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*Photo by Shane Kirkpatrick.*

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## Editor's Note

*Dear Readers,*

This is often referred to as "the most wonderful time of the year." Visits from friends and family, gifts, special events, time off from school and work and decadent foods all help us to enjoy this season.

At some point, however, I think we all experience the stress that comes with the Christmas season. We may worry about the added expenses, how the weather may impact our travel plans, if we have gotten the greeting cards in the mail on time or myriad other things.

In one of my favorite stories, "The Gift of the Magi," the main characters learn to value what is truly important. This month, try to remember that making memories in time spent together is one of the greatest gifts that can be given. It will last far longer than the trinket in the box. Even the unexpected events can end up being a story shared and laughed about in years to come.

Wishing you joy and peace!

*Jill*

Jill Martinez

North Ellis Co. NOW Editor

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P.S. The publisher and staff of NOW Magazines wish you and your family a very merry Christmas and the happiest of holiday seasons!

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# MAKING Spirits Bright

— By Rick Mauch

*You won't find a frumpy apron on this Mrs. Claus. When Darla Bicknell joins jolly Saint Nick at a public appearance, she's the perfect match in style, from her flowing red gown to the smile that would warm the heart of any elf, child or adult. "He goes to all these parties and wears these fancy boots, and she's going to wear an apron like she just walked out of the kitchen?" Darla asked, smiling. "Not me. I dress up, and I want to look good. I'm Santa's eye candy."*

Darla, 62, is an actress/singer who has been playing the role of Mrs. Claus for seven years. It started when she played the part and visited a Spanish family in which a mom and son both had cancer. "The son later passed, but the mom survived," she recalled. "It's so sad that he died, but I'm so glad I was able to bring some joy to him."

The next year, Darla, via encouragement from her friend, Chuck Lee, joined Lone Star Santas. Lee is well-known in the Ovilla area for playing Santa Claus. "We have known Darla for years. She served as the first voice and acting coach for several of our children, providing an excellent career-building foundation," Chuck said. "Some of our children are professional singers/dancers/actors today. When I was contacted by a fellow professional Santa needing a high-quality Mrs. Claus to work with, I knew exactly who to challenge into the role of Santa's partner for the holiday fun. She's not just a helper to Santa. Darla is also a stand-alone act who could provide a complete Christmas-themed experience in her own right."

One of Darla's favorite things is the Convoy of Toys project put on by the Lone Star Santas. They help people during their recovery from disasters, such as





**"Darla is able to relate to young, old and everyone in between, making them feel like they are the most important person in the room."**







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In their roles as Mrs. Claus and an elf, Darla Bicknell and Sarah Hall do their parts to keep spirits jolly.

the hurricanes in Houston and Puerto Rico. "We don't want them to wait until Christmas to have those toys replaced," she said.

The group takes donations and even buys items themselves to help. It's a year-round project. The first was the Missouri flooding a few years ago. "Santa is willing to go anywhere," Darla said. "The Red Cross is asking us to go along with them now."

She also loves joining Chuck, aka Santa, for their annual visits with the Dallas Cowboys. They show up for a game (this year on Christmas Eve), visit the children of players, and make an annual visit to team owner Jerry Jones' home. "I think Mrs. Jones fell in love with my character," she said.

It was also with the Jones family that Darla had perhaps her most embarrassing moment as Mrs. Claus. She laughs about it now. "I was in a hoop skirt, and they asked me if I would use the servants' restroom. The door handle was made of gold and porcelain," she said. "My skirt got caught on the handle. It fell off and shattered all over the floor. The wall is covered with these beautiful Hummel figurines. When they came running in, my skirt was up, but all I could think of was, *Did any of the Hummels break?* Fortunately, they did not. They thought it was funny."

Darla doesn't just play Mrs. Claus. In fact, she has a repertoire of characters that include Betty Lou Who from Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, a fairy godmother, Mother Goose, Dazzling Dallas (a cowgirl) and Beatrix Potter, author of *Peter Rabbit*.

"Darla is able to relate to young, old and everyone in between, making them



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feel like they are the most important person in the room,” said Mitchell Allen, a longtime Santa Claus. “She also is able to really help with small children who are afraid of Santa. Her professionalism is unmatched. She brings the experience of a professional actor to the role of Mrs. Claus. She is truly a winter princess.”

Darla’s reputation as Mrs. Claus extends well beyond the local area. She had a lady reporter from New York contact her for an article and some advice about playing Mrs. Claus. “She said I was such a pretty Mrs. Claus. I told her she was on the nice list, for sure,” Darla said, chuckling.

Ironically, Darla was not into theater earlier in life. It wasn’t until she became a church secretary and the music director talked her into auditioning for a clown show at Cedar Valley College that she got hooked. “I sang in church and was in one musical when I was younger,” she said. “I got married right out of high school.”

She and her husband, Marc, have been married 44 years. They have three children: sons, Timothy and Nathan,

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and daughter, Rachel Verbeck. They also have eight granddaughters ranging in age from 9 to 17. "When they come to LaLa's house, they love to perform," Darla said. "They call me LaLa because I taught them to sing. My oldest granddaughter even plays Elf on a Shelf with me at the Dallas Arboretum. She has a great voice."

Playing characters not only brings happiness and inspiration to others. It also inspires Darla. In 2010, she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and her love for theater helped her win the battle.

Among her most special moments as Mrs. Claus, she recalled meeting a man with Alzheimer's disease who never spoke. However, upon meeting her, he got up from his chair and began to sing and dance. "He later told me about his favorite presents," she said. "My dad and sister both passed away with Alzheimer's. My dad couldn't remember my name. I gave him a guitar, and he could still sing harmonies, and he remembered every word to songs."

There was also the time a child gave her a present. It wasn't much, but to her it was priceless. "I had a child give me 27 cents. The mom said they were so thrilled about giving Mrs. Claus a present. It was so special. Moments like that are why I can't wait to put on that dress the next time," Darla said.

"Many a Mrs. Claus are aspiring to meet the lofty standard set by Darla in one of her best roles to date," Chuck said. "Try as they might, there remains only one Darla Bicknell." **NOW**



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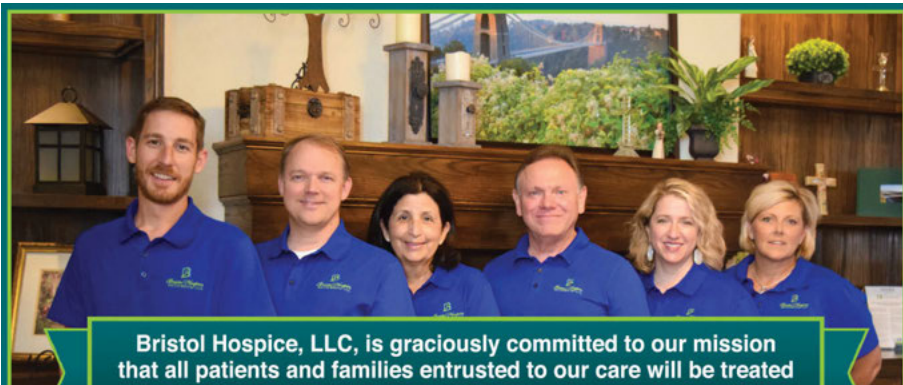
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# A DIRECTOR'S PERSPECT





*Sometimes from desperate measures comes the greatest inspiration. Jeff Hamm can attest to this. The 32-year-old, 2003 Ovilla Christian School graduate was hoping to make a career as a musician and win numerous awards. That was before he and his bandmates found themselves struggling financially — to put it mildly — in 2013. Fate, as it turned out, had other plans for Jeff. While they did include the presumed end to one career, they included the beginning of another. “I’d come to a point where we were just broke,” he recalled of his days in a Christian rock band. “We loved what we were doing, but there just wasn’t any money in it.*

— By Rick Mauch

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Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. -Proverbs 22:6



"I was working with a youth group, and I picked up a camera and started fooling around. As everything changes in the world, everything is becoming video. I figured if I could become good with a camera, perhaps I could do something special."

Jeff has made numerous short films, and people like them a lot. He won the 2016 168 Film Project with a production entitled *The River*. Recently, he won a speed film competition with an apocalyptic movie entitled *Santapocalypse*. Jeff and his team had 48 hours to write and produce the movie. The challenge was increased by it being his first venture into the horror genre.

While *Santapocalypse* is an exception, most of Jeff's films leave the viewer pondering goodness and its contradictions. For example, *The River* is about a little girl who gets separated from her family in the wilderness, but by remembering some advice, she finds her way to safety. *Drive*, his 2017 entry in the 168 Film Project, is about a girl who lets a sense of entitlement stand between her and what might have been the happiest moment in her life.





And then there's *Pancho and the Angry Bossman*. It's a dark comedy about a janitor loved by everyone except the most important person at the business where he works. "I put myself in my films," Jeff said. "A lady wrote a note to me about 'Pancho.' It said, 'The person who gives the most is usually the most overlooked.' I've been that person."

Jason Walter Vaile has done most of the writing for Jeff's films. However, for *Pancho*, Jeff tested his own writing ability, working with Jose Quinones and Larry Cassidy, who have been actors in his works. He also contributed to the writing of *The River*, along with Jason and Mark Blitch.

Jeff tried something different with *Pancho*. The ending leaves the audience wondering what happened next. "I wanted people to make up their own ending about what happened to Pancho," he said.

He also put a little bit of himself in *Drive*, using the memories of growing up working on trucks with his grandfather. Jeff said he finds inspiration all around for his films. He's not looking for superheroes or the vast love story, just something folks will enjoy and maybe learn from, which will leave them feeling like they just viewed something worth their while.

"Jeff is a great director with amazing vision and is very easy to work with," Larry said. "I have worked with Jeff on several short films, and I always look forward to our next project together."

Jeff's first award-winning film came at the advice of a friend. He was taking headshots for an actress when Anne Beyer asked him bluntly, "Jeff, what do you want to do?"

He couldn't forget the question. Then, she encouraged him even more. "She told me she'd come on as a producer if I'd enter 168," he said. "When *The River* ended up winning, it was an eye-opener. I realized maybe I can do this in a big way."

Jeff's next film, *Intuition*, is scheduled to be released before the end of 2017. It's the dark



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story of a man who, after finding out how unhappy his wife is, goes back in time to tell a younger version of himself not to get married.

Jeff doesn't regret one second of his days as a musician. In fact, that experience helps him greatly when it comes to scoring his films. "I've gone from a singer/songwriter with aspirations to a director/producer of films with aspirations," he said. "I'm enjoying it all."

Jeff and his wife, Bethany, a former model, have been married three years. She helps with his films by doing makeup and has even been cast in some small parts. "I love what he does. We have the same vision, which is why we clicked when we met," she said.

Jeff also works for Mike Barber Prison Ministries. He produces music for the former Houston Oilers star, along with social media, video and graphics. He directed and edited Barber's Super Bowl Special on the Trinity Broadcast Network this past season.

Between traveling to Houston for his work with Barber and traveling for film, Jeff stays quite busy. However, he makes sure to remember important people in his life. For example, he cast his former drama teacher as the mother in *Drive*. "I grew up onstage. It was so cool to put her in one of my films," he said.

Jeff hopes to someday make feature films. He's confident that as his success continues, he'll get the chance. "I just want to tell stories, and I think I'll get that opportunity," he said. "It's just a matter of finding that right person to believe in me enough to invest in me." **NOW**



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— By Debbie Durling

At Home With Todd and Brenda Haney





Todd and Brenda Haney met in 1997 at Trinity Church in Cedar Hill when they were introduced by a mutual friend. "I told myself she would be my wife one day," Todd said with a serious nod. They became friends and had a brief courtship shortly after meeting, but the friendship lasted. Years later, Todd was prompted to ask Brenda, "Would you want to give us another try?" They were married a year later, in 2004, seven years after that first encounter.

They currently enjoy a beautiful life filled with family, friends and one especially loved little guy, their son, Camden. Todd is a corporate vice president of strategy and analysis for a major insurance company, and Brenda is the choir director at Trinity Church in Cedar Hill.

In 2007, when Camden was 1 year old, they bought the property where their home now sits. At one time, the subdivision was known as Fun Town. "When they were doing the dirt work to level the property, we found a lot of golf balls," Brenda said with a chuckle.

During the next seven years, the couple paid the land off and took that time to plan their dream home, down to the last detail. Todd had only two requests: a shower with no glass and a walk-in attic. The rest of the home was Brenda's to dream about and bring to fruition. Brenda's greatest wish was to have a place for large groups of people to gather and be comfortable. "I wanted a home that felt inviting, casual and lived-in. I didn't want people to be afraid to enjoy themselves," she admitted.

On the outside, the Tudor-style architecture is accented with varied tones of red brick, cedar posts and a rounded red door. "I have always wanted a red door," Brenda said. "I played with many different shades. When I drove up the driveway one day, the more recent color I had experimented with made me happy,

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so I knew it was the one.” The door is a perfect accent to the browns, reds and grays that fill this beautiful home.

Inside the front door, a modern, crisp farmhouse-style home awaits. Both relaxing and inviting, the entry is wide and long, with the study to one side and a staircase to the other. An antique pine floor with a rustic barn finish and hand-scraped texture flows throughout the

home. Modern decor with words, sayings, initials and arrows hangs in the entry and accents other rooms, as well.

The study is accented in Brenda’s favorite color and pattern, red plaid. Built-in shelving lines the back wall with a perfect bridge between them to hold Brenda’s keyboard. Antique pictures and a pair of old skis hung on the wall give this modern room an old-fashioned feel.



For the Christmas season, a tree swathed in gold and tartan plaid completes the festive room.

The stairs are lined with crisp, white balusters, which are topped with a wooden rail. For the holidays, the already beautiful bannister is wrapped in garland and bows. A media room, found at the head of the stairs, makes any family gathering extra special. Guest rooms also have smaller Christmas trees to give them the ambience of the season.

The open areas downstairs were created for the gatherings the family loves to host. “I had the best time designing this open space,” Brenda said. “We like being together as a family. Life can be crazy busy. I love to just be at home,”



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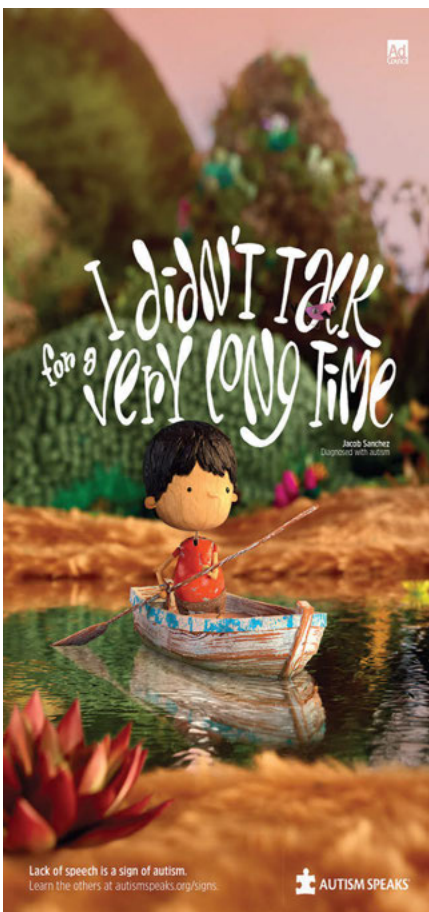
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Todd said. "We enjoy having company, but we love to make the most of just us." They enjoy game nights, just the three of them, which is why the family room has no television. It does have a floor-to-ceiling brick fireplace with a cedar beam mantel and is arranged to encourage conversation. For the holiday season, the family room receives added embellishments. The largest Christmas tree in the house is dressed in plaid and burlap for a shabby chic effect. Seasonal pillows and red plaid lamps enhance the seating area for added festive charm.

A brick archway spans the width of the room and serves as an architectural piece of interest, creating the illusion of a division between the family room and the kitchen. A stunning farmhouse-themed kitchen, dining room and keeping room await on the other side. Open shelves, white custom cabinetry and a farm sink create the look. However, Brenda's true







prize is the red and stainless Bertazzoni gas range that is tucked neatly below the white subway tile and between the black and gray granite-crowned cabinetry. "We had gone to Farmer's Branch looking at countertops," Brenda shared. "In the front of this business was a wholesale showroom of designer appliances. I walked in, and the first thing I laid my eyes on was this red stove."

Brenda couldn't get the range off her mind and began to look for a discounted version of it. After months of searching the company's scratch and dent page, the exact range was offered at an unbelievably reduced price. After minor repairs were made to the electrical plug, she had a dream range for her dream home.

Directly across from the kitchen is a dining area that contains a long farm table with mix-matched chairs for seating. The year-round reds in the kitchen are tied into the dining area to greet holiday dinner guests. Beside it is the keeping room, complete with a cozy sectional. "This was my first online furniture purchase. I was so nervous about it fitting the room," Brenda said. "I agonized over it and even tried to cancel my order." It's a good thing she didn't. The sectional fits the space to a tee.

So many features like a beautiful, relaxing pool in the backyard, a walk-in tiled shower, and a fireplace by the garden tub in the master suite make this a lovely home. But, it has the most important feature of all — a family who loves each other, enjoys being together and sharing their home with family and friends. **NOW**

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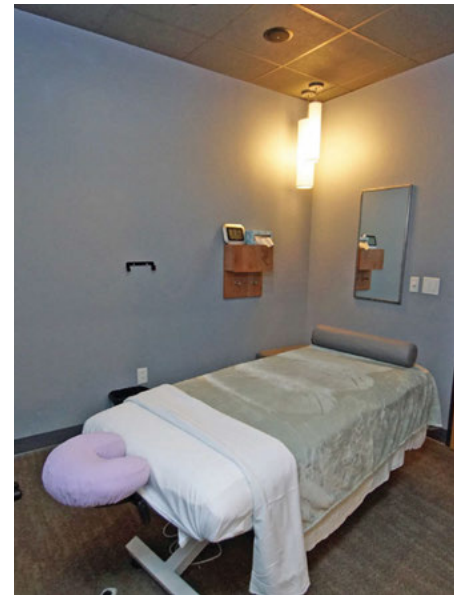


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*Massage Envy is the perfect gift this holiday season.*

— By Virginia Riddle

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Services offered include massages and stretching, skin care, 60- to 90-minute facials for men and women, back facials for

men, acne treatments and Microderm Infusion treatments. Licensed or certified estheticians can customize facials to clients’ needs with about 30-40 different options for treatments, including anti-aging treatments with Vitamin C or hydrating with anti-acne treatments.

Even the busiest of folks can fit appointments with Massage Envy into their schedules, since Lyle and his staff have hours available every day of the week. “We have 21 employees including estheticians, massage therapists with stretch credentials,



front desk associates and a site manager. Our estheticians and massage therapists are all state licensed and must take courses to stay up-to-date. All their credentials are on display," Lyle said. "Together, our team accommodates even the most challenging clients' schedules."

He works diligently to hire only the best personnel. "Everyone must value a team environment and give respect to all clients," Lyle explained. "I believe we have a very good team." Massage Envy is a member of the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce.

Payments can be made through check, cash and most major credit cards. Massage Envy also makes the perfect gift for almost any occasion through the gift cards offered.

Owning his own businesses has been Lyle's goal since he went to trade school and entered the workforce. "I've owned a janitorial business and a foster care agency," he explained. "My wife, Jakema, was a massage therapist, and I could see how rewarding massages could be. She has loving hands and always wanted to give back to the community by taking aching bodies with all types of issues and giving them a natural way of healing. A lot of people told me what I couldn't do, and that motivated me. I learned to troubleshoot in the computer world, and then I traveled the world. Then at a Christmas gathering, I met the owner of another Massage Envy location and found that this business could be very rewarding."

Lyle and Jakema braved opening Massage Envy and making their move to Waxahachie with their six children, ranging in ages from 6-18 — all on the same day last May! "We started working with the youth group at our church, Greater Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Church in Dallas. Then we adopted three boys after having fostered them. Jakema also had a daughter, so now we have six children. We moved from Red Oak and love the views from our hilltop home," Lyle said.

As minister of music at his church, Lyle enjoys using his God-given gift of music. "God's given me that and more," he said. He also loves to cook. "I cook like an old-school grandmother," he confessed.

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Brandon Burchett and Dylan Jones work on building a car during Maker Space time in the library at Ovilla Christian School.



Wooden Elementary student, Brooke Murphy, enjoys having her face painted at the 3rd Annual ROISD Han/toberfest.



Engineering students in Ferris build a table out of paper that they can actually stand on.



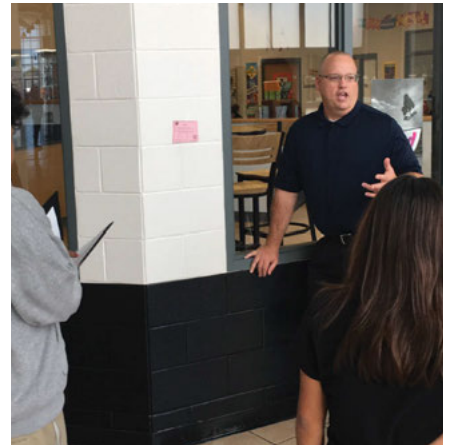
Olga Eichmann and her children, Daniel and Alex, enjoy Halloween activities at the Red Oak library.



Lt. Rick Boone, Exec. Asst. Joane Mubammad and Records Clerk Shayla Ingram accept medications as part of the Take it to the Box program.



The Durhams, Threadgills and Brad Piland are enjoying an afternoon at Ovilla's Heritage Day.



Mr. Rachel explains the math project to students. Math teachers are educating in places outside the classroom to get the students more involved in the process.



Fagan leads the Ferris Yellowjackets team onto the field.



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# The Amazing Liver

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

The largest organ inside the body reveals remarkable regenerative properties. You can lose a majority portion of your liver, and the remaining tissue can grow into a whole organ once again. Amazing! This vital organ performs numerous functions, and without it, the body would perish.

It is located in the upper right side of the abdomen and below the diaphragm. One of its more important jobs is to remove waste products from the bloodstream by performing as a filter. Drugs, alcohol and environmental substances are just a few of the substances removed or neutralized by the liver. The liver produces and regulates cholesterol and manufactures clotting factors for the blood and other proteins. It helps to maintain the balance of hormones. Making and secreting bile and storing some vitamins and minerals are among the more well-known functions. The liver also helps to regulate blood sugar levels by storing glycogen.

There are many things you can do to keep your liver healthy. Excessive intake of alcohol is the leading cause of liver disease, so drink in moderation. Use over-the-counter medications and herbal or natural remedies with caution. Your liver still has to process these, whether they are man-made or “natural.” Even high doses of certain vitamins can be harmful. Follow your physician’s instructions on any prescribed medication. Limit or avoid any exposure to environmental

hazards and toxins, such as certain cleaners and insecticides. If you can breathe it, consume it or have it penetrate your skin, it will eventually reach your liver. So, use gloves and a mask in a well-ventilated area when handling hazardous chemicals. Try to avoid foods that are high in unhealthy fats. Hepatitis A, B and C can cause significant damage to the liver, but there are vaccines available for Hepatitis A and B. Since the virus is spread by contact with another’s bodily fluids or blood, try to avoid contact with these substances.

Although it can regenerate itself, the liver is not indestructible. Some of the signs and symptoms that your liver could be headed for trouble may, at first, be too vague for a diagnosis. Nausea, weakness, lack of energy and a change in appetite can be attributed to a host of diseases. The more specific indications that are cause for alarm are yellowing of the skin, eyes and urine (jaundice). Advanced cases would present with symptoms such as unexplained itching of the skin, abdominal pain and swelling, in addition to the previous presenting symptoms.

These symptoms are cause for concern and warrant monitoring by your physician. Many liver ailments can be treated. The best course of action is to protect yourself and keep you and your liver safe. **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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### December 1 — 3, 8 — 10

Bethlehem Revisited: 6:00-9:00 p.m., 402 N. College St., Waxahachie. Take a step back in time and visit life in Bethlehem when Christ was born. Admission is free, but donations are welcome. For more information, call (972) 937-2390.

### December 2

Christmas in Red Oak: Noon-3:00 p.m., Watkins Park, Red Oak. Come and enjoy pictures with Santa, bounce houses, hay rides and more. For more information, call (469) 218-1202 or email [lmcglothlin@redoaktx.org](mailto:lmcglothlin@redoaktx.org).

### December 2 — 3, 9 — 10

Candlelight Home Tour: 2:00-8:00 p.m., Waxahachie. Visit unique homes, the Ellis County Courthouse and the Sims Library for a pleasurable viewing experience. Tickets are \$15 per weekend and can be purchased before Dec. 10 online at [www.DowntownWaxahachie.com](http://www.DowntownWaxahachie.com). Call (972) 923-4433 for more information.

### December 6

Christmas in Ovilla: 5:30-8:00 p.m., Ovilla Road Baptist Church. This is a free event for the community. Enjoy food, music and games. Bring canned foods for a local food bank. Call (972) 617-8544 for more information.

### December 7

Cooking with Natasha: 6:30-8:00 p.m., 101 Live Oak, Red Oak. Parents and children learn to make cookies, cake balls, and popcorn snacks. To reserve your place, call (972) 617-4658 or email [donna.knight@redoakisd.org](mailto:donna.knight@redoakisd.org).

The Shoestring Production presents "Frosty in Hawaii: The Play": 6:30 p.m., Red Oak Municipal Center. Call the Red Oak Library at (469) 218-1230 for more information.

### December 9

Red Oak High School Special Needs Christmas Market: 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., ROHS Cafeteria. Free admission. Pictures with Santa for a donation. Silent auction and donations benefit the Special Needs Prom.

### December 10

Native American Arts & Crafts Show: 5:00-11:00 p.m., Midlothian Civic Center, 224 S. 11th St., Midlothian. Attendees will enjoy music, jewelry, books and a market of Native American arts and crafts. For more information, call Toni Bowers at (903) 744-0305 or Alicia Alvarado at (214) 926-3995.

### December 14

Polar Express Movie Night: 6:00 p.m., Red Oak Library. Bring the children for an

enjoyable Christmas movie experience. Call (469) 218-1230 for more details.

### December 18

Red Oak Friends of the Library Social: 6:30 p.m., Red Oak Municipal Center. Find out how you can be a part of ROFL's efforts to support the library and enjoy socializing with people from the community. Email [redoakffriends@gmail.com](mailto:redoakffriends@gmail.com) for more information.

### Ongoing:

### Wednesdays and Thursdays

Red Oak Senior Citizens Group: 8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., 207 W. Red Oak Rd. Join for games and activities. Light breakfast provided both days. Lunch provided on **Thursdays**. \$2 per week membership fee. For more information, call (214) 864-9014.

*Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to [jill.martinez@nowmagazines.com](mailto:jill.martinez@nowmagazines.com).*



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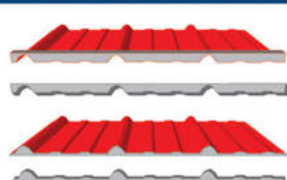
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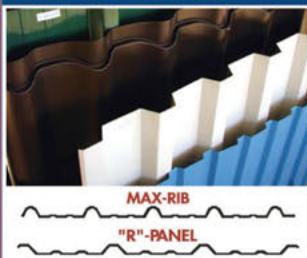
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## In the Kitchen With Jolie Crews

— *By Rachel Smith*

Like a relaxing trip to the beach, simmering foods and baking goodies are a form of reflection and rejuvenation for Jolie Crews. Cooking is a lifestyle where she is unafraid to experiment and let go of her stress — and the sweets top off her experience. “I have an unquenchable sweet tooth, so baking desserts is my specialty,” she admitted.

At 8 years old, on her dad’s birthday, she had good practice in the name of sweets. With little money and time, Jolie and her sister baked a two-layer chocolate cake, which crumbled in the process. But, her sister had an idea. “We made the chocolate icing, poured it over the crumbled layers, grabbed our LEGO farm animals and made a mudslide farm cake,” Jolie beamed. “That still gets us laughing today!” **NOW**

### Cranberry Sauce

- 1 cup sugar**
- Juice from an orange**
- 1/4 tsp. ginger, fresh or ground (optional)**
- 1 bag fresh cranberries**

- 1.** Place sugar and orange juice in a saucepan on medium heat. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Add ginger, if desired.
- 2.** Add cranberries and cover; Let simmer until all cranberries pop.
- 3.** Serve warm and runny, or refrigerate overnight for a jelly texture.

### Peanut Butter Balls

- 1/4 cup molasses**
- 1/4 cup honey**
- 1/2 cup peanut butter**
- 1 cup powdered milk**
- 1/2 cup raisins (optional)**

- 1.** Mix all ingredients together. Roll into 1-inch balls. Enjoy!

### Momo’s Pancakes/Crepes

- 1/4 cup shortening**
- 2 cups flour**
- 1 tsp. baking powder**
- 1/2 cup sugar**
- 1/2 tsp. salt**
- 2 cups milk**
- 2 eggs**
- 1 tsp. vanilla**

- 1.** Cut shortening into flour, baking powder, sugar and salt.
- 2.** Add one cup of milk at a time to the bowl; add eggs and vanilla, beating well.
- 3.** Cook in a skillet on medium-high heat.

### Pumpkin Muffins

- 1 1/2 cups sugar**
- 1 cup flour**
- 3/4 tsp. cinnamon**
- 3/4 tsp. ground cloves**
- 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg**
- 2 cups canned pumpkin puree**
- 3 large eggs**

- 3/4 cup canola oil**
- 1 1/2 tsp. vanilla**

- 1.** In a bowl, mix dry ingredients.
- 2.** In a separate bowl, mix wet ingredients.
- 3.** Combine wet and dry mixtures together; pour into muffin tins with liners.
- 4.** Bake in the oven at 325 F for 25 minutes.

### Shrimp and Pasta

- 1 lb. your choice of pasta**
- 1 stick butter**
- 1 bag pre-cooked shrimp, or preferred shrimp**
- 1/2 tsp. minced garlic**
- 2 medium tomatoes, chopped (or half a can of diced tomatoes)**
- 1 bundle fresh spinach**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**
- Red pepper flakes, to taste (optional)**

- 1.** Cook and drain pasta per package directions.
- 2.** Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat; add shrimp, garlic and tomatoes.
- 3.** Let mixture simmer for 5-10 minutes. Add spinach in the last 2 minutes.
- 4.** Combine pasta and shrimp mixture in a large bowl; add salt and pepper, to taste. Add red pepper flakes for spice, if desired.

### Tortellini Soup

- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 tsp. olive oil**
- 1 large can diced tomatoes**
- 1 can tomato sauce**
- 4 cups chicken stock**
- 1/2 tsp. dried oregano**
- 4 large fresh basil leaves**
- 1/2 tsp. dried basil**
- 1/2 block cream cheese**
- 1 bag frozen cheese tortellini**
- 1 bundle fresh spinach leaves**
- Browned ground beef, to taste (optional)**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**

- 1.** Lightly brown garlic in olive oil.
- 2.** Add tomatoes, tomato sauce, chicken stock and spices; add cream cheese.
- 3.** While cheese melts, prepare tortellini per package directions. Drain and add to sauce mixture. Add spinach; mix in beef, if desired. Add salt and pepper to taste.

**To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).**



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