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Also Inside

Fifty Years and
5,000 Children

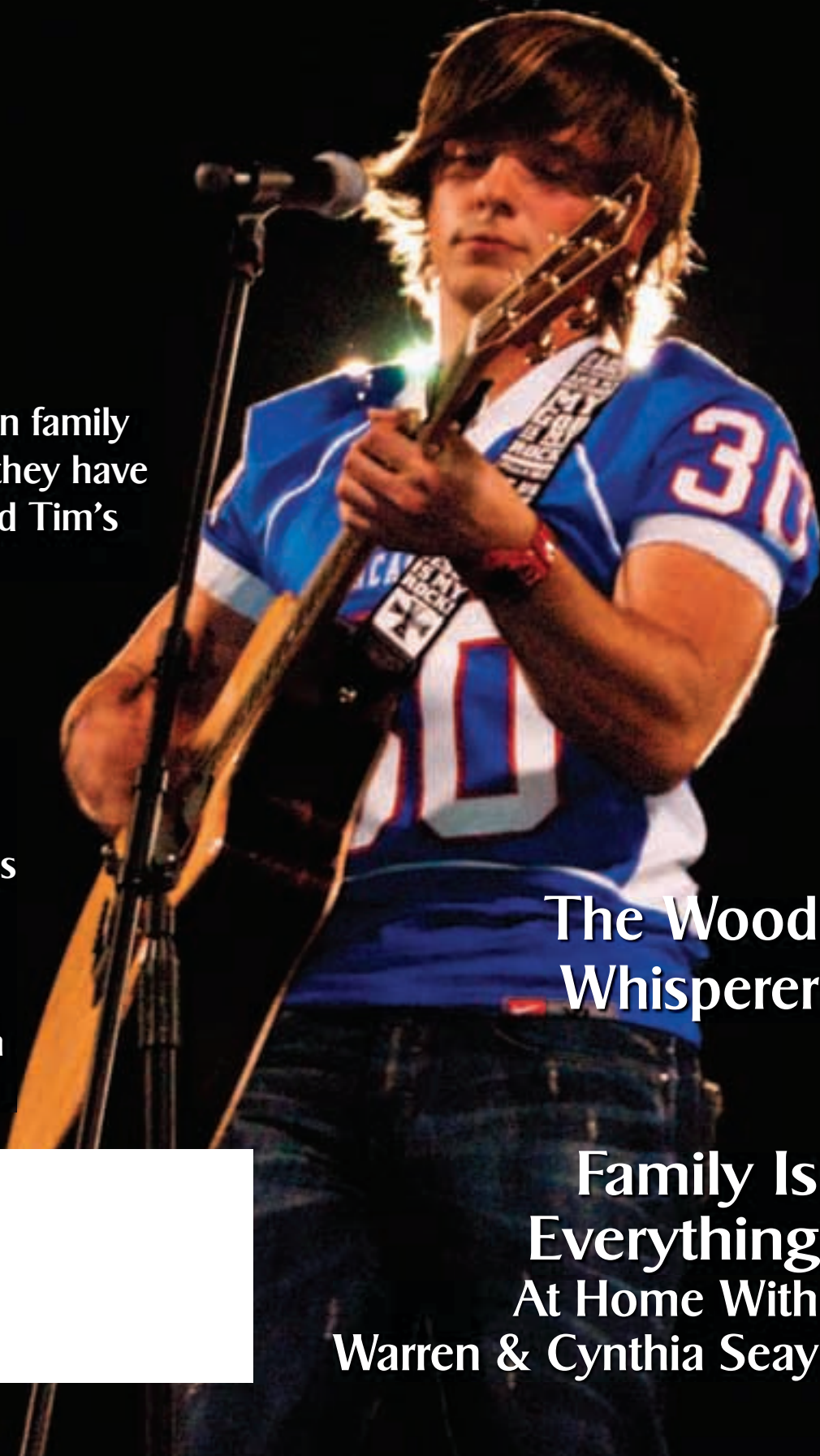
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Dr. Gayle Smith-Blair, Psychiatrist (behind); Dr. Catherine Thomas, OB/GYN;
Dr. Donald Blair, OB/GYN (behind); Sharon Roberts WHNP;
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On The Cover



Tim Urban plays for the hometown crowd at Duncanville High School's opening football game.

Photo by Opaque Visuals.

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Editor's Note

Happy Valentine's Day, Southwest Friends,

February 14 brings thoughts of love to mind. We think of people, budding romances, weddings and mushy cards adorned with ridiculous little cherubs flying around bearing hearts, ribbons and flowers.

Other days throughout the month with special observances are: 1st - National Freedom Day; 2nd - Groundhog Day; 3rd - The day the music died (commemorating Buddy Holly's death in 1959); 4th - Your mailman; 5th - Weathermen; 7th - Waving *all* your fingers at your neighbors; 13th - Getting a different name; 16th - Doing a favor for a grouch; 17th - Perpetrating random acts of kindness; and on the 22nd - Choose either to be humble or participate in international world thinking.

February is also the American Heart Month — to keep those romances going, take care of your heart! And lastly, whoever designates months and days decided February is National Grapefruit, Creative Weddings and Canned Food Month.

Don't forget to give those clever cards to your special loves!

Beverly

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Fifty Years and 5,000 Children

— By Sydni Thomas

Five decades of marriage and over 5,000 children later, Ray and Sharon Ashley are not making plans to retire anytime soon. In 1979, the Ashleys founded Ashleys Private School in Cedar Hill. Thousands of children have come through their lives over the years, and they lead their school as if each child is the most precious investment that a parent can make.

Before it became Ashleys Private School it was Cedar Hill Day School. Two previous owners had run it as a day care facility. Cedar Hill was a small town of 6,000 where everyone knew each other's names. The city had more cows than people, and the only stores were mom-and-pop shops. "We started with just four rooms and 47 children," Sharon

said. "Now we go through the fifth grade and have over 200."

"When we opened, it was primarily childcare," Ray said. "We noticed some

That is when we decided to start doing grade levels and have an actual school."

The school has grown significantly in the last 30 years. Twenty-two teachers

lead preschool through the fifth grade. Most of the kindergartners are reading by Christmastime, if not in prekindergarten. "The teachers are the school," Ray said. "It's not the building or the classrooms."

"I'm a real advocate of letting them read when they are ready to," Sharon



reading skills and things were lacking, which were causing the older children to have problems doing their homework.

said. "The one thing we stress being a private school is working individually with the students and taking them as far as

they can go while also loving them. All children deserve to be loved."

As they built the school, Ray wanted its foundation to be built on the same idea as the one-room schoolhouse. Each class is kept small so that each child receives the attention he or she needs. "When I was a child that is all we had," Ray remembered. "Everyone learned in the same room. I view each individual classroom here as a school."

"I love being in a small school," Sharon added. "I've taught in big schools, but



with a small school you know everyone's name. When you know a child by name you can learn more about them, and you are closer to them."

Education has played a large role in the Ashleys' lives. In fact, they had quite a few experiences prior to ending up at Ashleys Private School. Not surprisingly, their story began in a schoolhouse. Ray and Sharon grew up in the same town and even went to the same high school but were only casual acquaintances. Only when they were both attending Oklahoma State University (OSU) did they form an acquaintanceship, which became a friendship and later turned into love. Sharon conned Ray into serving a dinner for her sorority, and despite his clumsiness, he made it through the dinner. After that, the two finally started dating. "I wanted to make sure he was what I wanted," Sharon said.

"She used to bum a ride home with me on the weekends from Oklahoma State," Ray said. "But I charged her a dollar each time so I could have gas money. That was the platonic part of our relationship."

Ray relocated to a job in Sweetwater, Texas, after graduating from OSU. He

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did not propose to Sharon until after she graduated from college in 1960. "He sent me a picture of this horrible looking shack in Sweetwater and told me that we were going to live there," Sharon said. "I almost backed out right then." The couple was married that November and lived in Sweetwater only a couple of months before Ray's job had them moving again.

When the gypsum company Ray worked for in Sweetwater broke ground in Iowa, they packed their bags. From there they came back to Texas, and Ray



got into the aerospace industry. As an engineer working on the Apollo project, Ray's job kept them moving around to Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Washington. "Apollo was a highlight," Ray said. "When the project ended, they farmed 30 engineers out to Seattle, Washington, and we worked on 747s. From there, we went back to Tulsa and then to St. Louis." Prior to their last move back to Texas, they lived in Colorado and worked in the restaurant management industry.

"I have a collection of teacher's certificates," Sharon said. "I learned to pack up pretty good. Our oldest daughter didn't finish a single grade in the same school she started until the fifth grade. It didn't hurt her any though."

The Ashleys have two daughters. Dr. Shawn Ashley, the oldest daughter, graduated from Texas A&M and is a veterinarian at Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in Dallas. She has two master's degrees, a doctorate and has gone back to school to study infectious diseases. Michelle Emmert, their youngest child, teaches at the school. After graduating from

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Abilene Christian University, she joined her parents at the school and has taught just about every grade level. Michelle's husband, Wade, also graduated from Abilene Christian and Baylor Law School and practices law in Dallas.

Michelle and Wade's two sons, Walker and Will, light up their grandparents' lives. Both boys have been students of Ashley's Private School. Walker graduated from the fifth grade last year and Will is now in the second grade. "Walker doesn't get far from Ray," Sharon said. "They talk math

***"When you know
a child by name
you can learn
more about them,
and you are closer
to them."***

and sports. And Will is our little artist."

Walker has laid claim to Ray's vintage 1941 Ford truck, which has become a fixture at the school. Each day, it is parked out front with the school's logo. Those passing by stop from time-to-time to talk with Ray about his truck and pose for pictures. Ray had it converted into a street rod, and the couple drives it to the school each day in fair weather. "I had to get electric windows, air conditioning and a CD player put into it," Ray said. "If I didn't, Sharon probably wouldn't ride along with me."

"Ray's truck is his joy. It's his pride, and you don't touch it," Sharon said. "I will not drive it."

The Ashley's have dedicated 30 years of their 50-year marriage to the school and showing their students what it means to be a family. Currently, the school has 14 second- and third-generation students. Sharon taught many of their parents and grandparents. "The best part of our job is when a student comes back to show us what they've done with their lives," Sharon said. "Each child has blessed us." **NOW**

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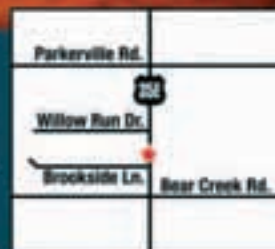
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Replenishing Hopes and Dreams

— By Antoinette Nevils

Making a difference by pushing issues that can improve the community is Lee Merryman's job and daily goal. "I am always looking for grants that serve the community," Lee said. "This is something needed for the community." Lee moved to the DeSoto Independent School District (ISD) to manage a grant. Two years ago, she became the grant coordinator and wrote a special grant, which started a unique program that has not only improved the community, but is also part of an issue that is affecting the nation.



With the help of Lee and other DeSoto ISD colleagues, the Where I Now Gain Success Dropout Recovery Program (WINGS) was formed. WINGS was created to help young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who have dropped out of a Texas public school finish their coursework and earn their high school diploma. WINGS is not just a program providing education. This is a program where young people can replenish their hopes and dreams.

The goal of the program is to provide students with an opportunity to earn the credits and skills needed for a high school diploma and beyond. Students are allowed to work at their own pace and as their schedules allow. The program offers basic subject classes, as well as computer programs, dual credit, tutoring, job and career fairs, college entrance counseling and

financial aid assistance. The center also provides free child care during classes, area transportation, family and substance abuse counseling and mentoring.

Lee had no problem proposing her grant to the superintendent, teachers and community-based organizations. All were on board. "The community has been behind us, and has been instrumental in our success," Lee stated. She hired great retired teachers and DeSoto ISD staff to teach and run the programs, including Jane Koch, Kathy Goad and Linda Murphree. "The staff has been fabulous — so excited about the program. They see the kids work hard and are determined," Lee shared smiling. "They are committed to the program."

WINGS received the funding from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in August 2010 with a \$100,000 grant. Since their start-up, the TEA made a visit to the center and nominated it as a model school for state dropout recovery programs. "I was happy to get it done

"We want people who care about young people, to encourage them to stay in school, talk about life and help them through problems."

this quickly," Lee said. "We are doing so well. They wanted to make us a model school after three weeks." This is a huge honor for Lee and her staff, as they hope this will draw support and sponsors. Next year, the school will only be funded by donations, sponsors and average daily attendance record funding from the state government.

At the heart of WINGS are its beneficiaries. The students have a variety of backgrounds and reasons for their high school departure, but all have a common goal now to receive their diploma and finish what they started. Many realized it was too difficult without a diploma or felt it was still needed. "These students come back ready to work," Lee shared. "We have a lot of interesting students — lots of different types of stories." Lee even shared how one of their students was an actor in Los Angeles and came back home to enroll in



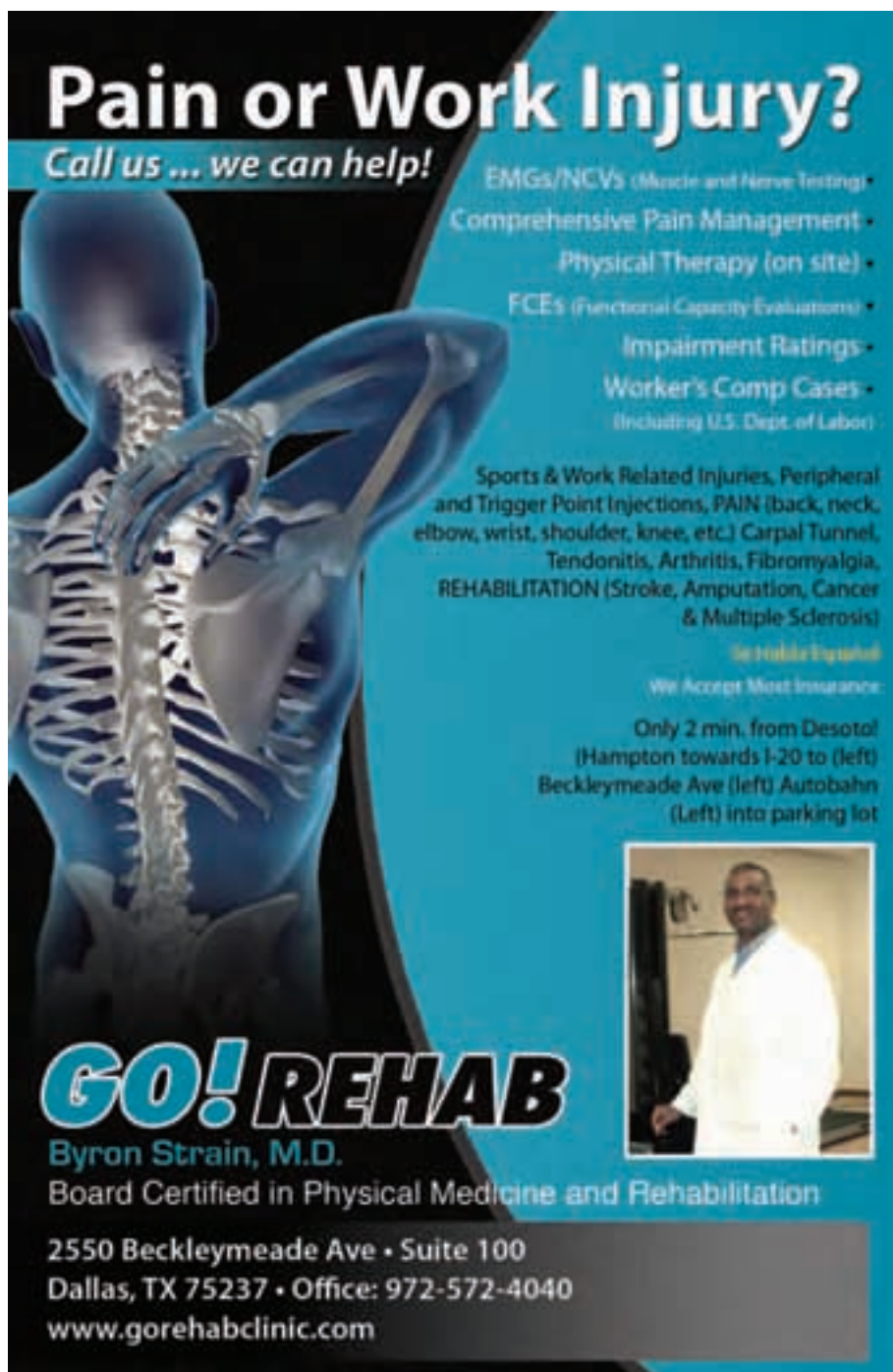
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WINGS. He turned down a role from a major TV network in order to finish his education.

Another star student in the program is Varri Harrison, age 19, who enrolled in WINGS in October. Originally from New Orleans, she is a Hurricane Katrina survivor who moved to DeSoto. After having issues with depression, she left high school during her senior year to take time off. She heard about the program from a friend and quickly enrolled. "I want to be successful and get my high school diploma, so I can continue on with my modeling career," Varri said. She is not only enrolled in WINGS, but she is also enrolled in a modeling school in



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Dallas. Lee and the staff describe Varri as a hard worker who comes in daily at 8:00 a.m. for coursework and leaves around 3:00 p.m. They believe this will take her to a quick graduation date. Varri enjoys the staff and the program, as well. "I love it. You don't have to rush, and you have tutorials to help you. No excuse not to pass," Varri explained. "I'm making great progress." Varri's plan is to finish the program so she can fully commit to her career choice.

The center usually gets about one new student a week and currently has 50 enrolled. Lee thought the center would have a slow admission rate, but students have been streaming in since August. "We pulled records and started calling students who dropped out about the program," Lee explained. Teenagers and those within the age limit interested in the program can continue to enroll anytime throughout the year.

Since students decide their own schedule and pace, their graduation depends on how often they attend classes, where they started in the program and how hard they work. A classic, cap-and-gown



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Board works to balance budget with possible state funding cuts

After four years of utilizing the fund balance to offset a deficit budget, DeSoto ISD Board and administration are working hard to trim an additional \$2.9 million from current expenses to present a balanced budget for the 2011-12 school year. Unfortunately, that may not be enough! With the Texas Legislature needing to reduce their expenses by \$27 billion, funding of public education is likely to be reduced. This would mean the district would need to further reduce the budget.

How did we get here?

The state funding formula put all districts on a fixed revenue income based on 2006; no inflationary increases; no additional revenue based on property taxes.

As fixed expenses increased, DeSoto ISD, like many districts, used their savings (fund balance) to make ends meet.

Reductions in expenses and savings measures have meant less of a dip into savings over the past several years, but we are dangerously close to dipping below the state's acceptable level.

The last two years have included administrative and campus reductions in staff, travel and materials, as well as savings in electricity and trash collections.

So what is expected to be cut?

Some positions will be eliminated and people reassigned if possible; those are primarily at schools exceeding staffing ratios and additional paraprofessional positions.

Contract days and benefits for employees could be reduced to cut costs.

Some programs could be eliminated or reduced in scope for savings.

Continued savings measures for operations will be explored including utilities.

For more details, visit the district Web site at www.desotoisd.org



In Memorium of Sharon Starnes

School Board President Sharon Starnes will long be remembered for her tenacity to do right by the students of DeSoto ISD. She joined her beloved husband Kenneth in heaven on January 7, 2011, after a lengthy battle with cancer.

Mrs. Starnes has long been an advocate for public education having served on the DeSoto Board of Trustees since May 2002. She was a Life Member of the Texas PTA and a member of the Texas School Board Black Caucus Association. A Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE), she received the President's Award and Planner of the Year from the Society of Government Meeting Professionals and the President's Award from the Concerned DeSoto Citizens group. A graduate of Texas Tech University, she obtained her Masters from Texas Woman's University.

Her favorite gospel lyric reflects how she lived her life - "If I could help someone along the way, then my work has not been done in vain."

Her son Rainey, who graduated from DeSoto High School, is currently at Stephen F. Austin University and son Ryan is currently a junior at DHS. Husband Kenneth Starnes, died last year from complications with an illness. We extend our heartfelt sympathy to her family.

*When the Lord calls our loved ones home, he leaves a gift of memories in exchange.
What a fight she has fought. What a peace she must feel.*

calendar of events

Feb. 14, 28; March 28, April 11, 25 - Board Meetings, DeSoto ISD Board Room

February 14 - Board Candidate packets available for pickup

February 21 - Staff Development Day; No School

March 1-4 - TAKS Testing (various grades and subjects)

March 7-11 - Celebrate Texas Public Schools Week

March 14-18 - Spring Break

March 26 - Education Foundation Gala and Auction

April 22 - Teacher Prep Day; No School

May 2-13 - District Transfer Request Period (intra-district requests for 2011-12)

May 30 - Memorial Day Holiday

June 2 - Last Day of School

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graduation ceremony is held every semester for students who finish the program. Afterward, students have the skills needed to move on to the next step in life. For example, Aaron MacKenzie, another WINGS student and Lee's mentee, plans to join the Army after he graduates. "I also want to go to college, study business and move to Los Angeles to start a business," Aaron shared.

Lee explained most students seek to join the military and attend community colleges after graduating. "We are pushing



for beyond college," Lee emphasized.

The program also recruits mentors to support the students in all areas, including friendship. Mentors visit students once a week and most are usually community and business leaders in the area. "We want people who care about young people, to encourage them to stay in school, talk about life and help them through problems," Lee said.

The center has gained great tangible support and donations, including computers. These items allow small classes, independent study and tutoring to run smoothly and efficiently. "We don't have a lot of money for the program, so we are looking for volunteers and retired teachers," Lee explained. WINGS also accepts individual donations of items on the center's wish list.

WINGS is not alone. According to an ABC news report, President Barack Obama called the U.S. dropout rate a "crisis" in America and announced in March that he plans to grant \$900 million to school districts and state governments. Two students graduated with their diploma from WINGS last year, and several more graduated in January. The WINGS program is not just changing the lives of young people in DeSoto, but is also part of a plan to change the future of an entire nation. **NOW**

Editor's Note: For more information on the WINGS program, contact Lee Merryman at lmerryman@desotoisd.org.

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A large photograph of Tim Urban performing on stage. He is wearing a blue and white football jersey with the number 30 and is playing an acoustic guitar. A microphone is in front of him.

An American URBAN LEGEND

— By Beverly Shay

The saying goes, “Behind every good man is a good woman.” In the case of American Idol semi-finalist Tim Urban, behind this successful young man is an entire family. Indeed, it took their “village” to raise him. One of the many outstanding characteristics of the Urban family is their understated ordinariness — none of them, including Tim, take themselves too seriously or consider themselves of exceptional importance. Yet every one of them is confidently aware of their unique, irrefutable worth. The family exudes security, self-confidence, complete support and obvious respect for one another.



“Of course, I am proud of Tim. I was proud of him before the *American Idol* adventure. I am proud of all our kids,” his mother, Doris, remarked. “We’re excited for him, but this wasn’t really a ‘life-changing’ event for any of us.”

At Duncanville’s opening football game, David Urban, unrecognized as Tim’s father, was asked what he thought of Tim. David responded, “He’s OK.” As to parenting “a rising star,” David replied: “Our goal in raising all of our children has been to train them every way we can to be disciples of Jesus,

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not us. They're on loan from God to us. Their heavenly Father is my heavenly Father. My children are my brothers and sisters in Christ. My wife and I have sought to teach our kids to understand who they are and to know they can hear God's voice. That is what they need, and they need to know it from God Himself."

As his children mature, David has no regrets. "Life is too short for regrets. We aren't part of their training anymore; we wait until they ask for input. I would never tell them who to pick for a spouse or what career to pursue. Really, the secret of parenting is to see it as on-the-job training." Then you watch them follow their gifting and goals.

David and Doris, who moved their family from the state of Washington to Duncanville, Texas, in 1996, have been parenting for quite a while and have 10 children ranging from 14-31 years of age. All have been homeschooled, two are married, two are in the military and all are tight with each other. Although none of the children have had formal music lessons, they all seem to be able to "pick it up" — David, three sons and two daughters play guitar, three daughters and Tim play some piano and two sons play the djembe drum. The only voice coaching Tim ever received was on the show.

Tim's brother, Philip, a Marine sergeant currently serving in Afghanistan, who has also served in Iraq, figures Tim's success is because of his hair — spoken like a true older brother. "I encouraged Tim to pursue his passion," Philip remarked. "Being deployed, I couldn't really keep track of his progress, didn't know when he passed his audition and got on the show, but my company kept track of him, and I watched online as time allowed." Philip, like Tim and all their siblings, feels their homeschooling and childhood training was the absolute best. "We were given a firm grounding, so we each know who we are. We grew up in a loving home with a great relationship with our parents and plenty of social interaction. Our parents supported our decisions about what we wanted to pursue in life," Philip stated.

Tim's oldest brother, David, a second


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lieutenant, recently graduated from the Air Force Academy. "David always wanted to go to the Academy and fly. He is stationed in Del Rio, Texas, awaiting flight school," Doris remarked.

Gathered in the family room (every room in their home is a family room), the Urban family chuckled, cajoled and guided Tim through interview questions with easy camaraderie. Jedediah, the youngest at 14, functioned as self-appointed press secretary. Tim sat back, relaxed, waiting to hear what misinformation his brother might spout, although he mostly agreed with what "Ninja" (Jedediah's nickname) said.

Tim's commentary included remarks on his faith, being homeschooled, favorite books and movies, advice, mistakes, turning points and epitaphs. "The most important thing in my life is my relationship with Christ. I gave my life to God after a bad dream I had as a young child. Then, at 15 or 16, having been raised in a Christian home with godly, biblical training, I came to a real personal commitment to Him," Tim began. "For my epitaph ..." Tim paused, "I wouldn't want it to say anything about my career — maybe just that I loved God, my family and friends.

"Some of the best times of my life have involved traveling: with my family and on my own with others. Traveling gives a better perspective of the world. Others struggle with the same issues we do — the realities of life. Different places affected me differently: Europe seemed so dark spiritually with a great need for Christ. The relief trip I took to South Africa really impacted me. Life isn't all about me," Tim reflected.

"If I were to describe myself, I would have to say homeschooling defined me. It's always interesting to bring that up publicly because of people's assumptions and misconceptions. My

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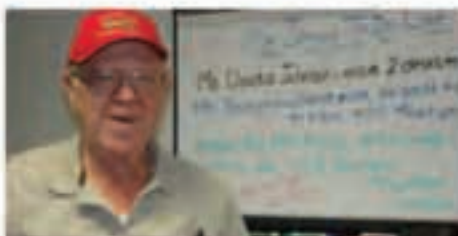
The list of job duties for Duncanville ISD bus driver Jerry Waddell includes picking up students from their morning stops and transporting them to school safely and on time. But Jerry adds more to-do's to that list every day at his final stop of the morning, Merrifield Elementary.

A bus driver by trade and a handyman by choice, Mr. Waddell has been volunteering at Merrifield Elementary for the past five and a half years. "He helps in many ways," says Principal Linda Bennett, "from placing mail in the teachers' boxes to helping with cafeteria duty." A retiree, he says he had free time in between his morning and afternoon bus routes. "I went inside to talk to Ms. Bennett one day, and we got to talking about how I just went home after my morning shift. She suggested that if I would come over to Merrifield she would put me to work."

This simple conversation has led to a lasting relationship with students and staff. "When I first started working cafeteria duty, there was a kindergartener who used to always order a baked potato. I gave her the nickname of Tater, and she's now in the fourth grade. Every time that she sees me, she runs up and gives me a hug. It feels good to have kids think that highly of me."

Mr. Waddell's relationships with students are strengthened by his ever-increasing involvement in school activities such as PTA. A familiar face around Merrifield Elementary, Mr. Waddell says that there is nowhere else he'd rather be. "It's very rewarding to watch kids learn and grow. That's why we're in this business."

For his efforts to not only transport students to school safely, but also to make sure that they have every opportunity to learn while there, we honor Jerry Waddell as a "Red and Blue - Is It In You?" recipient.



Duncanville ISD Community Invited to Attend the Tom and Verda Shine Performance Hall Dedication Sunday, February 27, 2011 Duncanville High School 2:00 PM

Duncanville ISD Celebrates Black History Month!

Visit our website to view photo galleries and read about engaging lessons that celebrate the achievements of African

Americans throughout history. Bilhartz Elementary (pictured right) began their month-long celebration in January by honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. with banners, writing contests, and history lessons.



The Duncanville ISD Board of Trustees (seated, l to r) Dorothy Robertson, Vice President, President Louis S. McElroy, Secretary Dr. Deborah Harris, and Board Members (standing l to r) Superintendent Dr. Alfred Ray, Vice President Marlene Pongery, and Phil McElroy.

Celebrating Duncanville ISD Board of Trustees

January was School Board Recognition Month, and more than 100 students, parents, and staff members turned out at last month's School Board meeting to help say "Thank You!" Our dedicated leaders were presented with songs, poems, speeches, videos, and special student demonstrations. View photo and video galleries at www.duncanvilleisd.org.

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greatest 'lack' was organized sports, but looking at my friends, I think all I missed was broken bones."

"But you did break your collar bone," several siblings inserted simultaneously.

Following conversations may be a bit hard for an outsider, but the family seems able to carry on several without dropping an opportunity for humor, sarcasm or loving mockery. And yet, they all listened with respect, affirmation and agreement as Tim spoke of the home they have all shared. "Some of the best advice I ever received," continued Tim, "was from my dad. I told him I wanted to be a pastor, and he asked why. He told me, 'We need more Christians in the world, where the field is. The opportunity is outside the pulpit. Share Christ outside of that,'" Tim nodded at his dad,



obviously acknowledging he still finds that advice sound.

"You have to keep doing what you want, even when it is hard. For me, the hardest part was making myself perform — to actually do what I had thought about. That's the only way to truly know if you want to do what you think you do." Tim has recorded an album and plans to pursue more music and acting opportunities.

Tim's sister, Abby, believes Tim gets his sense of humor from them, and said: "We refined it."

Doris believes they all contribute to his stability, and his sister, Gabby, summed up the family's feelings: "*American Idol* didn't change Tim."

To which Tim replied, "I didn't have to maintain an image. I knew God would have me on that stage just as long as He wanted me there." **NOW**



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Family Is Everything — By Beverly Shay

At Home With Warren and Cynthia Seay



In a beautiful, two-story DeSoto home, resides a family of five of the most loving people around. Hailing from rural northeastern Louisiana, Warren and Cynthia Seay met in high school, where he was an all-state football running back and she was a cheerleader. They dated their senior year and married while they were both in college: he at Louisiana Tech in Ruston and she at Northeast Louisiana University, now called The University of Louisiana at Monroe. The love they still share is the trademark of their family, and it is evident their children caught the same bug.

The focal point of their spacious, high-ceilinged home and their lives together is the family room at the back of the house. A large leather wraparound couch faces an ivory-colored stone fireplace and the TV, where sports are usually the programs of choice. "We had the hardwood floors put in here and in the



formal rooms," Cynthia remarked. The rich wood is a fitting counterpoint to the 18-foot ceiling, open winding staircase and arched openings to the kitchen.

Together the two rooms are the scene of much entertaining. "I am rather known for my famous gumbo and jambalaya," Warren stated with no sign of humility. Snickers from his three children and wife were quickly followed by agreement. Tall cabinets, lots of counter space and bar stools at the counter beneath the arches make it easy to envision the bantering that accompanies their many gatherings.

Much as love has marked Warren and Cythnia's relationship, football has marked Warren's entire life. Youngest son, Cord, a senior, has followed in his footsteps as an all-district and all-state linebacker on the DeSoto High School (DHS) varsity football team. He is looking forward to attending college, hopefully Georgetown, on a football scholarship. He plans to major in broadcast communication. "I'd like to work for ESPN or Rivals.com as a sports analyst," he admitted quietly.

Diamond, 23, and Warren Jr., 22, known fondly as June Bug — a name he does not mind — recalled their early childhood in Louisiana. "We spent a lot of time with my grandmother because we lived in Monroe, where Dad taught, but went to school in Collinston, where she lived," Diamond reminisced. "School was very family-oriented because we were related to everyone."

"That meant a lot of expectation on us," began Warren Jr. "But it was also

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very close-knit.” June, as his mom and dad prefer to call him, also spoke of his closeness with his sister. “We’re only 15 months apart, so I did everything she did. We’re really tight as a family, and this helped when we moved to DeSoto.”

The family made the move in 1997, following Cynthia’s job offer from CTX Mortgage Company in Dallas. “That didn’t come soon enough for me,” added Warren, who is a football coach and teacher at Irving High School. “I wish we had moved here seven years earlier!”

Soon they became active members of



Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Dallas, led by Pastor Paul E. Walker. “Christ is the center of our lives,” Cynthia stated.

“DeSoto was different,” Dyamond admitted. “But mostly because there were no cousins here! But we adjusted quickly; the city is quite family-oriented.” Dyamond excelled in school, academically and athletically. “I was pretty quiet, but athletic. In junior high, I was a cheerleader, ran track and played basketball. In high school, it was track and basketball.”

“You were also very smart,” interjected Warren Jr. proudly. “She graduated



number 16 out of 464.”

Dyamond, a Soaring Eagle Award recipient, graduated from DHS in 2005, with a track scholarship to the University of Colorado at Boulder, where she ran track all four years and joined a sorority: Alpha Kappa Alpha. “We did a lot of community service, mentored high school girls and did a reading program called Read with the Buffs — our team was the Buffaloes.”

Back in DeSoto, Dyamond followed in her mother’s footsteps by working for a mortgage company. “My degree is in integrative physiology (kinesiology), and I want to go to grad school for physical

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therapy,” she mentioned somewhat shyly. “But I never want to move out. I love living at home with my whole family!”

This home was two years old when the Seay family moved into it in 2005, adding a covered patio to expand their entertainment area. “This is definitely the hang-out place for our children and all their friends. We have fish fries on Fridays and barbecues on Saturdays,” began Cynthia, everyone nodding with enthusiasm.

“About the only thing we don’t have here,” said Warren, “is room for my horses. I’ve had four or five horses over the last 10 years.” Warren sighed with contentment. “I really do love horses. They provide my therapy. When I am with them, I don’t have a care in the world. Right now, I board my beautiful Palomino in Ovilla.”

As Warren Jr. told his story, he scootched a bit closer to his mom, “I’m not an athlete like my dad, sister and brother,” he admitted. “I take after my mom’s love for music and the arts.” Senior class president and one of the top 10 graduates of DHS in 2006, Warren Jr. also played French horn in the Eagle Band. In May 2010, as a member of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, he graduated *summa cum laude* from Southern Methodist University with a degree in political

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science, having attended on the Hunt Leadership Scholarship. In August, he began Dedman School of Law. "I hope to practice property or entertainment/sports law. Maybe I will represent my brother," he remarked.

Upstairs, the bedrooms each reflect the inclinations of the Seay children. Dyamond's is pink and ivory, with a high bed perched above drawers. An entire wall is lined with medals she has won in track. Mixed in is her Miss DeSoto High School crown ('05), a DHS bear and photos of her travels with friends. "I love to travel and have a good time," Dyamond confessed. The upstairs bathroom is decorated in frogs, clearly influenced by Dyamond's loyalty to her sorority.



Almost every room of their home is *full* of trophies, awards and commendations for all three children. The Seay family undoubtedly knows how to celebrate each other. However, the upstairs sitting room, overlooking the family room below, features the "official" wall of achievements and awards. Many video game wars were waged here, but now Cynthia watches the government channel to keep up with Warren Jr.'s participation as a trustee on the DeSoto school board, where he helps oversee budgets and school evaluations.

The home, while decorated with many lovely things, is truly a showcase of a family who lives for and relishes celebrating each other. When you walk away, you are much more impacted by who they are than what they have. **NOW**

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THE WOOD WHISPERER

— By Beverly Shay

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the ear of the listener and the hands of the craftsman. Eric Staalsen enjoys beauty on all three levels almost daily. Eric is an artist, a musician and a craftsman who builds bass guitars from some of the most exquisite woods to be found. "Growing up I always had the talent for drawing, painting and even sculpting. I did murals and artwork at churches and in friends' homes. I knew one day I would create wonderful pieces of art, but I never thought they'd be instruments," Eric remarked, both humbled and awed at what his interests and skills have produced.

Eric was born in 1973, the youngest of four boys, in the city of Wewak, Papua New Guinea, where his parents were missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators. Around the age of 7, his family moved to Duncanville, where Eric attended Fair Meadows Elementary and Byrd Middle School and graduated from Duncanville High School in 1992. "Music wasn't something that was pushed in our home, but my mother always had a piano,



"I listen to the wood as I shape it, seeking to find its tone and notes."



played well and even gave me lessons. But I never really 'got into music' until I joined band at Byrd, playing tuba. Learning to read bass clef made moving on to bass guitar logical," remarked Eric, who stayed with the school band program until 10th grade. "I even got to march in the Rose Bowl Parade!"

In high school, Eric and his best friend decided to form a Christian rock band. With Eric on bass and singing, Roger on guitar and singing and two other guys on drums and lead guitar, the band recorded a demo CD at Cedar Valley College, played in several band contests and even in some clubs in Deep Ellum. "Roger asked if I would be interested in joining a music program run by a group called YWAM (Youth With A Mission), to tour in a Christian rock band through Ireland. In the summer of '94, we went first to Billings, Montana, to meet the other band members, and then we were off



to Ireland — one of the most amazing experiences of my lifetime," Eric recalled.

Since childhood, Eric had been disassembling and reassembling everything — something that carried over into his musical travels, as he took apart his basses and soldered in new pickups and refinished them. "Little did I realize this would lead to the conception of Staalsen Custom Guitars! I spent years reading and studying over 20 books on how most of the major guitar and bass manufacturers built their instruments. I never got to apprentice with a master luthier (one who repairs and makes stringed instruments), but all I studied and learned by trial and error culminated in my guitar-building style.

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by doing. Even as I began to build, I have continued to participate in several online bass guitar forums. We discuss and share our building and construction processes, to learn from each other and help others avoid pitfalls in the art of luthiery," Eric stated. Just recently, Eric met and arranged to apprentice under Master Luthier Pavel de la Fuente of Haltom City, who has been building basses for over 25 years.

Eric sees a bass guitar as an extension of the musician. Because he invests hours speaking with his clients and gaining an understanding of their playing style and technique, he can custom tailor an instrument to their unique artistic expression, as well as arm length.



"My years spent in pool design and construction, as well as landscape architecture have equipped me in designing and constructing instruments. My first guitar was a kit, a great way to see what goes into an instrument. I was immediately addicted," he admitted. "In 2007, my wife convinced me I needed to pursue this passion. We converted the garage into a complete woodworking shop. Before long, I had developed four basic models, but I also work with any design a client may come up with. While I still work my full-time day job, I hope sometime soon to be able to indulge in my craftsmanship full time."

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Dallas, Eric has either purchased or designed all the equipment and tools he needs. After drawing up meticulous designs on AutoCAD, he chooses various pieces of wood.

The neck is the first section of the guitar built, which is usually made of several laminated pieces of different woods — each type of wood has different tonal characteristics. To play jazz, you might choose a deeper, denser wood. “Guitars are both stringed and percussive instruments,” Eric explained. To the neck he adds the wings, again, usually constructed from a variety of woods. “I made one with 13 types of wood, placing the denser wood in the center of the laminated wings.” Once the wings are in place, the next step is to route the neck for the adjustable truss rods that will prevent the neck from bowing to the pull of the strings. The fret board is then glued on and the neck shaped by hand with a rasp. “I listen to the wood as I shape it, seeking to find its tone and notes. I let it whisper to me, which is a real joy,” Eric divulged. “Each guitar is intrinsically unique — in sound and style.”

Fret wire is pressed into pre-calibrated grooves made by a fret saw at precise scale intervals. Eric’s home-made bevel file creates edges and the frets are sanded down. Next, he uses a drill and router to create a control cavity on the back and for the pickup on the front. The pitch and angle of the neck in relation to the body determine the sustainability of the notes, as well as how it is strung. Balancing neck and body style and weight is crucial.

Hours and hours go into sanding and finishing with clear coat painting, tongue oil or lacquer spray finish. “Start to finish involves three layers of building, depending on the hardware. Because I work at this part time, I can finish a guitar in about three to four months, including wood curing time, or about 140 hours, depending on the complexity and number of woods used and length of curing.”

Once completed, it is time for a test play. Holding one of his hand-shaped works of art and strumming out its music, he and those around him inevitably get lost in its beauty.

Editors note: To see his amazing handiwork visit staalsencustomguitars.com 

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From left:

Viola Ortega, Dr. Tenny and Brenda Navarrete.



The Joint Guy

Dr. Tenny personally evaluates every patient with a thorough examination and honest recommendation of a personalized treatment plan.

— By Beverly Shay

Dr. John Tenny, an orthopedic surgeon for 25 years, specializes in shoulder and knee arthroscopy and arthritis. “We are now able to accomplish many things, which used to involve long hospital stays, through day surgeries with less pain and a quicker recovery period,” remarked Dr. Tenny. In arthroscopy, two small incisions are made. The one for the arthroscope provides vision for the doctor by transmitting the view of the joint onto a computer screen. The other incision allows the doctor to insert surgical instruments to complete repairs. Because the joint is not opened up fully, less trauma occurs in the connective tissue.

“Many things can cause joint problems: body weight, injury, tearing, hereditary conditions and natural deterioration due

to aging, such as the cartilage wearing out or spur formation and arthritis,” explained Dr. Tenny. Anyone can suffer joint problems, but they are more common as we age.

Dr. Tenny has a state-of-the-art office with two very friendly employees — Brenda Navarrete, R.N., who has been with him since 1991, and Viola Ortega, M.A., who has been with him three years. “I have two employees who work as much as four.” The office with its three exam rooms also features photos taken by Dr. Tenny and interior decoration provided by his wife, Beth.

“We feel like part of the family,” commented Brenda, as Viola nodded.

Dr. Tenny grew up on the outskirts of Kansas City, Missouri, and completed his undergraduate studies and medical schooling

Business **NOW**

at the University of Missouri in Columbia. He spent his residency from 1980-85 at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Lubbock campus. From 1985 to early 2010, Dr. Tenny maintained his private practice in Lancaster. Because the hospital in Lancaster closed two years ago, Dr. Tenny brought his office closer to Methodist Charlton Medical Center, where he conducts many of his surgeries. His new location opened on September 1, 2010.

"The medical advances in orthopedics, with new procedures and improved implants, make it an exciting field to work in," remarked Dr. Tenny. While he treats broken bones, his area of expertise is shoulder and knee arthroscopy. "Every decade the arthroscopy instruments and implants improve."

Dr. Tenny also does total joint replacement with implants that are also improving. Formerly, implants lasted about 10 years. With newer materials, they are now expected to last two or

"My goal is to provide the best care and advice I can on how to deal with each patient's condition or injury."

three times that long. Dr. Tenny also uses an anterior approach for hip replacement, minimizing tissue damage and enhancing patient recovery.

Dr. Tenny recommends maintaining the ideal body weight, low-impact exercise, diets that include daily servings of fruits and vegetables and stretching exercises, such as yoga, to help maintain joint flexibility and health. "We see an increase in joint problems, but I feel this is mainly due to our aging population," commented Dr. Tenny.

"My goal is to provide the best care and advice I can on how to deal with each patient's condition or injury," he said. If a patient needs both knees replaced, Dr. Tenny recommends having them done one at a time. "Having both done simultaneously can risk greater complications."

If you have been injured or are experiencing pain, infection with fever, loss of motion or weakness, let Dr. Tenny bring you relief. **NOW**

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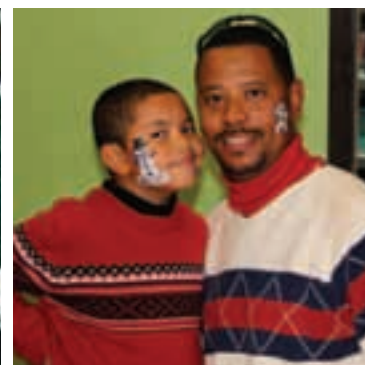
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Cedar Hill High School Theatre students present the boisterous comedy, Scapino!



Cedar Hill swimmer, Barbie Bernier, places first in the butterfly at a Duncanville tri-meet.



Father and son model their face painting at the Zula B. Wylie Public Library.



Dr. Clement Gibson directs Lake Ridge Elementary students in a performance of Make a Difference - A Celebration of Goodwill.



Branden Sparks, Paul Fierro, Layton Slaughter III plant crape myrtle trees.



The Chamber welcomes Christopher's Smokehouse Barbeque with a ribbon cutting.

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Kaitlyn Lucy, who has been a Canterbury student since kindergarten, received a scholarship to play volleyball at Oklahoma Baptist University.



All five grads pose together as the inaugural WINGS graduating class! From left: Darrin Sims, Aaron Morales, D'Leisha Lawrence, Terrance Hudson and Kendall Harris.



Cammy Jackson poses with Felecia Benton, who won \$125 dollars networking with the DeSoto Chamber of Commerce.



Dr. Jerry Hinnant and Reverend Doctor Ernest McAfee at a reception honoring Dr. Hinnant's 18 years of service to Canterbury.

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Joe Garza, Heidi Ornelas, Sam Sytheun, Robert Travis and Liz Vasquez are DISD's first graduates of 2011.



Heather Vaile, Sharon & Taekgeun Vandygriff and Kristin and Aubrey Ludwig enjoy sodas at Ben Franklin Apothecary.



Hannah Gibson and Ashleigh Brown take a walk with Rudy the dog.



Bilbartz Elementary pays homage to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a "Freedom March" around the school.



The DISD Board of Trustees are presented with banners, gifts, songs, speeches and videos at the January School Board Meeting in honor of School Board Recognition Month.



Don Brogden helping Phyllis Davison find the perfect shoes at Duncanville Outreach Ministry's Thrift Station.

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Healthy Heart, Healthy You

— By *Cealee Thomas, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.*

Women naturally love. We love our families, our churches, our jobs and well, you get the point. We love to take care of what is important to us, yet we neglect our own well-being, especially our heart. It is time to learn the facts of CHD, coronary heart disease, and what we can do to ensure a hearty life.

What is Coronary Heart Disease?

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is a form of cardiovascular disease (CVD) that pertains to the heart and its vessels. The walls of the arteries become narrow, due to plaque build-up, and blood flow to the heart is slowed down or even stopped. Symptoms are not always noticeable, so it is important to see your doctor. In the United States among women, deaths associated with all cardiovascular disease were greater than those associated with all forms of cancer.

How does it affect me?

The longer an illness is left untreated, the worse it can get. Because heart disease can lead to disability, decreased quality

of life and even death, it is important to know your risk factors:

- Do you have a sedentary lifestyle?
- Are you overweight or obese?
- Do you have high blood pressure?
- Do you smoke?
- Have you previously experienced a heart attack?

It is important to see your trusted doctor if you have answered yes to any of these questions.

What can I do about it?

• Always, always, always consult your physician if you have any concerns about your heart.

• Realize that your health is a priority, and it is not selfish to put your health first. Take care of yourself. Go for a walk; take the stairs; eat right — be proactive!

• Visit your doctor, even if he/she is an ob-gyn. Oftentimes, an ob-gyn is the only doctor that a woman sees for her care, and if this is the case for you, consult with him/her about your concern of CVD and your risks.

This month is all about loving others and those closest to you. This year, I challenge you to value and love yourself, your health and your heart.

Cealee Thomas, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.
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If you're self-employed, and you've already established a SEP IRA retirement account, you've got until April 15, 2011, to fully fund your plan for the 2010 tax year. If you haven't set up a SEP IRA, you might want to think about opening one — because it can help people like you build significant resources for retirement.

You can establish and fund a SEP IRA for 2010, as long as you do so by your tax-filing date, including extensions. For many self-employed individuals, this may be April 15, 2011, but your business could have a different deadline, so check with your tax adviser.

A SEP IRA offers you some key advantages. First are the tax benefits. Your contributions are tax deductible and your earnings grow tax deferred, which means your earnings have the opportunity to grow faster than in an account on which you paid taxes every year. (Taxes are due upon withdrawal and withdrawals prior to age 59 1/2 may be subject to a 10-percent IRS penalty.)

Furthermore, the SEP IRA's relatively high contribution limits allow you to put away sizeable sums every year. For the 2010 tax year, you can put in the lesser of \$49,000 or 25 percent of your compensation, which is capped at a maximum of \$245,000.

Obviously, a SEP IRA can be a great vehicle for building your individual retirement savings. But if you own a small business, you may find that a SEP IRA is also a good tool for attracting and retaining good employees.

IRS regulations require you to include all eligible employees who are at least 21 and have been with your company for three out of the immediately preceding five years. But, once the plan is set up, you have a great deal of flexibility in making contributions to your employees' accounts. You can change your annual contributions, or cut them altogether, according to the performance of your business. Keep in mind, though, that the percentage of compensation

contributed to a SEP IRA must be the same for you and your employees. So, for example, if you put in 25 percent of your compensation to your SEP IRA, you must also contribute 25 percent of all eligible employees' compensation to their plans. When you make company contributions, you may be able to deduct them as a business expense.

Your employees may be attracted to the SEP IRA for some of the same reasons you are: an employer-provided benefit, tax-deferred growth and a wide range of investment options. You can set up a SEP IRA for your business with a minimum amount of paperwork. And you won't have to file a Form 5500, either.

Given all the benefits of a SEP IRA — tax advantages, high contribution




limits, ease of administration — is it the right plan for you? It all depends on your individual situation. Your financial advisor and tax adviser can help you determine which type of retirement plan is right for you. But whichever plan you choose, use it to its full potential. Retirement is expensive — so it pays to be prepared. **NOW**

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Calendar

FEBRUARY 2011

February 1

Free tax help by AARP: 10:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. (each Tuesday-April 12), Cedar Hill Public Library. First come, first served!

National Alliance on Mental Illness-Dallas Chapter Family Support Group: 7:00-8:30 p.m., Trinity UMC, 1302 South Clark Road, Duncanville. For family members of those with mental illness. No cost. Contact Madeline Kelley at (972) 298-9378 or (214) 536-2703, or Evelyn Glass at (214) 728-0637.

February 3-27

African American Repertory Theater presents *Flyin' West* by Pearl Cleage at The Corner Theater, 211 E. Pleasant Run Rd., DeSoto. Preview: Feb. 3: 7:30 p.m.; \$10. Fridays and Saturdays: 7:30 p.m.: \$20. Saturday and Sunday: 2:30 p.m.: \$15. (972) 572-0998 or www.aareptheater.com.

February 5

Cedar Hill's annual Daddy/Daughter Dance: Ages 4-8: 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.; ages 9-12: 2:00-4:00 p.m., at the Cedar Hill Recreation Center, 310 E. Parkerville Rd. Cost: \$30/couple and \$15/additional daughter. Cost includes photo, refreshments and gift. Register

at cedarhilltx.com or call (972) 293-5288 for more information.

Teen Super Bowl Party: 3:00 p.m., Cedar Hill Public Library. Enjoy pizza, Wii and board games (ages 12 and up).

DeSoto's 17th Annual Daddy/Daughter Valentine Dance: 6:00-9:00 p.m., DeSoto Civic Center. Cost: \$30/couple; \$15/additional child; \$50/couple for special reserved seating; includes 5x7 photo and refreshments. No tickets sold at the door. Call Carolyn Campbell for more information. (972) 230-9651.

February 10-12 and 17-19

Duncanville Community Theatre presents *Mary, Mary*, a story of unlikely and reluctant love. (972) 780-5707 or e-mail boxoffice@dctheatre.org.

February 12

Black History Month Celebration: 3:00 p.m., Cedar Hill Public Library.

February 15

African American genealogy program: 6:00 p.m., DeSoto Public Library.

February 19

Register for the next DeSoto Dialog and Dining by **February 7** at www.desotodd.org or call Kathy Maple Jones (972) 230-9648.

February 20

Concerned DeSoto Citizens Gospel Fest: 4:00-7:00 p.m., DeSoto Civic Center - Blue Bonnet Rooms, 211 E. Pleasant Run Road, DeSoto. Cost: \$10. Benefits CDC Scholarship Program. cdcdesoto@yahoo.com.

February 26

Expanding Your Horizons (EYH) career day program for girls (grades six-eight) with program for accompanying adults: 8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Cedar Valley College, Lancaster. Advance registration required: www.EYH.AAUW-swdc.org. (972) 709-1957.

Duncanville Lions Club's 19th Annual Las Vegas Night: 6:00-10:00 p.m., Hilton Garden Inn, Duncanville. Cost: \$75/person buffet dinner and \$1,000 casino chips. Funds DHS senior scholarships and Duncanville charities.

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



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In The Kitchen With Gayle Whiddon

— *By Beverly Shay*

Gayle Whiddon has baked cakes for 45 years. “My mom made a special cake for our birthdays each year. Mine is around Easter, so I got a bunny or a butterfly. Her designs were inspired by *McCall's Magazine*. Many of my recipes are from my mom and aunt.

“After I began making cakes in 1966, I entered cake decorating contests at the State Fair. You had to decorate them right in front of the judges! I have made cakes for friends I went to school with, then their children's birthdays and weddings, and now the grandchildren's birthdays. That's pretty cool,” remarked Gayle, who also bakes cakes for many famous people and professional athletes. “I also make cookies, but I don't care to cook dinner!” she laughed. She still uses the same double oven she has had for 35 years. **NOW**

Aunt Jo's Orange Date Nut Cake

- 1 cup butter
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 Tbsp. orange zest
- 4 egg yolks
- 4 cups cake flour (if using all-purpose flour, it must be sifted before being measured)
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 1/3 cups buttermilk
- 1 1-lb. pkg. chopped dates
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 4 egg whites, stiffly beaten

1. Cream together first 3 ingredients; add egg yolks.
2. Sift flour and baking soda.
3. Add buttermilk, dates and nuts.
4. Fold in egg whites
5. Preheat oven to 350 F. When cake is put into oven, decrease oven temp to 300 F. Bake 1-1 1/2 hours.
6. As soon as cake is removed from oven, punch holes in cake with an ice pick and pour glaze (recipe below) over it while it is hot.

Glaze for Aunt Jo's Cake

- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 Tbsp. orange zest

1. Combine ingredients and cook until a rolling boil. Pour over cake while cake and glaze are hot.

Great Chocolate Fudge

- 1 can PET evaporated milk
- 3 cups sugar
- 12 oz. pkg. chocolate chips
- 6 oz. pkg. milk chocolate chips
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 1 7-oz. jar marshmallow cream
- 2 sticks margarine
- 2 cups nuts

1. Bring milk and sugar to a boil for 15 minutes (235 F on candy thermometer).
2. In a large bowl, pour milk mixture over chocolate chips, vanilla, marshmallow cream and margarine. Stir in nuts.
3. Pour into a large pan and allow to cool before serving.

Wedding Punch

- 3 cups sugar
- 6 cups water
- 1 46-oz. can pineapple juice
- 2 cups orange juice
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 5 bananas, mashed
- 3 qts. ginger ale

1. Boil sugar and water for 3 minutes. Cool.
2. Add pineapple, orange and lemon juices. Add bananas.
3. Freeze.
4. Serve with ginger ale. (Consistency will be slushy.)

Sherbet Wedding Punch

- 4 1/2-gallons Sherbet (any flavor)
- 7 2-liter bottles ginger ale

1. Scoop Sherbet into punch bowl(s).
2. Pour ginger ale over the Sherbet and mix together until combined. Serves 150.

The Best Cherry Cobbler

- 2 cans cherry pie filling
- 1 can crushed pineapple
- 1 butter vanilla cake mix (dry)
- 1 stick butter, chopped
- 2 cups pecans

1. Mix pie filling and pineapple in a large, oblong cake pan until combined.
2. Cover mixture with dry cake mix, chopped butter and pecans.
3. Bake at 350 F for 1 hour.
4. Serve with vanilla ice cream if desired.

Bow Tie Chicken Salad

Prepare this salad one day in advance, cover and chill.

- 3 cups (7 oz.) uncooked bow tie pasta, cooked, rinsed and drained
- 2 cups diced cooked chicken
- 1/2 cup celery, chopped
- 1/3 cup dried cranberries
- Poppy seed dressing, to taste
- 1/4 cup slivered almonds, toasted

1. In a large bowl, mix cooked pasta, chicken, celery and cranberries. Pour on desired amount of Poppy Seed Dressing; toss gently to coat. Fold in almonds.
2. Serve with lettuce and/or croissants.

To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit www.nowmagazines.com.