or cold. Top with raisins and ground cinnamon if desired. Leftovers can be frozen as popsicles!

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