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Pre-K & Kinder Round Up

DeSoto ISD will host a Pre-K & Kinder Round Up for new students to register on April 3-5 and May 1-3 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the DeSoto Town Center, 211 E. Pleasant Run Rd.

All DeSoto ISD Pre-K students attend full-day programming at the **Amber Terrace Discovery & Design Early Childhood Academy**, which also houses the district's Eagle Advantage Child Development Center for students age 18 months to three years. Kinder students attend their neighborhood school.

A child is eligible for free Pre-K if the child is age 4 on or before Sept. 1 and any of the following: on free- or reduced-meals; non-English speaking; homeless; a military child; or under state conservatorship. DeSoto ISD also offers a tuition-based Pre-K program. Check the district website for registration materials needed for student enrollment!

PREK ROUNDUP

- STEP 1 - REGISTER ONLINE**
Register at desotoisd.org
- STEP 2 - CARNIVAL**
April 3-5, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. or
May 1-3, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
DeSoto Town Center
207 E. Pleasant Run Rd.



Cook and Simonfalvi were named ALL-STATE Choir! Congratulations to our DHS fine arts students who advanced to the state level - from left: Samuel Orta (Tenor 1, Flute), Byron Hanspard, Jr. (Bass 2), Juliana Simonfalvi (Soprano 1), Brayla Cook (Alto 1) and Montavion McKinney (Tenor 1).

Calendar

Wed., Feb. 1, 9 a.m. - DHS Signing Day, Dyer Gymnasium
Th., Feb. 9, 7:30 a.m. - Coffee TALK, Northside ES, 525 Ray Street
Mon., Feb. 20 - Staff Development and Parent Conference Day
Feb. 27-March 3 - Celebrate Texas Public Schools Week
March 13-17 - Spring Break

NEWS TO KNOW

PARENT CONFERENCE DAY

DeSoto teachers will host parent conferences on Monday, February 20 to update parents on their students academic grades, classroom activities, upcoming events, and much more. Parents are encouraged to meet with teachers that afternoon.

HALL OF HONOR NOMINATIONS

Nominations will be accepted January 30 through March 31 for the DeSoto ISD Hall of Honor. Forms are online for both the DHS Alumni Hall of Fame and Distinguished Service Award categories. The Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony will take place Friday, May 5 at DeSoto High School. For more information, visit www.desotoisd.org.

BOARD MEMBER ELECTION

The candidate filing and voting dates have been set for the 2017 DeSoto ISD Board of Trustee election scheduled for Saturday, May 6. Candidate filing dates for the election will be Wednesday, Jan. 18 through Friday, Feb. 17.

Positions up for election this year are:

- Place 3 — Karen Daniel (i)
- Place 4 — Jerry Hall (i)
- Place 5 — Aubrey C. Hooper (i)

Interested candidates may pick up and submit a candidate packet at DeSoto ISD, 200 E. Belt Line Road, from 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Elected board members will serve three-year terms.

COFFEE TALK WITH DR. HARRIS

Join Supt. David Harris for candid conversations about your campus and DeSoto ISD.

- Thursday, February 9 - 7:30 a.m. @ Northside ES
- Thursday, April 13 - 7:30 a.m. @ Ruby Young ES

SAVE THE DATES:

March 28-30 - STAAR Testing Dates
April 1 - DeSoto LIVING! Chamber Festival held at East MS, 601 Belt Line Rd.
April 22 - Male Leadership Symposium, DHS
April 22 - Education Foundation Gala
May 5 - Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony
May 6 - Election Day



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Managing Editor, Becky Walker

Southwest Editor, Abby Rich

Editorial Coordinator, Sandra Strong

Editorial Assistant, Rachel Smith

Writers, Debbie Durling . Vernon Folks

Jill Martinez . Rick Mauch

Betty Tryon . Carolyn Wills

Editors/Proofreaders, Pat Anthony

Shannon Pfaff

GRAPHICS AND DESIGN

Creative Director, Chris McCalla

Artists, Kristin Bato . Morgan Christensen

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography Director, Jill Rose

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ON THE COVER



Bob Williams and fellow members
of the 20th Special Operations
Squadron finally tell their story.

Photo by Shane Kirkpatrick.

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Editor's Note

A Month of Rest ... Yeah, Right!

I always think of February as a yearly month of rest and pause. It is the in-between month marking the end of winter and the coming of spring, and the last truly cold month for North Texas. Though after a big move to a new house, I won't be able to take a restful break before spring rushes in! While most everything is unpacked and pictures hung on the wall, I still have a ton to do. The great thing about moving into another home is the chance to start fresh and get organized. Working with one room at a time makes it not as overwhelming. And I can't neglect the closets — closets tend to be the spaces we literally throw our odd stuff into when we don't know what to do with it. I'm a big fan of containers, especially on closet shelves versus throwing everything on top, which makes for a cluttered look. I don't go so far as to label every container, but I'm sure that's just around the corner.

Happy organizing!

Abby

Abby Rich

SouthwestNOW Editor

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**“I WANTED TO BE WHERE THE
ACTION WAS, AND I’M GLAD
I WENT. WE SAVED LIVES.”**

HIDDEN HEROES

— By Rick Mauch

Bob Williams, 77, a DeSoto resident, reflected on his time in the Green Hornets, a Special Operations helicopter squadron. Bob was a staff sergeant serving as a gunner/crew chief, as he flew over 700 top-secret rescue missions behind enemy lines in Cambodia and Laos. Bob paused, choking up. He can talk about it now, but he couldn't for four decades. "No one knew what we were doing, not even the others on the base," he said. "We wore no insignia. If we were captured, they didn't want the enemy to know who were officers."

Bob and his fellow members of the 20th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) were inducted into the Air Force Museum National Hall of Fame at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, in September 2016. Their unit is depicted in the only diorama in the museum that features an actual event — a daring rescue that took place on November 26, 1968, known as the “Chisel.”

A six-man Special Forces team encountered a much larger enemy force and retreated to a nearby river bank. Facing gunfire from three sides, the reconnaissance team radioed for emergency evacuation, with the Green Hornets hearing the call. They extracted the threatened unit despite heavy gunfire. With nowhere to land and needing to make two attempts to get the helicopter hovering just above the river, the rescue was made amidst “gunfire so thick you could walk on it,” as described by Door Gunner Sgt. Fred Cook.



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Bob will never forget that rescue nor the 700 combat missions that could have taken his life — and did take the lives of several he knew. The entire Green Hornets unit is the most highly decorated ever in the Air Force, with Bob receiving the following honors: Purple Heart, Airman's Medal, Bronze Star, Five Air Medals, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, Air Force Presidential Unit Citation, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Senior Air Crew Member Wings with 10-years flight status, Air Force Good Conduct Medal, Five Vietnam Outstanding Service Medals, Republic of Vietnam Defense Medal and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

And while Bob will always remember, for four decades only he and a select few others in the government knew the real stories. They were sworn to secrecy as highly classified until 2008. "I couldn't tell my wife, my son, no one," Bob said. "We got our orders from the CIA and were sworn to secrecy. I breathed a sigh of relief when I could finally tell someone."

They were heroes, but they also had ghosts from the war to haunt them. Many, including Bob, suffered from PTSD trying to deal with their memories. He said he often finds himself dealing with troubling memories and images, and even takes medicine for occasional flashbacks. He also bleeds very easily as a result of coming into contact with the famous Agent Orange, used by the military as part of its herbicidal warfare program.

Bob recalled a soldier trapped beneath a crashed helicopter. Try as they might, there was no way to get him from beneath the chopper before it became engulfed in flames. Bob, stopping for a moment to steady himself, continued the disturbing memory. He said the soldier, a friend, saluted them even as he was being swallowed by the fire. "The last thing he did was come to attention and salute us," Bob said. "When they went back later

and found his burned body, he was still in a salute.

"I knew him. He was a happy-go-lucky, jolly guy. I never saw him without a smile."

While Bob saw the deaths of others, he also almost faced his own death numerous times. On one occasion, when a helicopter was hovering above the ground receiving return ground fire, a bullet hit Bob in the left forehead knocking him up and back inside the helicopter.

"A mile an hour faster and 2 inches lower, and I'd be dead," he said.

Bob returned from his service in Vietnam in 1970. Sadly, it was not a hero's welcome for him and many other soldiers, which makes Bob appreciate the recent honor in Dayton even more.



"When we came back, we were told to wear civilian clothing because people would spit on soldiers," he said. "After a while you understood what they were doing, even if you didn't agree with how they were doing it. They were protesting."

"But this honor was a long time coming. Now it's nice to get recognized. I think even people who protested back then — a lot of them have had a change of heart."

Carol, Bob's wife, said the ceremony impressed upon those watching just exactly what Bob and his fellow soldiers had been through. It enabled them to understand the scope of it all. "I looked at his medals and I'd heard the stories, but even I didn't fully comprehend the scope of it all," Carol said. "But now I'm just in awe."

As is Bob's son, Kenneth. Having served in the Navy himself, he shares a special kinship with his father. "Growing up, I knew my father was in Vietnam and I knew he was a door gunner on a helicopter, but at the time



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you don't have the gravity of what he went through," Kenneth said. "After I came back from the Navy I got an idea, but it was all made clear in September. This really happened. They really went through this. They knew they could die on any mission. Imagine living like that every day!"

Bob said the event in Dayton rekindled lost relationships with several from his unit, though many are no longer alive. Those who are, however, have promised to stay in touch in their twilight years. In fact, Bob's already made reservations to attend a reunion in Kokomo, Indiana, later in 2017.

The ceremony in Dayton included a special "pass off," where the "old" guard presented the "new" younger members with a gift. Two CV-22 Osprey aircraft landed on the front lawn of the museum, flown by current members of the 20th SOS, and they were greeted by veterans from Bob's SOS. "We took memorabilia used by everyone in our unit and put it in a barn wood frame, denoting the old guard passing onto the new guard," Bob said. "We told them, 'You're the unit now.'"

Bob likes to escape for hunting and fishing, often up by Graham, where his daughter lives. He and Carol also enjoy time with their 19 grandchildren. And, while he sometimes watches movies about war, he said most don't go far enough in their depiction. There was one, however, that he said did get it more right than others — *American Sniper*, the story of Chris Kyle. "They came about as close to getting it right — war and what it does to a person — as any I've seen," he said. "But I wanted to go to Vietnam. I wanted to be where the action was, and I'm glad I went. We saved lives." **NOW**

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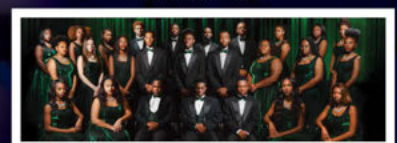
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PAST, Present, FUTURE

— By Debbie Durling

 AT HOME WITH 
ROB & BENNETTA RABY

Rob and Bennetta Raby have carved a little piece of heaven for themselves in their gated Cedar Hill community. Even though it's a grand home of over 5,000 square feet, every inch is filled with a welcoming feature from the past blended with artistic creativity of the present. The half-arched, solid-stained wood door offers a warm and welcoming place for visitors awaiting entrance to the home.

Once inside, a turning staircase to the left gives a subtle hint that there is more on the second floor. At the top of the stairs is a totally hidden world that includes three full baths, three bedrooms, a media room, a game room and two sitting balconies. To the right of the entry is what used to be the formal dining room, but is now Bennetta's home office. Farther down





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the front hall, a large fish tank creates a sense of tranquility as the hallway opens to the great room of the home. The family living space leads to the breakfast and kitchen areas. The trail is beautifully dressed with large, shiny, white tile that resembles marble. The shine creates a feeling of luxury and sophistication that complements the endless rising ceilings and crown molding. The smell of candles, sound of the trickling water from the fish tank and flickering light of the fireplace lend an ambience of peace and relaxation.

On a wall facing the staircase is a uniquely designed Rock Visions cross that truly reflects the exquisite beauty of this home and family. Bennetta was at an event a few years ago, and it caught her eye. She told the lady selling it that it was speaking to her. "What is it saying?" the lady asked. She replied that it reminded her of the broken body of Christ. Made of broken pieces of stone from 10 different geographic locations, it is intricate, yet simple at the same time. Beautiful jagged edges and colors come together, layered on top of each other,

to create a piece of art unlike any other. Rock Visions is also creating a 10-foot cross for the Raby home.

"God is at the center of our home," Bennetta shared. Just like the cross stands for faith, so do the Rabys. The intricate design of the stones laid carefully in the middle of the cross is like the work Rob and Bennetta put into making a home that creates close bonds with their two girls, and just as the arms of the artistic piece extend, so does this couple to the community. One of these extensions is a group, called All Pro Dads, that

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Rob began attending once a month and became the leader. It grew and has been instrumental in encouraging fathers to be involved with their kids' education. Under his leadership, the group grew from 10 fathers to over 200. "God blessed it," Bennetta said.

The elegant, yet functional, kitchen is a special place for family and friends. Rob is quite the cook, his specialty being herb-infused prime rib. "It melts in your mouth," Bennetta stated. "My husband puts a lot of love in his food." He loves to cook the main meals, and she tops it off with her specialty of baking. The open design of this area allows the fellowship and conversation to flow while they are at work. Creamy almond-colored walls that match the rest of the home are complemented by the off-white antique-style cabinetry surrounding two-thirds of



the space storing all the treasures used to make delightful dishes for everyone to enjoy. Across the tops of the cabinets is earth-toned brown marble with gold flecks scattered throughout. It is quite fitting for the creativity that happens when the two are in the kitchen working side by side.

Bennetta, a woman of many talents, has a passion to restore and/or repurpose old furniture. Throughout the home, the past warms the walls, rooms and nooks. By the front entry sits an old dresser that used to be the wash table in her grandmother's home. It's refinished with brown hues beneath gentle gold brushings. Crystal knobs have been added giving this 130-year-old piece the final touch of glam for the entry area. Rather than buy a traditional desk for her office, Bennetta refinished a table and buffet that belonged to her grandmother. The two-pedestal table has been painted black and turned sideways. An area of the top has been sectioned off by an artistically painted piece of glass for her

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workspace, leaving room for clients on the other side to pull up their chairs and use it as a workspace during meetings. It is clever, practical and creative. The buffet has been repurposed as her credenza. It is painted black to match the table and has new knobs to dress it up for the office space.

In the family dining area, Bennetta gets such joy and satisfaction to be able to continue the tradition of warm family meals and fellowship at the very table she sat around with her family while growing up. One more notable piece supports the television in the family living area. It's a mid-century piece with an open-shelf design created by small pedestal legs at each end, under the top. Below is a chest with drawers to house videos and other entertainment storage. After refinishing it to a dark tone, she replaced the old knobs with silver ones, giving it great appeal in this century.

One of their favorite things about living in this home is the neighbors. They are very down-to-earth and friendly. Halloween, two years ago, was their first holiday to spend in the house. "It took us over two hours to get through the neighborhood for trick-or-treating because everyone was so nice and spent time talking to us," Bennetta laughed. One of the neighbors does a village scene for every holiday. He and his wife invited the Raby family in and showed the girls the Halloween village. The girls were completely taken with the amazing way he had designed the little town to look like people really lived there and had decorated for the holiday. "I grew up in a neighborhood like this," Bennetta said with a smile.

"Whether we are at work, school or home, we try to be present," Rob said, and Bennetta quickly agreed. They've spent lots of time in each house they've lived in as husband and wife. Their goal is to make their home a place the family desires to be. "I want a house I can relax in, stretch out in and entertain in," Rob added. This is certainly the kind of home they have created. Under the television is a sign that reads, *Yesterday is history, tomorrow is your future, today is your life, live it.* The Rabys are working on the art of living their lives in the present while creating a beautiful future, as they remember the treasures of the past. **NOW**

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An Unstoppable Imagination

Valencia Versailles Gibson was born and raised in Texas, and will always consider herself a down-home Southern girl, but her spirit longs to see the world. "I am named after two foreign cities, after all!" Valencia exclaimed.

As a young girl, Valencia traveled throughout the United States with her family. Her uncle was in the military and was stationed in different cities, so her family would often visit them. These experiences definitely gave her the travel bug. "I dream of going to Venice. I've studied the area and just love the environment," she said. She also has an aunt who travels extensively and shares information about these excursions with Valencia. She savors every morsel and tucks the details away in her heart. The cost of raising a family makes it challenging to save for overseas travel. However, Valencia is diligently saving as much as she can so her dreams can become a reality. For now, she is living out her dreams vicariously through writing books.

"I've always been a big kid at heart. I thought when I grew up that I had to leave my imagination behind and play 'the grownup game.' But I learned that when I write, I can let my

Valencia ation

— By Jill Martinez

imagination run free, and my inner child can come out onto the page,” she said.

It wasn't easy for Valencia to make this discovery. She drifted from major to major in college while trying to find the right path for her life. She studied psychology for a while and then hopped over to criminal science. After that she tried her hand at business studies. It wasn't until she began studying communication that she realized how she could use her gifts in the real world.

Valencia worked for the Houston Housing Authority for over six years — and while she loved the rewarding work, she knew she needed to step away from

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corporate life to concentrate on writing. She had been writing stories as a hobby since she was a young girl, but it wasn't until recently that she attempted to write, illustrate and publish her first book. "Writing isn't easy. When I first started, I wrote a sentence a day and pieced my words together like a puzzle. Eventually, I developed the habit," she explained.

Her children's book entitled *The Man With the Paddle Boat Dream* is the story of a young chef who embarks on a journey to try different foods. The book includes various words in French, Spanish and Italian, and a mini cookbook at the end.

Some parts of the book are sentimental for Valencia. At one point in the story, the young chef talks to his mom. She tells him in French to follow his heart. This scene is reminiscent of the way Valencia's maternal grandmother used to tell her she was proud of her for knowing what was in her heart and going for it.

Diversity is another important theme in the book. In the story, the young chef marries a lady from Kenya. Though they come from different cultures, they share a love of cooking. Valencia wants people to see that we should overcome relationship barriers in this same way.

Finally, a young lady in a wheelchair is portrayed in the center of a celebratory moment in the story. This character is a tribute to a friend of Valencia's who had cerebral palsy, but was full of life and wisdom.

The book is a product of Valencia's curiosity about the world, her love of



foreign languages and her love of food. While she isn't a fluent speaker of other languages, learning about them has always been a hobby. She also loves exploring new foods. "I'll try anything at least once," she said. She loves to watch food being prepared on TV, and often she gets into the kitchen and experiments herself.

Valencia's imagination is unstoppable. It's one of the things that makes her so well-suited for writing children's fiction. She finds inspiration at every turn. "My husband tells me I just don't know when to stop," she revealed with a laugh. She often finds herself saying, "Could you imagine if ...?"

Her home is a haven for imagination. Her family turned the dining room into a fun zone. It's a place where they express themselves. Valencia can often be found sitting cross-legged on the dining room floor sketching pictures, writing or playing with her children. The area under the stairs was transformed into a library. Here, the family posts pictures of things that inspire them. They read and let their imaginations run wild. Of course, her children are always eager to play, and their ideas fuel Valencia's. They tell funny stories and set up forts where teddy bears must protect themselves with catapulting sock rolls. It's this inner-child that she channels onto the page.

Not only did Valencia write her book, but she also illustrated it. "I wrote the whole story without the pictures. I asked God to help me create the images, too. I never thought of myself as an artist before, but I couldn't afford to hire an



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illustrator, so I did what I had to do. I was so far out of my comfort zone during this entire process," she admitted. In the same manner that she set about writing a little bit each day, she began drawing lines here and there until images began to unfold. She drew the sketches for this book by hand using color pencils, but in the future, she would like to explore digital means of illustrating.

The publishing process was no walk in the park either. She tried going the traditional route, but hit roadblocks at every turn. "I found that many times it is about who you know. I didn't have connections, and self-publishing was very expensive, so I ended up going through an independent company a friend of mine also used," she shared.

She longs for her books to bring parents and children together as they sit down and read. She also hopes to get her books into school libraries. Right now, her book is available in select retail stores and on Amazon.

In the future, she hopes to be able to publish traditionally and have the dimensions of the book be much larger, so the kids can really enjoy the pictures. A hardback cover, landscaped formatting and full color is what she hopes for.

The process of writing, illustrating and publishing took months, but to Valencia, it was all worth it. "I'm in the process of writing three more," she stated. "My little chef will venture off to new places and explore new foods and languages. It will be a series that I hope will inspire people." **NOW**

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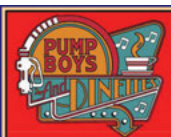


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A Perfect Proposal

— By Carolyn Wills

Somewhere between the magic of falling in love and the union of “I do” comes the all-important question of, “Will you marry me?” It’s the marriage proposal — that thrilling, risky, sometimes awkward hope — asked and answered throughout time. Today, the occasion of becoming engaged remains a special, celebrated passage. In fact, the world is “awhirl” with ideas, options and resources on how to plan the perfect moment.

Wedding-related websites, magazines, consultants, bloggers, florists, jewelers and churches have long provided in-depth information. And, now, specialized companies actually design marriage proposal packages.

There’s even a National Marriage Proposal Day. Who knew? It happens on March 20, coinciding with the first day of spring and the Vernal Equinox. The year it was first observed is unknown, but its origin is credited to ... wait for it ... a fellow Texan named John Michael O’Loughlin.

Has, then, the occasion of getting engaged been elevated to a new art form? In recent years, the important question has been delivered via flash mobs, Skyping, skywriting, texts, Facebook posts, Twitter, YouTube videos, live TV and stadium Jumbotrons, and all while new digital and virtual options keep emerging. According to statistics, though, there’s still something to say about good ole tradition.

A 2013 Engagement Ring and Jewelry survey commissioned by The Knot, a multiplatform wedding resource, suggested that tradition still prevails when it comes to the engaging moment. Overwhelmingly, 91 percent of suitors say they planned their







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*Injury Facts, 2011 Edition, National Safety Council. In Arkansas, policies CAG1001. In Idaho, policies CAG1001. In Oklahoma, policies CAG1001. In Oregon, policies CAG1001. In Pennsylvania, policies CAG1001. In Texas, policies CAG1001. In Virginia, policies CAG1001. This is a brief product overview only. Product may not be available in all states. Benefits are determined by plan state and plan level selected. Continental American Insurance Company (CAIC), a proud member of the Aflac family of insurers, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Aflac Incorporated and underwrites group coverage. CAIC is not licensed to solicit business in New York, Guam, Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands. For groups located in California, group coverage is underwritten by Continental American Life Insurance Company, Continental American Insurance Company, Columbia, South Carolina. A2003088 (1)



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proposal, while 47 percent planned it meticulously. Nearly 60 percent "popped" the question privately (between the beloveds), while the remaining 40 percent went public. A whopping 88 percent actually used the words, "Will you marry me?" And 81 percent proposed on bended knee.

Additionally, a 2014 Associated Press-WE tv Poll found that while 75 percent of Americans would be fine with the woman proposing, only about 5 percent of currently married couples polled confirmed that that's what actually happened. Also, according to David's Bridal's "What's on Brides' Minds" survey, brides strongly prefer personal, low-key proposals to elaborate public displays.

While it's comforting to learn that tradition has held value, and it's exciting to hear about new options, ultimately and importantly, isn't the unique, meaningful and memorable meeting of two loving people all that really matters? Creating the marriage proposal that adds a happy chapter to a romance and a forever story for the couple and their family throughout the years, starts with two people knowing each other, understanding they are moving in the same direction and, then, paying attention to what is special to both parties, as in the following scenarios:

Sweet and Simple:

Amy, a mother in Burleson, Texas, with two teenagers, had been single for six years. "I asked God, if it was in His plan, to bring someone into my life," she said with a smile. Not long after, church friends introduced her to Billy. "His wife had passed away," she shared. "By the second date, we 'knew' we were right for each other." For alone time, they would take daily walks and, on one of those walks, they happened onto a new street

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waiting for houses to be built. It was the beginnings of a new neighborhood and, as it happened, the perfect moment for Billy to propose. "We met in August and married in October," Amy added. "I wasn't expecting a proposal on our walk, but it couldn't have been more perfect."

The Asked/He Answered:

Then, there's Kate and Aaron in Wickenburg, Arizona, who had been together for 13 years. "I told him it was time he proposed," Kate said with a grin. She added that it should happen by Christmas Eve, and she wanted to be surprised. As time passed, she would announce that Christmas had come and gone and she was fine with things as they were. Fast forward to April, her birthday and an invitation from Aaron for a morning ride at the ranch, where he is head wrangler. As they headed into the desert, he sidled his horse next to hers. "I could get off and kneel?" he smiled. For Kate, it was a complete surprise.

Bell's Tweet:

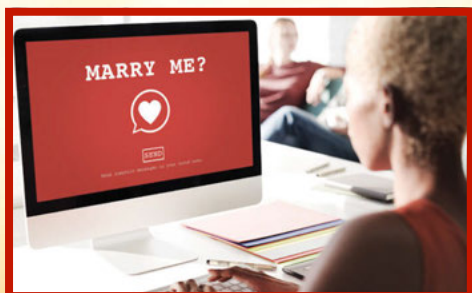

Kristen Bell is proof that it works for the woman to propose. Disney's *Frozen* star asked her longtime boyfriend, Dax Shepard, for his hand in marriage via a Tweet!

Two Best Ever Proposals:

Excerpts from "Best Wedding Proposals Ever" by Kate Store, *New York Post*, March 20, 2015 (National Proposal Day):

A prospective groom devoted a year to preparing his proposal. While vacationing in Aruba with his beloved, friends and family, he surprised her with a video of him proposing 365 times.


A surprised prospective bride was greeted by a town car after work and taken to a Los Angeles theater where her boyfriend had arranged for their love story to be performed

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as a musical. For the final act, he appeared on stage, kneeling toward her with a beautiful engagement ring and a hopeful, "Will you marry me?"

A Royal Proposal:

According to Britain's *Daily Mail Reporter* (November 2010), Prince William proposed to Kate Middleton in an isolated log cabin (no electricity and accessible only by air or horseback) while on a stopover during a Kenyan holiday. Kate reportedly said, "It was a wonderful 24 hours ... so romantic!"

Clearly, the prospective couple who respect each other's dreams and boundaries down to the tiniest of shared interests, favorite colors, flowers, foods, music, humor and traditions can take heart. When the moment of the all-important question arrives, the question will already be answered. **NOW**

Sources:

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2. The Knot 2013 Engagement Ring and Jewelry Survey Infographic by Hearts on Fire: www.heartsonfire.com
3. 2014 Associated Press and WE tv Poll: ap-gfkpoll.com/uncategorized/our-latest-poll-3
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5. *New York Post*, March 20, 2015: "Best Wedding Proposals Ever," Kate Store
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Art Abounds in Cedar Hill

Bill and Robin Ingle and their family are making art available to everyone in Cedar Hill.

— By Abby Rich

What started out as a love for art has taken root in a beautiful space to offer all-things-art to the Cedar Hill community. Robin Ingle, owner of Visual Expressions, has achieved her vision of bringing art education and culture to the area.

In 2004, Visual Expressions opened its doors first as a gallery and custom framing shop. In 2008, they opened the school because Robin and her husband, Bill, saw a distinct need for art education in the community. The state of Texas had recently pulled art out of public schools.

“We built the space to resemble the look and feel of an artist town square like Santa Fe, where artists abound, so as to replicate some of that,” Robin explained. Inside the ranch-style building with metal roofing and ornate landscaping is an art

school that offers after-school classes for kids, as well as classes for adults; a gallery with unique art for sale by artists of all ages; and a custom framing and artwork preservation shop.

The rooms are set up in a square with hallways that flow around the gallery. Inside the art-specific rooms are tons of workspaces. While some rooms are designated for mosaics and clay art, complete with large kilns, the entire space allows for birthday parties for kids ages 5 and up, and adult “Picasso parties,” where guests can bring wine and snacks.

Robin’s daughter, Jennifer Rodriguez, is also in on the adventure, as is Jennifer’s husband, Javier Tamez. It’s a family affair, and what makes them even more unique is they are all self-taught artists. “Javier has really built up our custom

framing and restoration part of the business," Jennifer said. "They do all of it in-house. Nothing leaves here," Robin said. "He's even framed original Picasso and Monet paintings."

Javier has also conservation-framed swords, a family Bible, flight suits, boxing gloves and more. "Conservation is always a top priority for protecting the art or items of importance," Javier explained.

Visual Expressions' art classes include all skill levels. For kids, they offer weekly drawing, mixed media, clay and painting for kids ages 5-13. One-on-one attention for the kids is assured, since they allow no more than 10 people per class.

There are six classrooms for teaching all levels of drawing, painting, encaustic painting, mosaics, fused glass, pottery, photography and mixed media. "We're not as strict with the regimen in our classes. We want people to be able to come in and just create regardless of the skill level," Jennifer said. "And we don't have a problem with experimentation."

Currently, Visual Expressions runs a half-day Wednesday class for students who are bussed from charter schools. The program runs nine weeks, and kids work with two mediums every three weeks, like painting and fused glass one week and clay and mosaics the next. They also offer sessions for homeschooled kids.

During these nine-week sessions, the kids work on community projects. One recent project involved students partnering with Village Tech to create two different 4 1/2-by-5-foot mosaics of their logo. Jennifer worked with these kids, ages 6-14, in order to design, create, complete and present the project at the student spring art show.

In 2009, Robin founded Art and Beyond, Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides scholarships for at-risk, underprivileged kids in southwest Dallas. "Our organization implements a well-trained staff to provide opportunities for the development of creative skills through art education programs," Robin said. "Art fosters problem-solving, communicating and team-building skills, and it's great exposure for kids to see what other kids create, not to mention it's very rewarding to be a part of." **NOW**

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Coaches of the Cedar Hill Blaze Track Club enjoy the beautiful weather on the track during the club's indoor track season.



Zula B. Wylie in Cedar Hill offers Food for Fines, where patrons may pay library late fees with canned goods.



DeSoto ISD spelling bee winner Abiba Moncriste from Ruby Young Elementary proudly shows off her winning trophy.



Duncanville resident Michael Jackson and his kids enjoy their winter break with lunch at Wingstop.



Duncanville First Methodist School's kindergarten students present goods from their annual food drive to Duncanville Outreach Ministry's Tony Davis.



Woodridge fine arts students perform at DeSoto Family Academy and the Magnet Showcase event, where DISD parents and students learn about district magnet programs.



The Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. Upsilon Lambda Omega Chapter celebrates 20 years of service to the Best Southwest communities of Cedar Hill, DeSoto, Duncanville and Lancaster.



The Shades of Gray band performs at the Duncanville Chamber of Commerce's 60th anniversary, Rockin 60's event.

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The Indiana Dunes is actually two parks — the Indiana

Dunes National Lakeshore and Indiana Dunes State Park. The national lakeshore is home to great beach sites and the historic Bailly Homestead, Chellberg Farm and the Century of Progress Homes, which were futuristic homes built for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. People can drive or walk past the homes year-round or arrange to tour them annually in October. The national lakeshore is also home to Pinhook Bog, which is believed to be the only true bog in Indiana.

The state park features The 3 Dune Challenge trail, which can be tackled any day of the year. To conquer it, a person must hike a special 1.5-mile course, climbing Mount Jackson (elevation 176 feet), Mount Holden (184 feet) and Mount Tom (192 feet). These are the three highest dunes in the park. Some parts of The 3 Dune Challenge trail feature 40-degree slopes. In the sand, it's common to take two steps forward and slide one step back.



In the nearby town of Beverly Shores, be sure to stop at Bartlett's Gourmet Grill & Tavern or The Rolling Stonebaker, a pizza truck that parks in Beverly Shores and at the European Market, which is an open-air market open from May to October in the town of Chesterton. Chesterton is home to the gourmet burger restaurant, Octave Grill, and the Italian restaurant, Lucrezia.

A 20-minute drive gets you to downtown Valparaiso, with a park featuring a summer splash pad and an irresistible tourist trap — a bronze statue of popcorn king Orville Redenbacher. Valparaiso's downtown is also home to shops, art galleries and great dining spots like Don Quijote Restaurant, one of only a few Spanish restaurants in the state. Be sure to get an ice cream cone from Valpo Velvet or a cupcake from Designer Desserts.

Just outside of Valparaiso is Taltree Arboretum Railway Garden

and Broken Wagon Bison Farm. At Taltree, the trains run daily from April to October, but the arboretum trails are open year-round. At Broken Wagon, people can arrange or take part in a tour at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays from June through September. Visitors can see bison up close, learn about them and purchase bison jerky and other products in the farm store.

A lot of visitors stay in Indiana Dunes Country and take side trips to places like Chicago, 50 minutes away, or Northern Indiana's Amish country. For more information about the Indiana Dunes, visit www.indianadunes.com, or call (800) 283-8687 to request the official Indiana Dunes Country Activities Guide. **NOW**

By Ken Kosky. Photos courtesy of Indiana Dunes Tourism.

Can You Make Your Investments Less “Taxing”?

Tax Freedom Day, which typically occurs in late April, according to the Tax Foundation, is the day when the nation as a whole has earned enough money to pay off its total tax bill for the year. So you may want to use this opportunity to determine if you can liberate yourself from some investment-related taxes in the future.

Actually, Tax Freedom Day is something of a fiction, in practical terms, because most people pay their taxes throughout the year via payroll deductions. Also, you may not mind paying your share of taxes, because your tax dollars are used in many ways — such as law enforcement, food safety, road maintenance, public education and so on — that, taken together, have a big impact on the quality of life in this country. Still, you may want to look for ways to reduce those taxes associated with your investments, leaving you more money available to meet your important goals, such as a comfortable retirement.

So, what moves can you make to become more of a “tax-smart” investor? Consider the following:

- **Know when to hold 'em.** If you sell an investment that you've held for less than one year, any profit you earn is considered a short-term capital gain, and it will be taxed at the same rate as your ordinary income. (For 2016, ordinary income tax rates range from 10 percent to 39.6 percent.) But if you hold the investment for longer than one year, your profit will be taxed at the long-term capital gains rate, which, for most taxpayers, will be just 15 percent. If at all possible, then, hold your investments at least long enough to qualify for the lower capital gains rate.
- **Look for the dividends.** Similar to long-term capital gains, most stock dividends are taxed at 15 percent for most taxpayers. Thus, dividend-paying stocks can provide you with an additional source of income at a tax rate that's likely going to be lower

than the rate on your ordinary earned income. As an added benefit, many dividend-paying stocks also offer growth potential. With some research, you can find stocks that have paid, and even increased, their dividends over a period of many years. (Be aware, though, that companies are not obligated to pay dividends and can reduce or discontinue them at their discretion.)

- **Use those tax-advantaged accounts.** Virtually all retirement accounts available to you, whether you've set them up yourself or they're made available by your employer, offer some type of tax advantage. With a traditional IRA, or a 401(k) or similar employer-sponsored retirement plan, your contributions are typically tax-deductible and your earnings can grow tax deferred. Contributions to a Roth IRA, or a Roth 401(k), are never deductible, but earnings can grow tax free, provided you meet certain conditions. The bottom line? Contribute as much as you can afford to the tax-advantaged plans to which you have access.

Tax Freedom Day is here and then it's gone. But by making some tax-smart investment decisions, you might reap some benefits for years to come. **NOW**

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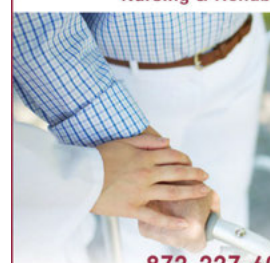
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February 1

Duncanville Women's Club Luncheon: 11:00 a.m., The Hilton Garden Inn, 800 N. Main St., Duncanville. This event will feature motivational speaker and magician David Hyla.

February 1 — April 12

AARP Tax-Aide help for seniors: 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., **Wednesdays only**, DeSoto Public Library. Volunteers from the AARP Tax-Aide service will be assisting seniors with tax returns. The service is provided and administered by AARP. Help is on a first-come, first-served basis. Bring last year's tax return, your social security card and records needed. AARP won't prepare complicated returns.

February 10

Mixology for Adults: 6:00 p.m., Zula B. Wylie Public Library in Cedar Hill. Learn how to put a new twist on your favorite cocktails with a professional mixologist after hours at the Library.

February 11

Elvis performed by Kraig Parker: 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Ben Franklin Apothecary, 302 N. Main St., Duncanville.

On the Trail with the Buffalo Soldiers: 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Cedar Hill State Park, 1570 W. FM

1382. The Buffalo Soldiers are making their way into Cedar Hill State Park. Visit with the soldiers and learn the many activities they did while marching and riding the trail. Pay park admission fees only.

February 13

Family Fun Night, Black History Month: 6:30 p.m., Zula B. Wylie Public Library. Bring the whole family to the library to celebrate Black History Month.

February 21

CareVan Immunization Clinic: 5:00-7:00 p.m., Trinity United Methodist Church, 1302 S. Clark Rd., Duncanville. Clinic will provide free vaccines for children with immunization records. For more information, call (972) 296-2155.

February 25

Understanding Electronics, Hands-on Workshop: 2:30 p.m., International Museum of Cultures, 411 Hwy. 67, Duncanville. There will be a special engineers' week activity for students age 12 and up and parents. For more information, visit www.swdallas-tx.aauw.net or call (972) 709-1957.

Heart to Serve event: 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., DeSoto Civic Center. Bluebonnet and Pecan

rooms. This is a free event to educate, empower and unite the citizens of DeSoto. It is a celebration of who we are and from where we have come, focused on the forward trajectory of our community.

Ongoing:

First Thursdays

Connected! Special Needs Parent Support Group meeting: 6:30-8:00 p.m., DeSoto Public Library. Join us as we provide support and share resources for parents of individuals with intellectual and physical differences.

Third Fridays

Senior Dances: 7:00-9:30 p.m., Hopkins Senior Center, 206 James Collins, Duncanville. Cost \$5. For more information, call 972-298-0667.

Third Saturdays

duncanSWITCH Saturday Street Market: 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Main and Center streets, Duncanville. The event will include vendors, food and fun.

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



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In the Kitchen With Louis Thibodeaux

— *By Rachel Smith*

Growing up, Louis Thibodeaux's mother worked two jobs, so at 9 years old, he and his brother took the reins to cook for the family. "My brother and I would prepare a full-course meal for her," he reminisced. Creole is Louis' specialty in the kitchen. "I make my own seasoning blend that I use at my restaurant, Thibodeaux's Authentic Cajun Cookin'," he said. "I can make anything, from shrimp creole to links and sausage, including boudin."

Being around exceptional cooks his entire life, Louis emerged as a natural culinary prodigy. Cooking is a passion his whole family shares. "Two of my uncles, my dad and I had a red bean cook-off," he boasted. "Several friends anonymously tasted each contestant's beans, and I unanimously won the competition!" **NOW**

Red Beans & Rice

- 1 lb. red beans**
- 1 pkg. ham hocks (2-3)**
- 1 large onion, chopped**
- 1 large bell pepper, chopped**
- 2 cups celery, diced**
- 4 Tbsp. granulated garlic**
- 4 Tbsp. granulated onion**
- 1 Tbsp. salt**
- 2 Tbsp. black pepper**
- 2 Tbsp. chili powder**
- 1 lb. ground beef**
- 1/2 cup rice**

- 1.** In a large pot, boil red beans and ham hocks until meat is tender.
- 2.** Add vegetables and seasonings.

- 3.** Brown ground beef; drain excess oil, and add to beans.
- 4.** Stir and thoroughly mix ingredients. (Add additional seasonings if needed.) Simmer 30 minutes.
- 5.** In a pot, add enough water to cover rice. Cook until rice is soft and water is boiling.
- 6.** In a bowl, add half a cup of rice and dip beans over rice for desired taste and texture.

Seafood Gumbo

Note: Watch salt content in Cajun seasonings.

- 16 oz. roux**
- 1 pkg. dried shrimp**
- 1 lb. crabs, cleaned**
- 12 oz. clam juice (optional)**
- 3 Tbsp. Accent Seasoning, or to taste**

- 3 Tbsp. granulated garlic, or to taste**
- 3 Tbsp. Cajun seasoning, or to taste**
- 2 Tbsp. gumbo filé, or to taste**
- 1 lb. sausage**
- 3 lbs. chicken quarters (cut thigh from leg)**
- 1 stalk celery**
- 2 onions**
- 2 bell peppers**
- 2 green onions**
- 1 stalk parsley**
- 1 lb. shrimp, peeled and deveined**

- 1.** Bring half a pot of water to a boil. Add roux, stirring with a large spoon until lumps are gone. Add dried shrimp, crabs, clam juice and seasonings.
- 2.** Cut up sausage; add to boiling water.
- 3.** Cut chicken into pieces, removing skin if desired; put to the side.
- 4.** Allow mixture to boil 20-30 minutes. Cut up vegetables, adding all except green onions and parsley to the pot; boil another 15-20 minutes.
- 5.** Add deveined shrimp, chicken and green onion to mixture; let boil 15-20 minutes.
- 6.** Add parsley; turn off heat and let sit on hot stove with top on. Make sure chicken has cooked and parsley has wilted. Enjoy over a bed of rice.

Thibodeaux's Court-bouillon

(Pronounced coo-be-yahn.)

- 1 lb. smoked sausage**
- 2 large cans tomato sauce**
- 1 can Ro-Tel**
- 1 onion, diced**
- 1 bell pepper, diced**
- 1 cup parsley, chopped**
- 1/2 cup garlic, chopped**
- 1 Tbsp. Accent Seasoning**
- 1 lb. shrimp**
- 2 lbs. fish sausage**

- 1.** In a large saucepan, combine all ingredients, except fish; bring to a boil for 20-30 minutes, stirring occasionally until sausage is tender.
- 2.** Add fish; cover pot. Let simmer 10 minutes. Turn off heat; let sit, covered 10 more minutes.
- 3.** Serve over rice. Note: for best results, don't add fish too early.

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

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