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## On The Cover



Matt and Carrie Vines  
have brought their  
family home.

Photo by  
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## Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Love it or hate it, Valentine's Day brings an endless onslaught of romance, roses and candy. My favorite sweets are conversation hearts, those colorful candies which are a staple in elementary schools everywhere: "I Do." "Be Mine." And, in keeping up with technology, "Email Me" and "LOL."

This month, there are lots of opportunities to have meaningful conversations. February is Black History Month, celebrating the culture and achievements of African-Americans. Valentine's Day is a great excuse for dads to talk to their daughters while whirling around the floor of the MAC on February 18 at the Daddy-Daughter Sweetheart Dance. And, of course, sports fans will debate the strengths and weaknesses of their favorite football teams leading up to the Super Bowl on February 5.

So get out there, talk to your friends, neighbors and family members. Take the time to learn something new, or enjoy a vigorous debate. No candy required.



*Jeremy*

Jeremy Agor  
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# UNEXPECTED THINGS

— By Janice C. Johnson



*Picture a die-hard Dallas Cowboys fan who, noticing many parallels between football and other aspects of life, decides to write a book about them. You would probably not imagine a dimpled, soft-spoken, middle-aged mom wearing high heels and a stylish haircut. Yet that description fits Melanie Garrett, whose debut book, **Under His Helmet**, was released in December 2010.*

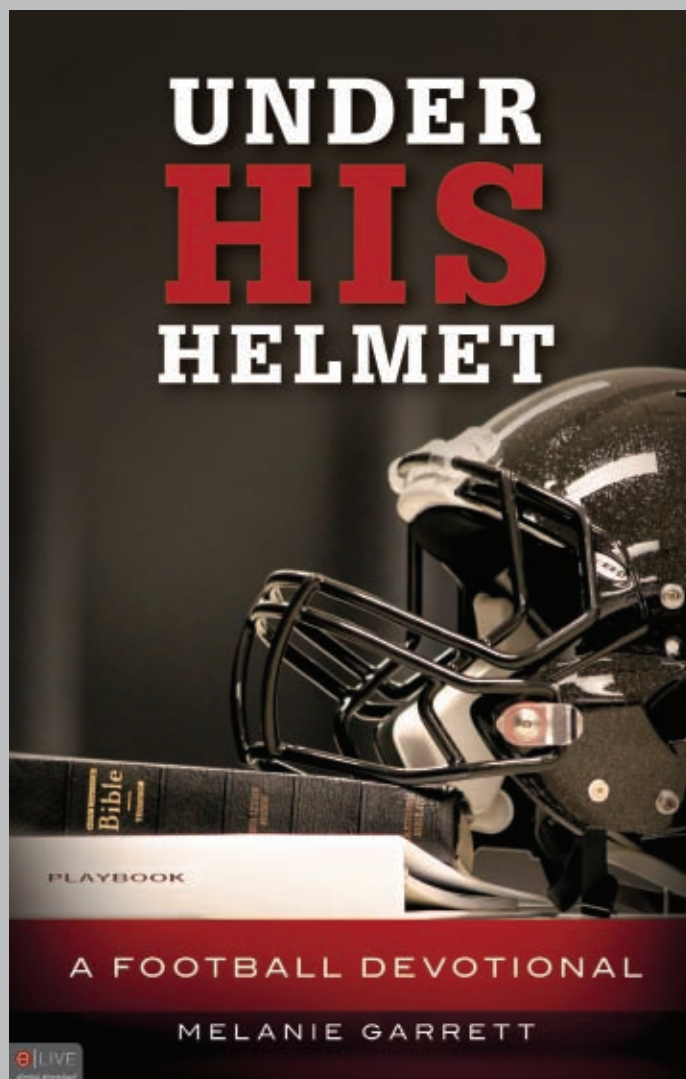
Melanie's love for all things football started early in childhood. The daughter of a pastor dad and nurse mom, she grew up cheering for the Cowboys each autumn Sunday after church. During her high school years, she played clarinet and percussion in her high school band, where "one of the greatest perks was the opportunity to attend all of the football games."

Melanie's connection with football continued through her years at The University of Texas at Austin. Naturally, she went to all the Longhorns' home games. She also played flag football, which gave her an on-the-field perspective of the game. During her junior and senior years, she worked part time with the athletic department as a tutor for student athletes. Her knowledge and respect for football gave her an immediate rapport with the players. "It was fun," she said. "I'd help them with English, and they'd help me with racquetball, or we'd go jogging together. I was like a little sister to all of them."

But the "little sister" had a core of steel. "I would not allow [the athletes] to play the dumb jock with me. I would tell them, 'No. You're a champion on the field. I won't accept that you're not a champion elsewhere.'"

Melanie sometimes ran into others who had the attitude that football players are just "brutes" with nothing more than physical capability. She begs to differ. "No. People have only *invested* in developing their physical [abilities], not the mental, but the capacity is there." One of the athletes she was tutoring was failing English, about to lose his playing eligibility and ready to give up. "He went from that to making a C — a C that he earned. I never did anything 'extra' for my boys. They always had to earn it."

Despite her enthusiasm, Melanie's life revolved around more than just football. As a 9-year-old, she accepted Christ as her personal savior. After that, the Bible took on new life for Melanie. She no longer saw it as just words on a page, but began to depend on its promises.





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After she received her bachelor's degree in elementary education, Melanie's brother, who was a member of the faculty at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, helped her locate an opening just across the state line in Watts, Oklahoma. Melanie interviewed and got the job.

During her first year of teaching, she found a surprisingly affordable apartment complex — an old converted barn. There, she met another tenant, Dustin Garrett, who soon became her best friend and, shortly thereafter, the love of her life. They courted through a four-month engagement, and the two have now been happily married for more than 28 years. Though they “had to just throw the wedding together,” Melanie said, “when you meet your best friend, and you realize, ‘I don’t ever want to live life without this person,’ then why should there be an arbitrary number of months [to wait]?”

The Garretts have lived in the Metroplex for over 25 years now. Melanie homeschooled their two children for most of their elementary years, and then returned to the public school classroom. She taught kindergarten in the Mansfield Independent School District for eight years.





Following her spiritual mentor's advice, she began keeping a journal of her prayers, and later added entries about ideas and insights that she gained. Often, a scene from a televised football game would remind her of a particular event or teaching in the Bible. "I see Scripture lived out in football." For instance, as the home team sets up for an important play, the home crowd will yell their enthusiasm with complete abandon. "That's what heaven looks like: a picture of praise, in full voice, with no inhibition."


As she develops spiritually, she also continues her enthusiastic cheering for the Longhorns and the Dallas Cowboys. Game days find Melanie and Dustin watching the game on television, with Melanie checking statistics on her smartphone. If the action slows, guests can journey upstairs to the Cowboys themed loft to look at autographed photos of professional quarterbacks on the walls or play a game on the blue and silver chess set. Curtains, lamps, accessories — everything bears the Cowboys' logo — or at least their colors. And although the Cowboys did not make the playoffs, the Garretts will be at their stations on Super Bowl Sunday.

In 2004, Melanie launched a speaking career, and in 2009, she decided to assemble a number of her short essays into a devotional book. "I could tell that this urge to write was more than journaling — that it was indeed a book crying out to be released," she affirmed.


From 2006 through 2008, Melanie sustained one sorrowful loss after another, as death claimed her grandmother, both parents, her spiritual mentor and two beloved dogs. While writing helped her process her deep grief, that very grief made Melanie more aware of her dependence on God, and gave her work the added depth of a warm sympathy for readers who have lost loved ones.

She smiles at the incongruity of a 50-plus-year-old woman being knowledgeable and passionate enough about the game of football to base her book on it. But she believes that





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same incongruity will attract people to her message. As she explained it, "I believe God uses the things that are not common to jar us out of our comfort zones."

Melanie designed her book to appeal to all audiences. "Someone who is not a Christian could read it and enjoy it or even people who don't like football." Whether speaking or writing, she wants to challenge and encourage people to be the best they can be. "That champion attitude resonates strongly in me," she said. "My daddy instilled that in me. My parents taught me about doing my best at everything, and to always, always strive for excellence."

Melanie illustrates this winning attitude throughout her book. In one of her favorite chapters, "Terriers and Wide Receivers," she writes about "Big Dog Syndrome," the confidence and commitment it takes to be great. But in it, she also warns about the danger of letting that confidence turn into arrogant pride. When a player stops asking how he can serve his team and begins to ask how the team can serve him, he stops being great. Contrary to the usual expectation, Melanie said, "You have to rise to the top by staying on your knees." **NOW**



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# Literacy LEGACY

— By Julie B. Cosgrove



*In 2001, some members of the Kiwanis Club of Mansfield were sitting around a table, discussing the international organization's project, Read Across the World, in their community. The Kiwanis had been donating reading books to elementary schools as a part of this project since the 1997-1998 school year. Someone asked, "Does anyone know who Jack Buster is?" Blank stares and head shakes were the response. "We're getting checks in his memory; lots of checks."*

Thus began the start of a decade-long partnership between the heirs and friends of Jack Buster and the Kiwanis. "Dad passed away in 2001," said Lynn Phears, Jack's daughter. "He was always a reader, and he'd take us to the library all the time." She smiled at the memory then continued. "He volunteered to teach English as a Second Language classes to the parents of high school students. You see, his motto was 'An Idle Mind is a Wasted Mind.'"

Lynn further explained the family knew their father would not want floral sprays at his funeral. "He was a very frugal man, so we wanted to find a cause people could donate to in his memory in lieu of flowers," she explained.

Lynn worked for Mansfield Independent School District



(MISD) under Claude Cunningham, who was the assistant superintendent at the time. She was aware he was a member of the Kiwanis and of their Read Across the World project. "We decided Dad would love to see more books go to elementary students who are learning to read," she said. "It's just with all the funeral planning I hadn't had time to tell Claude that was what the family wanted to do, too."

Over \$2,000 poured in, which was timely considering MISD was growing by leaps and bounds. Several new elementary schools were opening, each with a sparse library. "Most people do not realize that schools just do not have the funds to furnish a school library with loads of books. At best, they are able to purchase about a third of what they need," Claude said. "It takes most libraries at least three years to become decently stocked. The Kiwanis decided to take the memorial monies and donate books to the new libraries."

*"We want to teach them to respect books."*

Claude explained that due to the size of the donations, the Kiwanis decided to honor them by officially setting up the Jack Buster Memorial Book Project. "It was the right thing to do," Claude said. "Ten years later, people are still donating to the cause." Special memorial stickers are placed in each donated book.

Lynn nodded. "We had no idea where this would lead. In 1995 Mansfield had six elementary schools. Now there are 22 and counting. All of them have Jack Buster Memorial books in them."

Through the assistance of Dr. Sarah Jandrucko, the director of elementary education for MISD at that time, the Kiwanis were able to stock the new libraries with books for all levels of elementary school reading. She helped them decide which books to purchase. The initial memorial funding lasted a couple of years. However, as word spread, more and more people donated to the fund. Recently, the Mansfield Women's Club joined the cause and made a substantial donation to the Jack Buster Memorial Book Project.

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several years ago and that organization eagerly became involved. "They give us their educators' discount, as well as other discounts. They have taken great pains to find us the best deals," Claude explained. "And because we are nonprofit, we get the books tax free." This fall alone, the Kiwanis have purchased 65 books for under \$300.

All books are either new or very gently used. "We don't buy any books which have marks or scribbles in them." Claude made it clear that if a child sees scribbles in a book it only encourages them to do the same. He grimaced at the thought. "We want to teach them to respect books."

Even if there is no elementary school opening during the school year, the Jack Buster Memorial Book Project carries on. Books do not last forever. They get torn, worn out from use and out of style. The project goes back to the older



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elementary schools and helps them refurbish their libraries with new books. "We always involve the librarians and get their advice on what books to replace and what new ones to buy," Claude added.

As a part of the program, Kiwanis' members set aside time to come to the school libraries and read to the children from these books. "The Kiwanis' motto is 'Young Children First.' What better way to touch children's lives than to have successful adults teach them the importance of reading" Claude commented. "It sends an important message that other adults besides their teachers and parents think reading is important." Claude smiled. "It is amazing how little it costs to make a lasting impact."

Each time a new elementary school opens or an old one's library is targeted for donations, the club sponsors a breakfast. They teach volunteers how to read to the children at

their level. "It is very different reading to 20 or 30 kids than it is having your child or grandchild on your lap. Everyone wants to see the pictures, especially the younger kids," Claude explained.

Lynn agreed. "Most of the volunteers want to read to the younger ones because it's so much fun. They are attentive and



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ask questions. But the older children need to be turned on to reading on their own. There are of course fewer pictures, but the volunteers read a chapter to whet their enthusiasm."

She went on to convey the importance that the volunteers read and understand the book before they present it to the class. "Today, there's a lot of ethnicity in books. The family structure has changed. We want to make sure the volunteers can pronounce names, understand the message and show the kids they like the book, too."

Lynn volunteers to read the books to the children even though she's not a member of the Kiwanis. "When we started this, both Claude and I had school-aged children, though they were all further along than elementary school. Still, this program has impacted all of them."

Her daughter, Tara Taylor, is now an elementary school teacher in Mansfield at Thelma Jones Elementary. One of Claude's children is a teacher as well. "When I go to read to the kids," Lynn said, "and show them the book and the sticker, I tell them, 'See, that's my dad.' It means so very much."

A bit teary eyed, she smiled warmly, "To know one day my grandkids will pick up a book at school, open it up and see the memorial to Dad. Well, that's huge." **NOW**





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# Finding SPACE

— By Carolyn Wills

# TO GROW



## At Home With Matt and Carrie Vines

*Matt and Carrie Vines married six years ago, after they graduated from The University of Texas at Arlington. "We met while working at Spring Creek Barbeque when I was just 17," Carrie said. They were married in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, in front of about 40 family members and close friends who flew in for the wedding and stayed for the weekend.*

A few years later, the couple had purchased their first home in Arlington. Matt had become a software engineer at L3 Communications where he was building flight simulators for the Navy. Carrie was planning a future in real estate when, suddenly, their worlds got a whole lot bigger. "We learned that I was pregnant with twins," she smiled.

Today, they live in a beautiful, traditional, two-story home in one of Mansfield's elegant communities. "Our house in Arlington was so small, and as soon as we knew we were having twins, we began to look for a new home," Carrie explained. "We







chose Mansfield because of the great schools. Also, my mom lives in Mansfield, and Matt's parents and my dad are in Arlington."

They looked at a lot of houses before finding "the one" with four bedrooms, a spacious playroom and a great backyard. "Our house was the model for the builder. It was built about five years ago," Matt said. "We are the first owners and have been here for about three years."

As it turned out, their search for space was more of a necessity than they originally thought. Before the twins, Ethan and Kinsey, reached their second birthday, Carrie and Matt learned that they would be welcoming a third baby. "Jackson was born less than a year ago," Carrie said. "Three children in diapers

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is an event wherever we go," she laughed. "When I take them to the grocery store, it's a quick trip to fill up the cart and be in and out while everyone's still happy."

In six years, Matt and Carrie have created a beautiful, healthy family and a warm and welcoming home. With 4,700 square feet, there is room for everyone including Matt's cousin, Hanna, who lived with them while finishing high school and is now away at her first year of college. And let's not forget Gracie and Ashlie, two 10-year-old cats, who prefer never to be too close to one another.

There are four bedrooms, three-and-a-half baths, plus another half bath in the pool house. On the first floor, the kitchen, living room and breakfast area share an open space. "I like that I can be in the kitchen and see what the kids are doing," Carrie said. The kitchen features a granite island, separate eating counter and stainless steel appliances. "If I could



change anything, I would trade one of the double ovens for a warming drawer," she said. "Our house is a gathering place, and it would be nice to keep food from getting cold."

The living room is furnished in kid-friendly leather, which also offers richness against the light from the fireplace. The large common area is toward the back of the house, while the front door opens to a foyer banked on one side by a dining room and, on the other, by an office with a rich, wood-paneled ceiling. When the couple moved in, the once beige-colored walls were painted deeper shades of mocha with accents of red,

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Tessa Pierce is a Certified Public Accountant with over 17 years of experience in accounting and finance. She has worked for small and large publicly-held companies, as an auditor at Deloitte & Touche and as a VP of a multi-billion dollar private investment fund doing both capital management and financial reporting. Tessa has a BBA in accounting from the University of Oklahoma and an MBA in finance from Dallas Baptist University.

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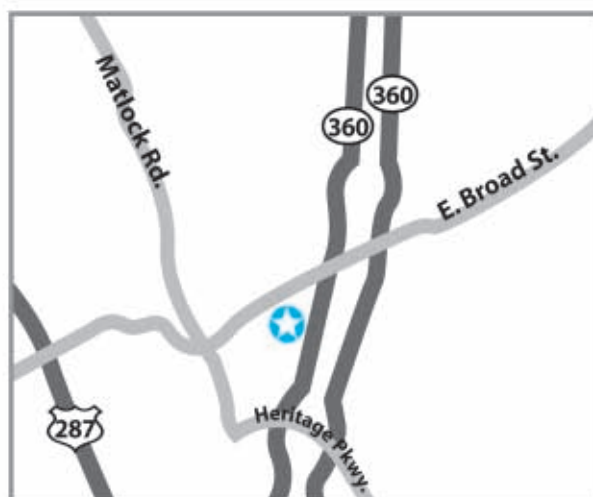
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gray and sage. The result is a warm, comfortable interior. Embellishments like crown molding and hand-scraped wood floors add elegance and drama, but the strongest design statement comes from Carrie's taste in art. Each room features a large, colorful canvas print, and thanks to the home's open-concept design, each print is visible from an equally dramatic print in the next room. The colors and graphics are so distinctive and connected that a visitor is compelled to walk from one to the other. "My friend is an interior decorator," Carrie said. "Sometimes I go to the Dallas Market with her, and that's how I've collected the art."

The master suite reflects variations of gray, tan, sage and silver. "It's my favorite room," Carrie said, "the place where I relax at the end of the day." The huge master bath is the size of a small bedroom. "The kids like to ride their scooters on the tile floor," she laughed. Another feature in the master bath is a horizontal chandelier with vases and flickering bulbs that look like candles.

The kids' bedrooms, guest room, play room and media room are found on the second floor. The massive play room is big enough to accommodate couches, tables, chairs and toys sufficient for three growing children and their friends.

With two rows of theater seats, a projector and 100-inch screen plus mini refrigerator, the media room is Matt's favorite. "We actually set it up and had friends over before we moved in," he

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said. "When the kids are older, we'll have parties with popcorn and movies."

The home's interior is spacious, warm and filled with entertainment, and the outside is its equal. The back door opens to a patio protected on three sides by the exterior of the house. Furnished with cushioned sofas, it feels like an interior room. Beyond it is a swimming pool and hot tub surrounded by an iron fence and accompanied by a pool house with a half bath and an outdoor kitchen complete with hibachi grill and mini refrigerator. "We had the pool house built," Matt said. "There's also a playground in the backyard."

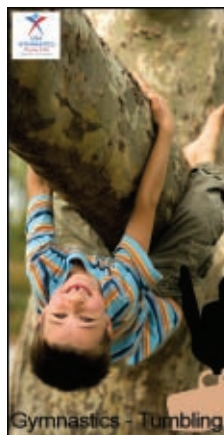
"Matt loves to cook on the hibachi," Carrie said. "The kids get excited when he makes a whole meal including fried rice and an onion volcano."

The home is in a gated community. "We don't have a clubhouse, but there is a beautiful pond with a gazebo and playground," Carrie said. "This is a



family-friendly community. My neighbor, Melissa, has a 4-year-old daughter and twin boys. We often trade kids' clothing across the fence. Also, there are two annual get-togethers at the pond where everyone shares dinner, and sometimes, the kids decorate wagons and bicycles, and we all walk around the neighborhood."

As Mansfield continues to grow, another high school is being built. "We're excited that it will be close to us," Carrie said. "We love being in Mansfield where everything is so new. A few months ago, I joined the Mansfield Early Childhood Parent Teacher Association, and I really like the group." It would seem that beyond finding space for their growing family, Matt and Carrie have brought their family home. **NOW**



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Chris is the son of Buck and Linda Lampe. He has lived in Mansfield all his life. For the last 10 years, his father coached football and soccer for Mansfield High School and recently retired. According to Buck, Chris has gone to almost every Mansfield High School football game since he was born. In fact, he's only missed three. So naturally, Chris had an interest in sports and in pushing himself to achieve success in all he set out to do.

That is probably the main reason Chris received a call one day from a family friend, who had connections to the Texas Rangers, offering him the unique opportunity to be a bat boy for the team this year. At the time, Chris wasn't really a big fan of baseball. Yet, even he had to admit this was an opportunity he couldn't pass up. "Most professional sports teams have an unwritten rule that 'what happens in the locker room stays in the locker room,'" Buck stated. "They knew that Chris,

# The Job of a Lifetime

— By Rick Hope

*He's both a football and soccer player for Mansfield High School. He is a B-student in his senior year, and a role model to his younger brother and sister. He's stood face-to-face with Josh Hamilton and Nolan Ryan, and has had conversations with President George W. Bush. It might be hard to believe that one young man has experienced all these things, but the unbeliever has never met Chris Lampe.*





having been around sports all his life, would understand that."

Before long, Chris became a member of the Rangers' family. He knew he was part of the team when they decided to have a little fun at his expense. One particular game day, Chris (who admits he doesn't know that much about baseball) was asked by Richard "Hoggy" Price, the clubhouse manager, if he knew the location of the "batter's box keys." Chris had never heard of such a thing and replied that he did not know where they were. From that point, he was sent on a search. It was even communicated with a sense of urgency. "They were telling me, 'Chris, it's almost game time! We've got to find those keys!' I was honestly getting scared," Chris remembered.

This was actually a prank in which everyone in the Rangers' organization agreed to play a part. Even Rangers' owner, Nolan Ryan, was approached by Chris to find the elusive keys. Walking back to the dugout in frustration, it suddenly dawned on Chris that a joke was being played. And the joke was on him. Looking down, he saw a pair of toy keys. Picking them up, Chris shouted to the dugout. "I've got them!" The team broke up in laughter. Richard later told him, "Chris, that just means they like you."

According to Linda, Chris gained a good outlook on professional athletes. "They even inquired about his football team and how things were going," she said. "They're not prima donnas."

As a matter of fact, Chris thinks it's that attitude and the fact that the team gets along so well that makes them successful. "They all treat each other with respect. They are like a family,"

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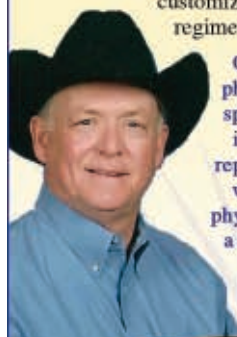
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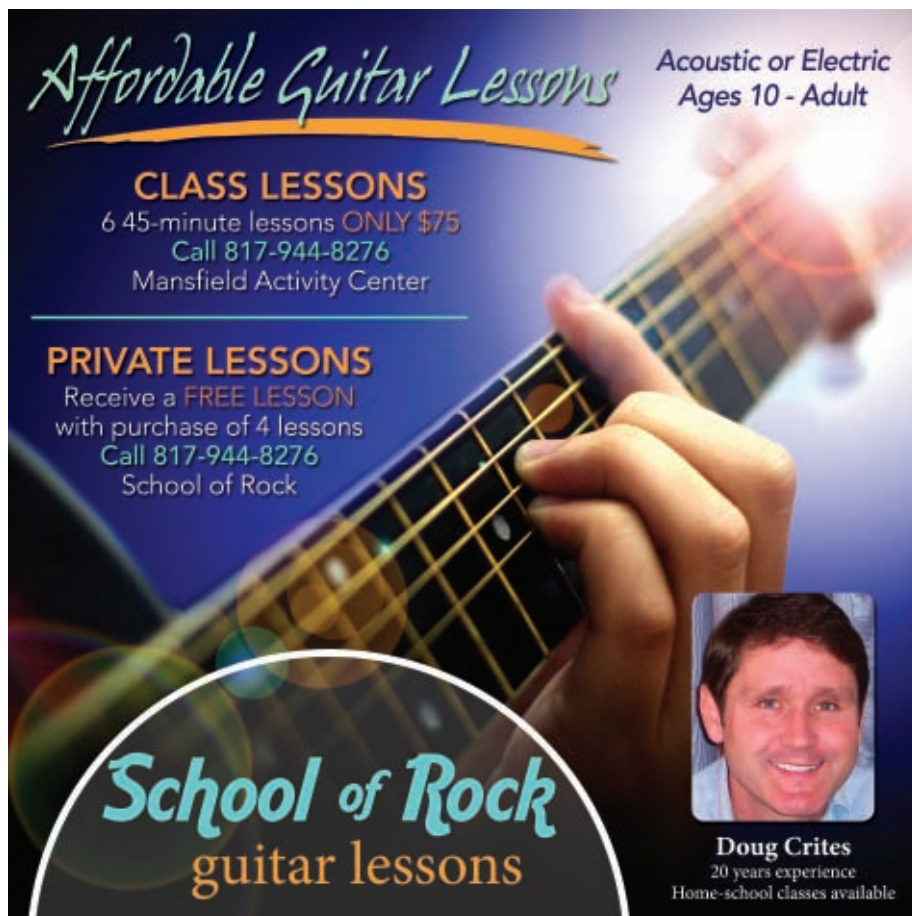

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Chris said. "Each player has their own handshake and every other player knows it. That's how well they know each other."

Of all the players, Chris got closest to Arthur Rhodes, and it broke his heart when Arthur was traded. However, there was a silver lining. Since Arthur was traded to the St. Louis Cardinals, Chris had the opportunity to see him again during the World Series.

The term "bat boy" is actually misleading, considering the many responsibilities assigned to this particular job title. Some of those responsibilities include doing laundry, cleaning the clubhouse, shining cleats, setting up the dugout and unloading the bus whenever the team returns from out of town games. Chris did not get to travel with the team. "Everything has to be just perfect and ready to go when the team arrives in the locker room," Chris added.

Keeping this job and continuing in his responsibilities as a student and Mansfield High School football player meant lots of self-discipline where Chris was concerned. Fortunately, everyone from his family, coaches and teachers was willing to work with him. On Rangers' game days, Chris had to leave practice early and head to the ballpark. Even on Friday nights, Chris would leave as soon as the football game was over so he could fulfill his responsibilities for

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the Rangers as the baseball game was drawing to a close. On nights when the team arrived home from an away game, Chris would have to be there to meet them. Sometimes, he did not get back home until 2:45 in the morning. He was still expected to be in class that same morning. Despite those challenges, he is pulling a B average.

However, the biggest treat for Chris came when the Rangers' organization rewarded all their personnel by flying them to St. Louis for the last two games of the World Series. "I had never traveled by myself. That was the most fun I ever had!" Chris explained.

Chris described Game 6 of the Series when the Rangers lost in the 11th inning, as one of the best baseball games in baseball history, but hated the final outcome. "It was worse than your dog dying," he confessed.



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Chris admits that although he didn't know much about baseball before this experience, he now has a great respect for the game and the people who play it. On top of that, he got to meet many of the legends of the game and especially remembers meeting a former owner of the Rangers, who also happens to be a former President.

When Chris was introduced to President George W. Bush before one of the games, President Bush inquired as to Chris's plans for the future. Chris told him he wanted an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. President Bush's parting comment to him was, "Let me know if you need anything!" Chris found that encouraging and hopes he will one day get to speak to the President again.

But for now, Chris continues in his high school career, while also enjoying time with his family. His brother, Taylor (14), and sister, Brooke (13), enjoy their time with him and learn a lot from their older brother. "Chris inspires me," Taylor said.

"He always inspires me to do better," Brooke added. More than likely, they are not alone in that sentiment. **NOW**





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# Current Ambassador, Future Farmer

— By Cindy Malone

*Jake Sickels, like any other smart and adventurous young man, tried a little bit of everything in an effort to find his passion. While growing up in Mansfield, attending Kenneth Davis Elementary, Mary Orr Intermediate and then Wester Junior High before entering Mansfield High School, he ran track and played golf. He even tried his hand at rodeo as a calf roper. However, it wasn't until he discovered agriculture that he found his calling.*

During Jake's sophomore year, he got his start taking an agriculture class at

Ben Barber Career Tech Academy. Jake was a natural since he had already helped care for livestock, including: longhorns, donkeys, horses, chickens and ducks, which belonged to some close family friends, Larry and Sandra Jay. "Agriculture is in my blood," Jake said. "My mom is from Breckenridge. She lived on a 170-acre farm, and her aunt still owns the farm out in Albany, Texas. And almost all of my dad's family work for John Deere." His mother, a legal secretary, and his father, a business owner, support Jake in his love of farming and agriculture even though Vocational Agricultural Education (still referred to as FFA for Future Farmers of America) can take up a lot of Jake's time and money.

By Jake's junior year of high school, he was certain that he wanted to be as involved in FFA as possible. He registered to attend Frontier High School





**“What I love, what I feel drawn to do, is creating farming equipment that is more effective in both cost and functionality.”**



where he could be closer to the three heifers — Leah, Lucky and Ms. This — he cares for and keeps out back. “I show heifers for fun,” Jake explained, “but my true passion lies with farming equipment, more specifically, restoring old farm equipment.”

Right now, in the Agricultural Science Center located behind Frontier High School, Jake is working to restore his “baby,” a 1968 Massey Ferguson 1100, 105 horsepower tractor. “I hope to take this tractor to the state competition that will be held in Houston over spring break,” Jake bragged. Not only will he be taking his tractor to Houston, he will also be taking it to prom. Luckily, he has found a girl who doesn’t mind forgoing the limo for a ride on a tractor.



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Jake has already received many awards and accolades. Jake managed to earn his first-level degree, the Greenhand FFA Degree and his Chapter FFA Degree fairly quickly and went on to earn his Lone Star Degree. He is one of 996 people in the state with this award. He is planning on applying for his American FFA Degree later on this year.

Jake's goals include getting accepted at Texas Tech University in their agricultural engineering program. "What I love, what I feel drawn to do, is creating farming equipment that is more effective in both cost and functionality," Jake said. However, his short-term goals are focused on getting the word out about FFA and its benefits. Jake pointed out, "Mansfield FFA has been in existence since 1935, but with the move toward industry and technology, the land for and interest in agriculture has been declining. Even still, the FFA is the largest youth organization in America, with Texas coming in second only to California in total membership.

One of the things holding back the popularity of FFA is the lack of involvement by younger kids. The group dedicated to bringing agriculture to kids younger than high school age is 4-H. The Ag Center located behind Frontier High School can also be used by 4-H members who need a place for their





livestock. "Kids need to get started early," Jake explained. "So we have to get the message across to them that FFA is not just cows, plows and sows. We know not everyone is going to be a farmer." Not only does FFA offer opportunities to learn things not taught in conventional classrooms, the organization offers scholarships and grants for college as well as continuing education.

Jake has been elected as vice president of the Mansfield FFA, as well as being the secretary for 4-H and sentinel for District 2. Jake's responsibility in the FFA is to correspond with other chapters, sharing ideas and planning community services. Jake was recently elected an ambassador to the state, one of only 23 in Texas, where he helps coordinate the VIP arrangements during the state convention, escorts those business owners who help support FFA and its missions, as well as serves them at the VIP breakfast, a long standing tradition.

The Mansfield FFA's commitment to community is an aspect of the organization not well-known. "We have an awesome officer team," Jake stated. "We love doing stuff in the community. It's nice when people recognize that the FFA is doing good things in the area. This past year, we went caroling and took cookies to a Mansfield nursing home. Also, twice a year we do a

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highway cleanup along North Main.” The Mansfield chapter of the FFA also contributes to Bears for Babes, a program that donates teddy bears to Medical City Children’s Hospital in hopes of comforting young kids who come in with illness and injury.

Every year in February, the week including George Washington’s birthday is designated as National FFA Week to raise awareness of the FFA program. This year, it will be February 18-25. Each of the Mansfield FFA committees will lead a few events, including: an arena football game, played in the mud of a rodeo arena; the Ag Olympics, held in the Agriculture Center on the 25th, right after school; and a family barbecue and movie night geared toward raising interest among the younger generation. The week will culminate with a banquet honoring the officers, their families and the community.

Jake will graduate from Frontier High School later this year and, with hard work and a little luck, will be designing and using the next generation of tractors and other farming equipment in just a few years. “I know it sounds goofy, but tractors really are my passion. I love fixing them up. I can really appreciate all the little nuances of the old models, and I want to mix the great things about them with new technology that will make it easier for all farmers, including me.” If he shows as much dedication to his studies and farm as he shows his high school FFA program, he should have no problem achieving that, and any other goal, to which he sets his mind. **NOW**



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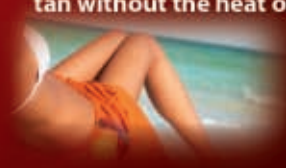
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# A Gift From *Heaven*

— By Rick Hope



*Throughout history, there have always been those who have cried out against injustice. And there have always been those who wanted to speak up for the downtrodden. Many are willing to speak out for the poor. Someone is always ready to take up a cause that everyone else seems to want to ignore. But very rarely is that person a preteen from Mansfield. But then, everyone who has ever met her agrees that Heaven Conner is indeed a very rare young lady.*

In May 2011, Heaven was walking with her mother, Sara, to a friend's house. As they walked, they began to talk about Heaven's frustration over the way a fellow student had been treated. "His clothes were not in the best condition," Heaven recalled.

But it wasn't just the treatment of that one student that bothered her. Heaven had compassion for other students in that situation. "There were some kids who would tease other kids who didn't have more than two outfits to wear," Heaven shared.

She also spoke of her sadness at the way some children were teased simply because they did not have lunch money. Heaven did not feel it was fair for people to be treated this way because of their circumstances. "I don't understand why people want to be mean," she said.



Finally, her mom told her, "Heaven, you can either complain about it or do something about it."

According to Sara, Heaven's brain immediately kicked into high gear, and she began thinking of creating her own charity. "She was thinking large scale. I had to slow her down a bit and convince her to start off on a smaller scale and let it grow from there," Sara said. "Her brain was going full tilt." From that conversation, ClothesEd.org was born.

Last summer, Heaven asked her friends to donate name brand clothing for an outdoor clothes sale. She put together a business proposal, which she submitted to her dad, Eben. After he OK'd the idea, she talked to the administrators at Mary Orr Elementary School, who gave her permission to hold the sale in their parking lot. She then found a donor who agreed to match whatever profit came out of the sale. Heaven made around \$500 from the sale. The donor matched it and, in addition, Heaven pitched in \$500 of her own money (she occasionally models for the Campbell Agency, which includes JCPenney as a client.) With close to \$1,500 in funds, Heaven then went "bargain-hunting" and bought name-brand clothes to be given away. She found students who needed the clothes through recommendations and inquiries on the ClothesEd Facebook page. ClothesEd has donated money to Worley Middle School in Mansfield and Acton Elementary School in Duncanville to assist students in purchasing lunch.



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Sara explained the reason for buying name-brand clothing: "The main reason is to be sensitive to the demographics and climate of the school district. In order for a student to reach their fullest potential, they have to be academically, socially and emotionally ready. Heaven feels this is her social contribution, as it helps minimize teasing and rejection."

Heaven has received very little criticism or questions from the community. "On the whole, everyone is supportive," Sara said. "They were impressed with Heaven and what she was doing. They wanted to encourage her."

Heaven has always been a compassionate giver. In December 2010, she donated \$750 of her modeling money to Samaritan's Purse Ministries to help provide water wells and necessary livestock to Third World countries. Last Christmas, she led a blanket drive for the Presbyterian Night Shelter in Fort Worth.



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She has also asked some of her former teachers to donate time during the upcoming summer to help tutor students who were having a hard time with certain subjects. The teachers readily agreed. Her goal next year is to have enough resources to help 50 students through clothing, tutoring and lunch assistance combined.

Heaven's entire family pitches in with the charity. Her father is the senior pastor of Word of Truth Family Church in Mansfield, and ClothesEd.org currently

operates under their nonprofit status. The Connors' family motto is "Live to Give and Give to Live." As a family, they believe givers enjoy the best benefits in life. In fact, Heaven hijacks clothes from her 2-year-old brother, Landon, for charity. "He has too many anyway," she laughed.

If her charity didn't keep her busy enough, Heaven also is active playing select soccer as a midfielder for the Dallas Texans. She also plays tennis, basketball and baseball. Musically, Heaven is a vocal student at Face the Music and plays the trumpet. When she was 9, Heaven wrote and recorded "Jesus Rocks" on Word of Truth's Children's





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Christmas CD. She currently attends The Oakridge School and plans to one day attend Texas Christian University to major in architecture and minor in theater arts. "I like to build things, and I'm very dramatic!" she said.

According to her charity's Web site, Heaven doesn't want to be the only child her age in the Mansfield area doing this type of work. "By myself, I can help a few kids, but if you get involved we can help a whole lot of kids," reads the site. The Web site also includes a "Givers Wall of Fame" for those who have donated money or clothes. She encourages "really cool kids" to be a part of what she is doing.

Heaven not only believes other kids her age can pull off an idea like hers, she actually encourages it. She challenges her peers to "find what you're good at and get started with it. Making a difference is the best thing you can do."

But this is much more than a childhood project for Heaven. Clearly this is something she wants to continue to do even as an adult. Sure, she may have another career. She may be a successful architect, but the charity will also always be a passion. Her motivation is not recognition from her peers or from the general public. The motivation of her heart is for the less fortunate. "I like to help people," she confessed. "I don't feel being mean to people is right." **NOW**

*Editor's Note: To get involved as a teacher or a donor, visit Heaven's Web site [Clothesed.org](http://Clothesed.org).*

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Amanda Brooks enjoys a glass of wine at her store, Winestyles, a wine and craft beer boutique. Worldwide offerings include organic, vegan and kosher selections.

## A Taste for Something Different

*Amanda Brooks has turned Winestyles into a place where people can develop their tastes. — By Jeremy Agor*

Amanda Brooks grew up in Mansfield when the city had just one high school. She left and found glory in the world of politics and film, but upon her return to Texas several years ago, she bought Winestyles, a wine and craft beer boutique, and has focused on making the store a fun place for people to taste new wines and beers, create gifts and learn.

Amanda had a good career as a writer covering New York State politics, and then worked as an associate producer on an independent film which won at the Sundance Film Festival, in Park City, Utah. When that happened, she decided to return to Texas and attend law school so she could write contracts for independent films. Unfortunately, Texas failed to pass a law that would have given film companies tax breaks, and the film industry pretty much left, leaving her career up in the air.

“When the first owners of the store put it up for sale, I bought it because I liked the concept of the franchise. The store is user-friendly for novice wine drinkers, and I love working with customers to choose just the right gift for someone,” Amanda explained. “Our customer service makes us stand out. When you shop here, you deal with someone who’s tasted the wines and can help you find something to fit your palate. I’ve tasted every wine in here. If you can tell me anything you like, I can match it.”

Winestyles offers wines from all over the world, including organic, vegan and kosher selections. Amanda is always on the lookout for Texas wines, and she recently added craft beer from all over the world — some gluten-free — to her inventory as well.

Winestyles offers both a Wine Club and a Beer Club, which feature different wines and beers each month. They also have a



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“6 wines for \$60” promotion, which was originally just supposed to last for one summer, but continues due to popularity. Amanda and her staff can create custom labels and gift baskets. “Our custom labels are always popular. We have Realtors who put a photo of a home they just sold as a thank-you gift. Our gift baskets often have a theme, like a certain food or a wedding. Customers can build their own or give us a budget, and we’ll make it for them,” Amanda said.

In addition to sales, Amanda also offers Wine 101 classes each quarter, which is a great way to be introduced to




different types of wine. The store always has bottles of wine open for tasting, and Amanda encourages people to try different wines.

“I tell people, you can read books and reviews, but everyone’s taste buds are different. You have to try different wines, because you can have the same varietal from four countries, and it won’t taste the same. You might like a Californian merlot, but not an Australian, for instance. There are so many variables that I’m constantly learning,” she explained.

Amanda is committed to making WineStyles a store where relationships are built. She has one employee who worked for the original owners, and Amanda relishes getting to know her clientele and forming long-lasting bonds with them.

“I’m here because I enjoy it,” she smiled. “Getting to know my customers and doing something I love, you just can’t compare it to any other job.” **NOW**



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*Sheldon (left) and Steve Paramore take time for some baseball.*

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## Common Cold

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

It is that time of the year again. The common cold virus is everywhere. Even though viral upper respiratory infections can occur at any time, when it gets cold, we expect the sniffles to follow. Although it is easy to blame catching an infection on the change in temperature, the increase in colds during the winter is more likely from people being indoors together more and having more of an opportunity of passing germs between them.

Colds are caused by hundreds of viruses and are easily spread by direct contact. Anyone who is ill and sneezes or coughs in the air is releasing a multitude of viruses capable of infecting another person. Because there are so many viruses that cause the infection, you can become ill multiple times in a season. Your best course of action would be to try to prevent becoming sick.

High on everyone's list of prevention is to wash your hands frequently. If water and soap are not available, use a hand sanitizer. The cold virus can live on surfaces. If you touch an area that has been contaminated, you can easily transfer the virus to yourself. In that light, try to keep your hands off your face. If there is a member of the household who is ill, you can avoid getting sick by practicing good sanitation methods and disposing of contaminated tissues in the proper manner. Guard your health by drinking plenty of water and avoid smoking, even

secondhand smoke can be detrimental. Smoking irritates the nasal passageways, which interferes with its ability to filter out foreign substances. Try to get enough restorative sleep. Eat a balanced diet and take a multi-vitamin. Vitamins help your immune system. You cannot always tell if someone is sick so never drink after anyone. Just be on guard and avoid people who are sick.

If you do catch a cold, the bad news is there is no medication to make it go away. However, there are remedies to try to make your illness more bearable. Gargle with one-half teaspoon salt in eight ounces of warm water for your sore throat. Sucking on throat lozenges can help also. Drink plenty of fluids to help flush out impurities, to loosen mucus and to avoid dehydration if fever is present. Over-the-counter medications are usually sufficient for the symptoms of cough, runny nose, stuffiness and fever. A cold will usually last anywhere from 4 days to a couple of weeks. Although there are things you can do to feel better, try to not get sick by practicing good health. **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.*



# February Gardens

— By Nancy Fenton

Did you get started last month readying your garden for a great year? If you didn't, it is not too late. Just use organic-based products that will not burn new seeds, because now is the time to start planting those cool weather vegetables. I mean cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, radishes, carrots, spinach, lettuces, beets, turnips and peas. All these vegetables can weather a cold snap or two and really need the shorter days and cooler temperatures. The standard rule of thumb is to plant a seed in a shallow trench and cover with soil about three times the depth of the seed. Gentle watering will finish the planting process. The sprouts will start to show in five to 10 days depending on the variety of vegetable you are planting. Once up, you have to make the hard decisions about which seedlings to get rid of. Each plant needs some growing room, so be ruthless! Even in the most carefully tended garden, a plant will need several inches on each side to grow well. This is the hardest part for me!

Certain varieties of all these vegetables grow better in our alkaline soils than others. Texas A&M offers the following

recommendations: Beets — Pacemaker III, broccoli — Premium Crop, Brussel sprouts — Prince Marvin, cabbage — Early Jersey Wakefield or Royal Chantenay, cauliflower — Snow Crown, garlic — Texas White, lettuce — Buttercrunch or Salad Bowl, peas — Sugar Snap or Little Marvel, radishes — Inca (red) or White Icicle, spinach — Melody. Onions should be planted by sets or seedlings, usually available at your local feed and seed stores. Irish potatoes can be planted now as seed chunks in a depression, adding rich soil as the plants grow. This is a fun project for a family and can be done in a large bag or container on the porch! Many of these vegetables will convert to good pot plants with a great harvest, if fertilized. Try some this year and have your own garden!

For more information on good varieties for North Texas, call the Ellis County Master Gardeners at (972) 825-5175. **NOW**

*Nancy Fenton is a Master Gardener.*

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## Credit Impacts Loan Qualification, Rate

— By *Tim Bordelon*

Have you ever wondered how you qualified for a loan? Or why you didn't? Or maybe you ended up with an interest rate higher than the one advertised?

Lenders use a credit-scoring to determine your credit rating, otherwise known as a credit score. The higher your credit score, the more likely you are to get the credit you want at a desirable rate.

### **Credit Score**

Credit scores are often called "FICO scores" after the Fair Isaac Corporation, a California-based company that developed software to compute the first credit scores. When using the FICO scoring method, your credit score will be a three-digit number ranging from 300 to 850 that tells the lender the level of future risk associated with your credit history. Lenders use the information in your credit report to determine your credit score and assess whether or not loaning you money is a good risk.

### **Good Credit Score**

There isn't a single "cutoff" score used by all lenders, and there are many additional factors besides your credit score that lenders use to determine whether to give you credit and at what interest rate. So it's hard to say what a good score is outside of

a particular lending situation. For example, one auto lender may offer lower interest rates to people with scores above 680 while another lender may use 720, and so on. Generally speaking, 300-650 is considered high risk, 650-700 is medium risk, 700-750 is low risk, and 750-850 is considered very low risk.

According to the Fair Isaac Corporation, credit scores are typically spread among the population as follows:

- 27 percent — Below 650
- 15 percent — 650-699
- 18 percent — 700-749
- 27 percent — 750-800
- 13 percent — Above 800

Understanding your credit score is the first step to financial success. It's a good idea to also monitor your credit report periodically, which you can do by receiving a free yearly credit report at [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com). **NOW**

*Tim Bordelon is a State Farm agent based in Mansfield.*



### February 2-March 9

Free Art Exhibit: Peter Helms Feresten: "... my thoughts wander to the south side of town," Tarrant County College, Southeast Campus. Featuring photographer's strong affinity for the south side of Ft. Worth and his anthropological drive to document the marginalized and unfamiliar parts of the city. Contact Christopher Blay at christopher.blay@tccd.edu or (817) 515-3406.

### February 3-5

*Forever Plaid* at Community of Hope Methodist Church, 1800 East Debbie Lane. Performance times: **Feb. 3 and 4:** 7:00 p.m.; **Feb. 5:** 3:00 p.m. Cost: \$10/students and seniors; \$12/adults. Back by popular demand, this hilarious show revives music from the '50s and '60s featuring over 30 familiar numbers, including: "Three Coins in a Fountain," "Moments to Remember," "Sixteen Tons," "Chain Gang," "Heart and Soul," "Lady of Spain," "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing" and more. For information or for tickets, please visit [www.mainstageclassicaltheatre.org](http://www.mainstageclassicaltheatre.org).

### February 4

Sara Hickman in concert: 7:30 p.m., Farr

Best Theater, 109 N. Main Street. For more information, contact Rhonda Meadows at (817) 453-1107 or [Rhonda@Farrbest.com](mailto:Rhonda@Farrbest.com).

### February 5

Mansfield Bible Church Super Bowl Party: 4:30 p.m., 2351 Country Club Drive. Event features the largest screen to show the Super Bowl in Mansfield! Invite your friends to come and watch the game on a 34x14 foot screen! No charge. For questions, go to [www.MBCchurch.com](http://www.MBCchurch.com) or call (817) 473-8980.

### February 11

Enjoy the comedy group HIMprov and a meal catered by Mexican Inn at Mansfield Bible Church's Valentine's Banquet! This event for singles and couples is only \$12.50 per person. Tickets are available at Mansfield Bible Church, 2351 Country Club Drive. To learn more, go to [www.MBCchurch.com](http://www.MBCchurch.com) or call (817) 473-8980.

### February 17

Brian Burns and Davin James in concert: 7:30 p.m., Farr Best Theater, 109 N. Main Street. For more information, contact Rhonda Meadows at (817) 453-1107

or [Rhonda@Farrbest.com](mailto:Rhonda@Farrbest.com).

### February 18

"Enchantment Under the Sea" Daddy-Daughter Sweetheart Dance: 6:30-8:30 p.m., Mansfield Activities Center, 106 S. Wisteria. \$30/couple (\$10 late fee applies **February 13** and later.) Call (817) 453-5420 for more information.

### February 26

Bridal and Special Event Show: 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Midlothian Conference Center, 1 Community Circle, Midlothian. Admission is \$3. For more information, call (972) 723-7919.

### Ongoing:

#### Tuesdays

The Rotary Club of Mansfield meetings: Noon-2:00 p.m., Spring Creek BBQ, 1724 N. Hwy. 287. Call Danny Wilson at (972) 595-1778.

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

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## In The Kitchen With Todd Simmons

— By *Jeremy Agor*

Todd Simmons is a financial advisor during the week, but he indulges his passion for cooking on the weekends, providing delicious meals for his family and for football parties for 20 or more friends. His love of cooking reflects his mother's. "I was born and raised in Louisiana. We roasted pigs, boiled crawfish, cooked jambalaya and gumbo and fried oysters. My mom always had something great to eat for us," he remembered.

Todd started cooking his sophomore year in college after moving into his first apartment. His most memorable meal from that time was the first meal he cooked for the woman who became his wife. "Steak, potatoes and salad. It must have been pretty good since she married me over 23 years ago," Todd laughed. **NOW**

### Chicken and Pasta With Cream Sauce

**Olive oil**

**1 green bell pepper, chopped**

**1 red bell pepper, chopped**

**3 Tbsp. garlic, minced**

**1 yellow onion, chopped**

**4 boneless chicken breasts, cut into pieces**

**1 pkg. cream cheese**

**1/2 stick butter**

**1 pint heavy cream**

**Pasta of your choice**

**1 small jar of capers**

**1.** Cover bottom of saucepan with olive oil.

Cook bell pepper, garlic and onion. Add cut up chicken breast; cook until done.

**2.** Add cream cheese, butter and heavy cream; cook on low heat until mixture is hot. Stir often so cream does not burn.

**3.** Cook pasta according to directions. Add capers and cooked pasta to mixture. Turn off heat; mix well.

### Pecan-crusted Stuffed Chicken Breasts

**1 yellow onion**

**2 green bell peppers**

**2 Tbsp. garlic, minced**

**1 can fire-roasted tomatoes**

**6 large boneless chicken breasts**

**1 carton feta cheese**

**12 oz. pecans, finely chopped**

**2 cups Italian bread crumbs**

**1.** Chop onion and bell pepper; mince garlic. Drain tomatoes. Sauté vegetables in olive oil until done. Set aside and let cool.

**2.** Using a small, sharp paring knife, cut a slit into the middle of the chicken breast, being careful not to let the knife cut through the top, bottom or other side of the chicken.

**3.** Mix feta cheese with cooled vegetables. Stuff chicken with the feta cheese/vegetable mixture. Mix the pecans and bread crumbs in a large bowl. Cover chicken breasts with pecan bread crumb mixture. Bake in a greased pan, uncovered, at 375 F for 45 minutes. Broil on high to brown the tops of chicken.

### Chicken and Sausage Jambalaya

**2 green bell peppers**

**1 yellow onion**

**1 cup vegetable oil**

**1 cup all-purpose flour**

**1 small tube of breakfast sausage**

**1 pkg. link sausage**

**3 boneless chicken breasts**

**2 Tbsp. minced garlic**

**2 cans Ro-Tel tomatoes**

**3 12-oz. beers or 36 oz. chicken broth**

**1 lb. rice**

**Tabasco, salt, pepper and Tony Chachere's Famous Creole Seasoning, to taste**

**1.** Chop bell peppers and onion. In a heavy stock pot, heat oil and brown flour to make a roux. Cook until dark brown. Add bell pepper and onion and cook for 5 minutes.

**2.** Add breakfast sausage and cook until done. Slice link sausage, add to roux and cook for 10 minutes.

**3.** Cut chicken into bite-sized pieces. Add chicken, garlic, Ro-Tel and beer or broth. Make sure mixture boils. Add rice and seasonings; return to a boil; turn down heat to low and cook for approximately 25 minutes. Stir occasionally so that rice does not stick to bottom of pot.

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



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