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Love's Journey

Chris and Jennifer
Buckhannon
celebrate life, one
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*Love at first sight resulted
in the Buckhannons'
fight for a common cause.*

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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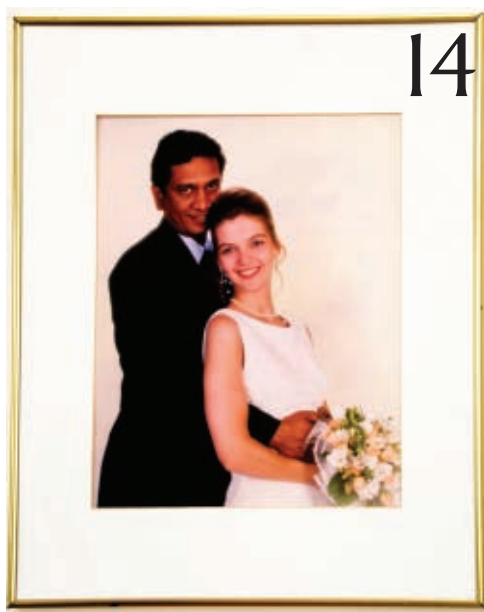
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Editor's Note

I've got a good "Punxsutawney" feeling ...

I may not believe in weather-predicting groundhogs, but a lifetime in Texas assures me warmer weather is not too far from February 2, whether Punxsutawney Phil agrees or not. With that in mind, I'm optimistic spring will be in the air soon.

Yes, the end of winter brings optimism in many forms. Just as this month marks Black History, Valentine's Day and Presidents Day, this issue highlights triumph over challenges and the perseverance of love against the odds.

Odds are, according to legend, if groundhog Phil sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter weather. If he does not see his shadow, there will be an early spring. Either way, we're excited here at NOW that our nine magazines, including *Red OakNOW*, continue to grow and bloom. That's what I call a good Punxsutawney feeling!

Angel

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LOVE'S JOURNEY

— By Angel Morris

The love story of Chris and Jennifer Buckhannon began on December 31, 2007, when the duo met at a friend's New Year's Eve party. They quickly became inseparable, and even life's challenges haven't broken their bond. "Neither of us was looking for a relationship ... but it was an instant attraction, and we have been together every day since then," Jennifer said.

Unbeknownst to Jennifer and Chris, their lives had been intertwined since both of their families moved to Red Oak in 1977. "My family moved to Red Oak when I was only 2 years old. We moved from Duncanville and planted ourselves here and have never uprooted," Jennifer said. Chris' family moved that same year to the area they lovingly dubbed "the farm."

"After meeting Chris, I realized that we had a connection that we weren't even aware of. I graduated from Red Oak High School in 1993, and Chris graduated in 1991. Our paths never crossed, but our families' paths had crossed a lot," Jennifer explained. "I played soccer with his sister and cousin as a young girl. I was in the same class with two of his cousins and worked with his brother at my first job at the Walmart photo center in Lancaster."

After that fateful party, however, the connection was apparent, "because we didn't want to be without each other. It

was like we just knew we needed to be together from the time we met," Chris said.

The couple had just settled into a Red Oak home together when a wrench was thrown into their blissful existence. On January 6, 2009, Chris was diagnosed with testicular cancer. "Once he was diagnosed, my priorities in life changed," Jennifer said.

In February 2009, Jennifer proposed marriage to Chris. And, since he was unable to work, Chris was in charge of planning the wedding. "We reversed the traditional roles. I picked the date and the location," Chris said. "Jennifer helped and gave her opinion, but I was in charge of getting everything organized."

The couple married on April 18, 2009, after Chris had his fourth and final round of chemo just a week before the wedding. "We wanted the wedding to be outside by the lake because our favorite thing to do

is go camping at the lake," Jennifer noted. "Unfortunately, it was raining buckets that day, so at the last minute, we had to move everything inside."

The day of the wedding, friends and family worked to help the couple's dream wedding become reality, as Chris and Jennifer got ready inside the fifth-wheel campers in which they had come to the site. Chris made sure to include Jennifer's daughter in the occasion, as well.

"Since I had been married previously, I had my daughter walk down the aisle with me, and she stood up with us as we got married. Chris even presented her with a ring as a gesture that we would all become a family," Jennifer said.

Becoming a blended family was another challenge Jennifer and Chris faced, along with then 7-year-old daughter, Cheyenne. "It was very important to me for my daughter to mesh with Chris, and we had to work out some kinks. It took time and a lot of patience, but now we have become one unit," Jennifer said.

"Learning to be a father is a challenge, but I think I get a little better at it each day," Chris said.

Communication and honesty are the two key ingredients to their success as a family. "Those two things are so important to making it through tough

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times. We take things as they come and support each other, no matter what crisis may arise,” Chris said.

Jennifer believes give-and-take is essential, as well. “We might not have the same tastes in things, but we are both willing to step outside the box to find common ground,” Jennifer said. As they do this, they learn to like each other’s interests. “In that way, we compliment each other,” she added.

Besides common interests of sporting events, camping, hunting and bowling, the Buckhannons have come to enjoy a mutual cause because of the way cancer has touched their lives. Jennifer organized the Central Ellis County Relay For Life in previous years, and she and Chris both participate in the event each year, along with the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. The race serves as a reminder of what they have overcome. “So far, I have been cancer-free since May 2009,” Chris said. In August 2009, Chris had his last surgery to remove the chemo port, and he goes back to the oncologist every three to four months to monitor his blood levels.

Because of the aggressiveness of his cancer, doctors don’t consider Chris in remission. But since his tumor was removed and his chemo treatment was completed, Chris said he has been “healthy as a horse.”

“Chris’ diagnosis changed both of our perspectives on life. We learned that you can’t take one second for granted — that each breath we take is a gift. And we have



learned to appreciate even the most minute things,” Jennifer said. “We have learned you really can’t sweat the small stuff.”

While a cancer diagnosis is never a good thing, Jennifer said it has taught them how important one’s outlook is to a situation’s outcome. “I would tell anybody who has ever been diagnosed to have a good mind frame and to think positive, no matter how bleak things may seem,” she said. “I believe that 90 percent of recovery comes from the mind, and if you give up, so will your body. It takes determination and the will to survive and overcome.”

With that in mind, the Buckhannon’s love story continues one day at a time. They each continue their jobs — Jennifer has worked five years as an accounting technician at the Army Air Force Exchange Service, and Chris has worked 13 years as a Havertys delivery driver. They plan to focus on staying healthy, enjoying their home in their quiet neighborhood and helping their daughter grow into a productive part of society.

Years from now, they hope their intertwined paths involve wide open spaces. “We would one day love to get a motor home so when we get to retire, we can travel,” Jennifer said. “But Red Oak will always be our home.” **NOW**

Editor’s Note: For more information regarding the American Cancer Society’s local Relay For Life, visit www.relayforlife.org/centralelliscountytx.

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Cache *in* Hand

— By Randy Biggam

An Internet-based, treasure-hunting game that's drawing millions of adventure seekers around the world has hooked one Ovilla resident, who's sniffed out more than 5,000 buried caches since 2008. The hub of this high-tech phenomenon — a kind of 21st century hide-and-seek — is the Web site www.geocaching.com, where members like retiree Larry Stevenson log on to receive challenges and location coordinates for digging up a variety of "treasures."

Larry and fellow outdoor enthusiasts also log on to share their experiences and photos after discovering the secreted items with their GPS devices, mobile phones, compasses or maps. Placed by fellow geocachers, the hidden goodies consist of everything from coveted sports tickets or travel coupons to trade-worthy coins and magnets. But for many, including Larry, the payoff is in the search, not the find.

From the peaks of Machu Picchu to Times Square to rural back roads everywhere, geocachers are on the go and loving it. "The fun of the game is the hunt itself," confessed Larry, a former Ovilla City Councilman. "You kind of get the fever for uncovering interesting things, regardless of whether the articles in the caches are expensive. What makes it worthwhile for me is the exploration."

Education is valuable, too. For 39 years, learning was Larry's stock-in-trade, teaching Texas history and coaching football and basketball in both the Red Oak and Duncanville Independent School Districts. "A lot of the caches you find are related to local or regional history," he said. "And that's right up my alley." Cemeteries are a favorite locale for depositing and uncovering geocaches, and Larry has squirreled away and found his fair share. "Cemeteries are a great place to do a

cache because of the opportunities for information on local historical figures or events,” Larry explained. “And it’s a running joke that the only people who outnumber the dead in cemeteries are geocachers.” As an example, caches that Larry hid in Dallas’ old historic Oak Cliff Cemetery have created a buzz among fellow history buffs who have visited the grounds to pay their respects to some of the city’s founding fathers, including William Houston, son of Texas pioneer Sam Houston.

Although most of the time Larry heads out on a spree spontaneously, he prepares for other jaunts with a bag packed with all the gear he might need. “I usually just set my GPS and go,” he said. “But I do have gadgets I take with me sometimes.” With camouflage tape, pliers and a magnifying glass he devised himself, the safari-hatted man locals like to call the “Indiana Jones of Red Oak” is ready for the road.



Along the way, Larry has found his niche in the global geocaching community of more than 5 million active players on the hunt for some 1.5 million caches hoarded in 100 countries on all seven continents. “I started out picking ones that were nearest to home, and now I’ve been all over,” he said. “The farthest west I’ve geocached is off the coast of Hermosa Beach, and the farthest east I’ve gone with the game is Jamestown.” He finds most stashes on his own, but he also enjoys teaming up with geocaching friends he’s met online or out in the field. “I run with a serious bunch of geocachers,” he pointed out. “It’s a lot of fun, and we live for it.” The group he has joined, Southwest Arlington Geocachers, is comprised of more than 100 members who refer to themselves as SWAG. “That stands for more than our name,” he laughed. “It also stands for ‘Stuff We Always Get!’”

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The treasure Larry and his friends find ranges from books, CDs and personal notes about the history of the area, to various trinkets for swapping. Geocaches are generally placed on public property, near landmarks for instance, or on private land by permission of the owners. There's almost no limit to what might be enclosed in hidden containers, although alcohol, drugs, firearms and adult-themed material are prohibited. "This is a family-friendly game," Larry said. "You can make it a guy's day out, but many geocachers are on outings with their wives or kids while camping or hiking, so people who want to join need to keep that in mind."



One of Larry's most exciting sojourns with his caching pals took place last summer. "It was in the heat of July when we decided to hit a section of geocaches out in California along Route 66," he recounted. "It was 118 degrees at one point, but we were determined to do the run." Calling themselves the Desert Seven, the men "struck" (chose) a special coin for their expedition, copies of which they trade with other cachers. Though it took place in the Mojave Desert during one of the hottest summers on record, the July 18 quest went off without a hitch, and the Texas adventurers logged some 1,047 caches between the towns of Barstow and Needles, California. "It was a lot of work," Larry admitted. "That many caches meant they were placed every 528 feet or, in other words, there were around 10 caches per mile!"

Larry and his friends' most recent trip was to Nevada several weeks ago where they trekked through one of the most popular geocaching destinations — the ET Power Trail, so-called for its nearness to the military base and alleged UFO hotbed known as Area 51.

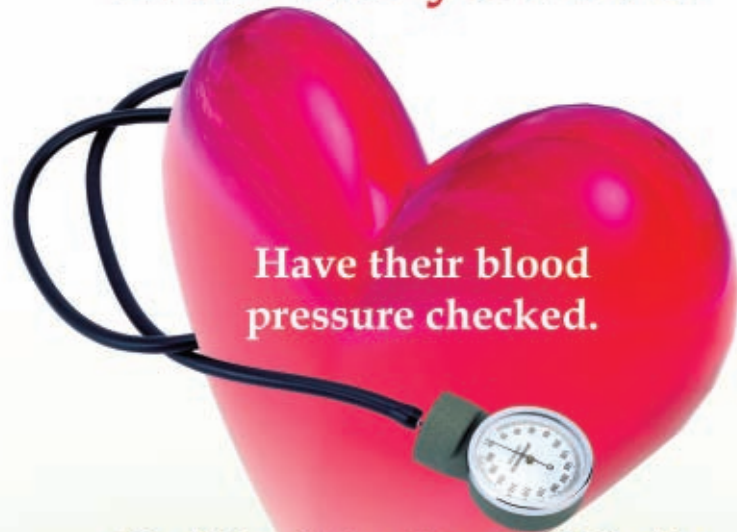
The group was glad to try its hand at the 1,500 caches stockpiled along the Extraterrestrial Highway, but they almost lost their chance. Last March, the Nevada Department of Transportation urged Groundspeak, the company that controls geocaching.com, to shut down the trail after receiving complaints about carelessly parked vehicles that endangered fellow motorists along the route. But a new path was soon reinstated, owing to louder complaints from geocachers, civic organizations and merchants who reported losing substantial tourism revenue due to the closing of the old ET Trail. "One of the businesses that benefits from geocachers visiting the region is a little motel called the Little A'Le'Inn," Larry said. "The owners say because of geocaching traffic, they are able to stay open year-round, instead of just seasonally."

Larry is continuing to enjoy his forays to local cemeteries, and especially appreciates the attention his caches have brought to the old Dallas Oakland Cemetery. He hopes the renewed interest of history-loving geocachers will lead to the neglected old graveyard's restoration.



"That would be great if we can get it fixed up again," he said. "That's one of the best things about geocaching. It may be just a sport, but it gives focus to important sites that need to be preserved. If you can have fun and still be able to do something meaningful, that's what I call a great game." **NOW**

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*Kishore & Alexandra
Asirvadam*

— By Angel Morris

Across land and sea, the Asirvadam family was meant to be. Alexandra, an Austria native, and Kishore, from India, traveled far to make their home in Red Oak. Today, they reflect on their journey and the relationship they jokingly call an arranged marriage. “We really think we were meant to be — with a lot of help from Kishore’s family,” Alexandra said.



"In 1994, I was debating whether to go to Edinburgh, Scotland, or Bournemouth, England," Alexandra explained of her exchange studies abroad. "I was set to stay with one host family, but three weeks before the trip, my family was changed. I'd never had a change of family before, and it was not the first time I went on such a trip."

The wheels of fate began to turn, as Alexandra was placed with Kishore's sister, who had just moved to Bournemouth the previous month. Upon her arrival, Alexandra was greeted by Kishore's mother, an Indian lady wearing a sari. "The next people I saw were African students speaking their native language, then an Italian student, also with broken English. I believed I landed on a different continent, definitely not England," Alexandra recalled.



Kishore's parents, Duncanville residents, happened to be visiting their daughter during Alexandra's four-week stay in England. "I got close to them and his sister, and I came back every following summer to visit. I wondered why I was so drawn to that family but couldn't figure it out," Alexandra said. "I planned on staying in England longer, and in September 1997, I went to England for an entire year to study marketing management."



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Kishore and Alexandra were both in long-term relationships during this time, and interestingly enough, both separated from their partners in February 1997. The two had never met one another at this point. From 1994-1997 Kishore's

parents kept inviting Alexandra to visit them in Duncanville, and after a vacation to Mexico, Alexandra popped in on them. Then she met Kishore.

"My father asked me to show her around Dallas, and we ran around together for a couple of days. At the end of our sightseeing, I asked her to a Halloween party I was planning," Kishore said. "She laughed and said surely she wouldn't come back all the way from England for a party. But I sent her a plane ticket, and she did!"

What followed were many long-distance visits, with Kishore working in Europe, Spain, Switzerland and Ireland during the time, while Alexandra returned to Vienna, Austria, in 1998 for a job. Tired of being apart, the couple married in June 1999. "Considering that I only met Kishore because his parents kept inviting me here persistently, we concluded that we never had a choice, and we ended up in an arranged marriage!" Alexandra joked.

The couple, who initially lived in Ireland, had their first son in May 2000 in Dallas. They moved back to Ireland and

then to Slovenia, had their second son in Austria and moved back to Texas after he was born in 2001. Living in Garland until 2003, the family eventually found its way to Red Oak. "It was closer to family and near enough to downtown Dallas, without the crowds," Kishore said. "Plus we have more land."



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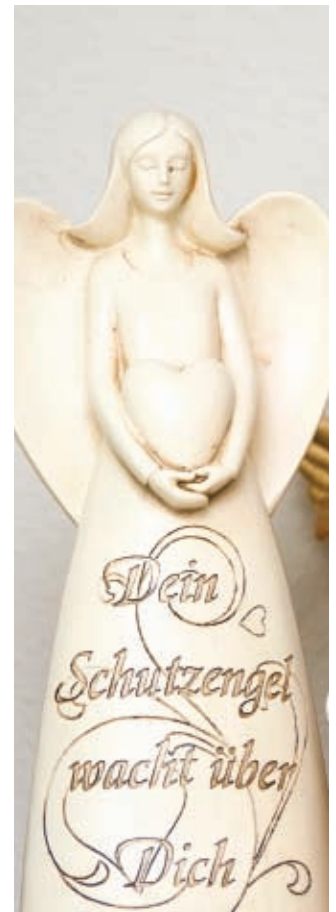


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Today they describe their home as “simple, functional and friendly for kids.” “I don’t hassle about keeping it in perfect order. It is full of toys, with an open kitchen, dining and living area, a huge master bedroom with roomy closet and a niche that is my little ‘relaxation/angel’ corner,” Alexandra said.

The surprise birth of their daughter in 2008 made the home even cozier. “Our house is a little too small for us, but we are trying to make it work. We’ve added a nice patio, which is comfortable, and a great outside party place. We have a large backyard,” Kishore said.

A painting of Alexandra’s hometown leads visitors from the entryway into the home, where the couple displays artwork from different places they have lived: Austria, Bolivia, Slovenia, Croatia, Mexico, Greece and Africa. “The plates on our kitchen cabinets are also from different places we have been,” Kishore noted.

A large Klimt print on the fireplace and piano fill the living room, where the family’s one and only TV is housed, as well. “The way we both grew up, all



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electronics are kept in the living area to keep the family interacting," Kishore said.

Boys Kevin, 11, and Nicholas, 10, have their own bedrooms, while little Shalini, 3, has a nook in the master bedroom. The

fourth bedroom has been Kishore's home office for two years, where he works as a telecommunications engineer, while Alexandra focuses on her professional counseling career. "My goal is to combine conventional and unconventional approaches to emotional healing, to help individuals get through emotional problems and traumatic experiences and to reduce the pain they feel," Alexandra said.

Both degreed professionals, Kishore has traveled to 40 countries and made vast contacts in the telecommunications industry, while Alexandra has visited 20 countries and practiced counseling in a women's shelter, foster care agency and local hospital. She uses her knowledge of other cultures, behavioral studies and training in multiple acupressure techniques to help her clients today.

Combining Kishore's analytical and Alexandra's sensitive approaches, the Asirvadam home incorporates their cultures without feeling like a collection of souvenirs. "Our family and memories are nicely spread over the house, and because the home is smaller, we try to keep the unnecessary stuff to a minimum," Kishore said.

Alexandra agreed that her career and her home have that in common. "People can learn to let go of baggage that's weighing them down and focus on the real things they want for themselves. This can start in our minds and our homes," she said.

As far as future plans for their "meant to be" family and home, "adding a room for my daughter is a possibility," Alexandra said.

Ultimately, the Asirvadams will continue to combine their worldly experiences with their belief in simplicity. "Get rid of what you don't need and set priorities," Alexandra said. "It's how to manage your life and maintain peace of mind," because that, after all, is the perfect arrangement. **NOW**

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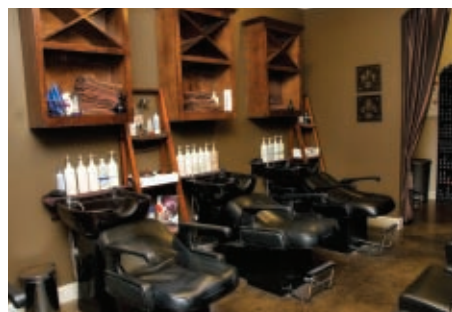
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Manager Vonda Jo Whaley and the staff of Impressions Salon Etc. provide a comfortable, upscale environment where every client is treated with TLC.

Good Impressions

This down-home salon gives customers an uptown experience.

— By Angel Morris

After 25 years in DeSoto, Impressions Salon Etc. is the newest Red Oak transplant now thriving in its home just off I-35 at Red Oak Road. While its feel is upscale, its attitude is down-home. “We’re small-town girls doing things big-city style. We’re from the South — we like to laugh and have fun,” Manager Vonda Jo Whaley said. “Most importantly, it’s all of our duty to take care of everyone’s clients the moment they step in the salon.”

The full-service salon can meet a variety of clients’ needs with 10 stylists, a manicurist and an esthetician on staff. Cuts, colors, nails and facials are all offered at Impressions, but the salon prides itself on its “above and beyond” services, as well. “We are very particular on how our clients are serviced. We baby our

customers. We want to give them something they may not find at every other salon,” Vonda noted.

The special treatment includes custom coffees and teas, delectable sweet treats and cozy, soothing waiting coves. Also offered are makeup application and bridal party stylings. An Aveda Salon since 1987, Impressions offers a full line of Aveda products, and even a mini boutique of handbags, jewelry, shoes and the like. “It’s just enough to give the client a little something pretty to look at while they’re here,” Vonda said.

Speaking of pretty, one step inside the salon and it’s easy to see why owner Reba Chandler and Vonda decided to move the salon here. “We’d been in DeSoto forever, and the salon had

gone through all the various trends in design. It was beautiful, but this place topped it,” Vonda said.

In July 2011, the Red Oak site became the salon's new home. Four of Impressions' original stylists, including Vonda, Alanna Bishop, Gina Burba and Sherry Hollenbeck, have worked together for more than 20 years. “It's a wonderful location, and it wasn't too far for our regular clients to make the transition,” Vonda said, noting the “fantastic four” and all Impressions employees are devoted to their faithful customers.

“We expect for their eyes to light up when we're done with them... We want everyone to leave feeling pampered and beautiful, because that's what they come here for.”

Today, they look forward to growing that client base in Red Oak. “We want to be involved in the community now that we're here. We would love to participate in service programs and assist people in any way there might be a need,” Vonda said, noting the stylists have aided women's shelters and social clubs in a variety of ways. “And, of course, we want to help those who may be looking for a new salon. We know if they come and try us, they'll feel right at home.”

“As with any client, the most important thing to us is to make sure you leave happy,” Vonda said. The staff looks for the telltale sign of each client's pleasure with their service. “We expect for their eyes to light up when we're done with them,” Vonda added. “We want everyone to leave feeling pampered and beautiful, because that's what they come here for. That's why we're called Impressions, and we want to leave you with a good one!” **NOW**

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First-grader, Erick Candelas, reads to Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students) volunteer Eric Shaw, father of second-grade student, Zara Shaw.



First-grader, Kemondre Yancy, displays the cookie he made himself in Mrs. Sheri Pack's Red Oak Elementary class.



Guests enjoy the annual Senior Citizen Dinner hosted by Hawks Against Destructive Decisions-Inspiring Teens (HADD-IT).



Red Oak Intermediate Gifted and Talented fifth-graders showcase structures created in their study of geometry in architecture.



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Reduce Stress By Improving Financial Health

— By Celeste Fonseca

Have you been feeling stressed lately? Gritting your teeth as you sit behind the wheel during rush hour traffic? Thinking of all the projects that need to be completed at work or home? Wondering if you'll ever find time to relax? Then you might be a little stressed.

While there are many contributors to stress — from work to commuting — money and finances are arguably one of the biggest sources of stress in our lives. It is a major area of conflict for couples, and it causes headaches and nausea according to Rockford, Ill. Family Credit Counseling Service, which surveyed consumers with credit card debt last November. Financial stress also increases your likelihood of developing gum disease according to research published in the *Journal of Periodontology*.

Here are five steps to help reduce the financial stress in your life:

1. Get Help

There are financial professionals who can provide guidance to repair your financial health by helping to assess your financial situation and assist you with investments and savings products to meet your future goals. You should also conduct research on your own by visiting Web sites, attending seminars and reading books that provide information on finances and investing.

2. Exercise

Work those financial muscles. It takes time and effort to reach your financial goals. If you're on a diet, you've likely set a goal of how many pounds you want to lose. If you're a collector, you've likely set a goal of how many items you want to own. If you're serious about saving money, it's no different — setting specific goals helps you focus on where you want to be. Without goals, you'll have no idea how much money to put aside from your take-home pay. That can make it too easy to spend it all, or to save far less than you could have, if you had simply determined a goal amount.

3. A Dollar a Day Keeps the Stress Away

Start saving now. In order to reap the financial benefits of compounding, you need to start saving as soon as possible. Even with all your bills and expenses, it's usually possible to find a little bit of money to invest. Track your expenses for one month and scrutinize your spending habits. Can you save \$5 per day by brown bagging your lunch rather than eating out? Will cutting back on premium cable channels free up \$15? Earmark financial windfalls like bonuses, tax refunds or birthday gifts for investing. If you find it too painful to put in the entire amount, commit a certain percentage to your savings.

4. Reward Yourself for a Job Well Done

You work hard, and when you retire, it will be time to reap the benefits. No matter what your retirement dream is, it takes some preparation to make it happen. If your current savings efforts are falling short of your future goals, consider consulting with a financial professional to review your current insurance and financial needs, and see if you have what you need to protect what you have today and prepare you for tomorrow.

5. Wipe Away the Credit Card Blues

Paying off high-interest loans from credit cards could help lower your financial stress, especially if you're having trouble making the minimum payments due on your credit card balances or making late payments. Working to eliminate credit card debt can help to ease your mind, and less consumer debt may help to keep your overall credit in good standing. Residents of many states are now eligible to receive, once per year, a free credit report from AnnualCreditReport.com. Visit www.annualcreditreport.com for more information. **NOW**

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February 2

Author's Group: 6:30-7:30 p.m., Municipal Building, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. Writers are invited to this discussion and critique group led by local author, Donald Horne.

February 4, 10, 18

Prayer Shawl Ministry: 10:00 a.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 Daubitz Dr. Guests are welcome to join this circle of healing hosted by the United Methodist Women. Call (972) 617-9100 for details.

February 7

PrimeTimers Senior Group meeting: 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Oaks Fellowship, 777 S. I-35 East. Open to all seniors. Fun, food and fellowship. RSVP by calling (214) 376-8208.

February 9

Teen Club: 6:30-7:30 p.m., Red Oak Library, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. A free monthly craft/game hour

for teens aged 13-19. Contact (469) 218-1230.

February 11

Ellis County SPCA Volunteer Training: Noon-1:00 p.m., 2570 FM 878, Waxahachie. E-mail coordinator@elliscountyspca.org for details.

Share the Love Gala for CASA of Ellis County: 6:00-10:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center, 1950 N. Interstate 35. Tickets: \$50/person. Event benefits CASA, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of abused and neglected children. Purchase tickets online at www.casaofelliscounty.org. Call (972) 937-1455 or e-mail rlrawls@sbcglobal.net.

February 18

Chili Supper and Cook-off: 5:00-8:00 p.m., Lions Club, 207 W. Red Oak Rd. Event benefits the Red Oak Lions Club and Red Oak ISD Education Foundation. Tickets: \$5/adults; \$3/children under 12. Purchase tickets from any Lion or Foundation member. E-mail Karen. Anderson@redoakisd.org or call (972) 617-4320.

February 25

Mr. and Mrs. Red Oak Pageant: 7:00-10:00 p.m., Red Oak High School Performing Arts Center, 122 State Hwy. 342. Local educators take

the stage in a comical pageant-style fundraiser competition. Visit www.redoakisd.org for more details.

March 2-3

Knights of Columbus Barbecue Cook-off: Mid-Way Regional Airport, off of Hwy. 287 between Midlothian and Waxahachie. Event benefits the Knights of Columbus Council 8417 and the Ellis County 4H and FFA Livestock Show. Contact Dennis Williams at (214) 399-0081 or dmwilliams05@sbcglobal.net or Ron Naizer at (817) 909-6484 or rnaizer@yahoo.com.

March 3

The Canterbury Episcopal School Annual Gala "Retro Rewind": 6:00 p.m., Ruthe Jackson Center 3113 S. Carrier Pkwy., Grand Prairie. The event benefits CES, a K-12 independent school in DeSoto that serves Red Oak and surrounding communities. Visit www.CanterburyGala.com, call Sherry Bowers at (972) 293-5877 or e-mail her at cesgala@yahoo.com.

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your event details to angel.morris@nowmagazines.com.

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In The Kitchen With Stacey Tolliver-Whitney

— *By Angel Morris*

Stacey Tolliver-Whitney started cooking 30 years ago watching her mother and grandmother in the kitchen. “Not only do I cook traditional things I learned from them, I like to re-create recipes from restaurants,” Stacey said. “But my best creation is cake bites. Not only does my family love them, but I have sold thousands of them at the holidays!”

Stacey dreams of some day opening her own restaurant or bakery. In the meantime, she stays busy feeding her blended family of six children with husband, Jack. “I have always had a love for cooking, and it has become a passion. Cooking meals and having family gatherings is a huge part of my life,” Stacey said. “It is a great way to get everyone together.” **NOW**

Porcupine Meatballs

- 2 tsp. cooking oil**
- 2 lbs. ground beef**
- 3 boxes beef-flavored Rice-A-Roni**
- 2 packets brown gravy mix**

- 1.** Heat oil in pan while mixing ground beef with Rice-A-Roni (do not add seasoning yet).
- 2.** Form meatballs to the size of your choice and add to heated oil.
- 3.** When meatballs are completely brown, add Rice-A-Roni seasoning packets with amount of water shown on box.
- 4.** Add brown gravy mix with amount of water shown on packet.
- 5.** Simmer for up to an hour, watching every 15 minutes to see if more water is needed.
- 6.** As meatballs get ready, some of the rice falls into the sauce, which makes great gravy.

Ketchup Goulash

- 2 lbs. ground beef**
- 1 red bell pepper**
- 1 yellow bell pepper**
- 1 orange bell pepper**
- 1 medium to large onion**
- 1 1-lb. box penne pasta, cooked**
- 1 24-oz. bottle of your favorite ketchup**

- 1.** Brown ground beef.
- 2.** Chop all peppers and onion and let simmer in ground beef for about 15 minutes.
- 3.** Mix in pasta and ketchup.

Easy Popovers

- 2 eggs**
- 1 cup flour**
- 1 cup milk**

- 1/2 tsp. salt**
- Cooking spray**

- 1.** Slightly beat eggs and mix in rest of ingredients.
- 2.** Spray muffin pan generously with cooking spray, filling each muffin cup half full.
- 3.** Cook at 450 F for 15-20 minutes, or until golden brown.
- 4.** Once removed from oven, center will fall, and you can fill them with your favorite breakfast meat, jelly or real butter.

Stuffed Mushrooms

- 1 block cream cheese**
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese**
- 1/2 cup bacon bits**
- 20 to 30 medium mushrooms**
- 1 8-oz. pkg. provolone cheese slices**

- 1.** Mix cream cheese, Parmesan cheese and bacon bits together.
- 2.** Place filling inside tops of each mushroom.
- 3.** Cut provolone cheese slices into quarters and place a piece on top of each mushroom.
- 4.** Bake in a 9 x 13-inch pan for 15 to 20 minutes.

Sausage and Cheese Croissant Rolls

- 1 can refrigerated croissant rolls**
- 1 cup cooked Jimmy Dean sausage, crumbled**
- 2 cups cheese, your choice of flavor**

- 1.** Unroll croissant dough keeping it together as one solid piece.
- 2.** Place sausage and cheese down the middle of the dough.
- 3.** Roll dough toward cheese and sausage making sure you patch any holes in the dough.
- 4.** Place in a 350 F oven and cook 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown.
- 5.** Remove from oven and let sit 5 minutes before slicing. Serve warm.

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