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M A G A Z I N E

May 2008

**Community
Pioneer**

**Catching the
Shutter Bug**

**Hoops and
Dreams**

**Working
Their Tails Off**

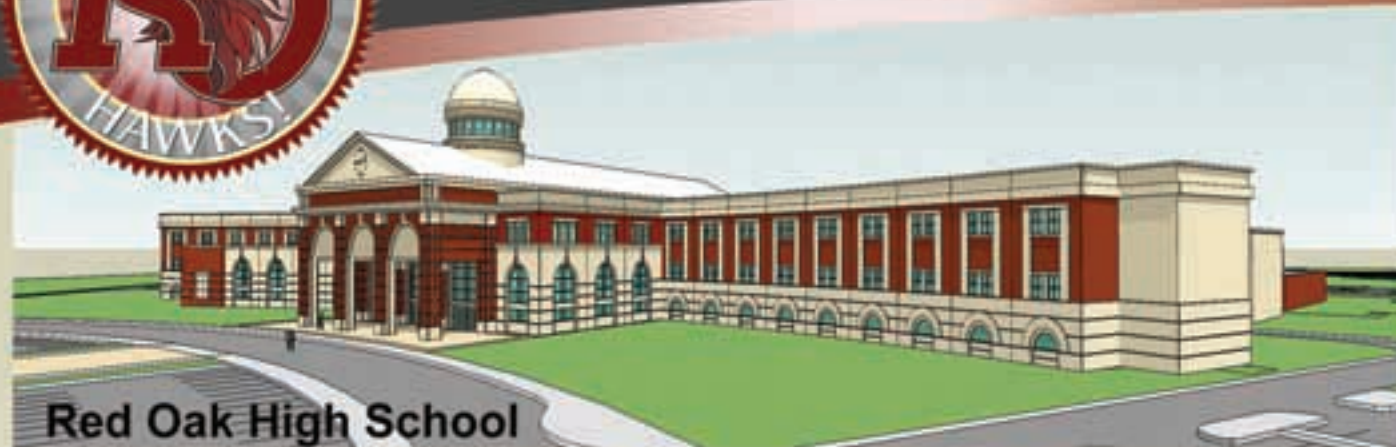
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At Home With
Jo Nell Wilson



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Editor's Note

Hello, Neighbors!

Now that we are having such glorious days to enjoy our community, may this issue encourage you to get out and try something new! Like local resident Johnny Pearson, you may want to get out and enjoy our city parks and trails. Then meet photographer Amy Seiger, who also enjoys working outdoors and having fun. After one visit with Amy, you will surely be encouraged to capture the great outdoors from behind the lens of a camera.

Speaking of outdoors, if you are interested in planting that spring garden, visit with Emily Lord, who loves every aspect of FFA and taking care of God's flora and fauna creations. Lastly, have a whooping good time shooting hoops with the Noland family, who are not only super-talented, but superstars as well!

Here is to following your springtime dreams!

Diana Merrill Claussen

Red OakNOW Editor

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Community Pioneer

— By Diana Merrill Claussen



There are not many within our city who can say they have been around to see the area grow from farmland and pastures to a thriving and viable community. Local resident Johnny Pearson Sr. has resided in Red Oak since the days when there were only about 200 residents.

"I have lived in the area since the late '60s," Johnny shared. He and his wife, Ann, liked the area so much they decided to rear their two children, John and Misty here. The Pearsons have now been married for 43 years, and Johnny is glad they decided to not only make Red Oak their home, but also the place they would retire. When the Pearsons first settled here, little did Johnny know that he would become known as a community pioneer. "After traveling all over the world and serving in the Army for 10 years, I became the first paid officer here in the city," Johnny said. "At the time, there were only two of us on the force: me and Chief Jerry Cockram."

This Vietnam veteran also worked

for the Red Oak Fire Department and formed some of the city's original sports leagues. "I started the first soccer team in Red Oak and then brought softball into Red Oak,"

Johnny informed.

"We used to practice soccer in our pasture and our horse, Barfly, would try to play, too." Johnny remembers a now famous youngster who made one of the early teams. "Buddy Groom used to play on my soccer team and later he became a major league baseball player," he said.

Johnny also recalls a time when he and his friends would explore the local forests. "I love the outdoors," he said. "We used to hunt birds in Red Oak when there were few houses and the area was all woods. ... I know this whole area here and have walked on

every part of it at one time or another." Johnny's love of outdoors was one of the many reasons he has continued to be involved in the growth and changes of the city.

Through the years, Johnny has been involved in many aspects of our area's history, especially its haunted history. "After we moved to Red Oak, I became friends with a Houston School Road landowner named Jack Gilespeie and would occasionally help him out with his property," Johnny shared.

The home located on Jack's property had quite a history of paranormal occurrences dating back to the early 1900s. Jack's property is now known as Reindeer Manor, and Johnny is the original founder of this local haunted attraction. The idea to turn Jack's property into a public haunt stemmed from the needs of the community.

"One year, the local baseball teams needed some money to buy lights for our baseball fields," Johnny shared. So, I came up with the idea of starting the haunted house on Jack's property. The first year we had the haunted house was in 1974. After about 10 years, we turned the property over to the Boy Scouts." Reindeer Manor is still in

their care to this day.

Today, Johnny serves on the Parks and Recreation board and is involved with many other local committees. These outlets give Johnny the opportunity to be more involved in the workings of Red Oak, and through them, he assists in making recommendations to enhance our area. "I

first started on the Parks board as a regular member and then became the president," he shared.

Being involved in the community has always been a constant undertaking for Johnny, who cannot imagine doing anything else. "I work harder now than

"I love the outdoors. We used to hunt birds in Red Oak when there were few houses and the area was all woods."

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I did before I retired," he chuckled. "I like to be outside with the fresh air, animals and the birds. I'm just an outdoors person and always have been. It is really beautiful out there, and I stay outside most days anyway because I am always working on something. I've always liked to keep moving, and I like to help people in anyway I can," Johnny smiled.

During most of his days, Johnny can be seen around town, digging ditches, planning community events or working on schematics for potential community opportunities. Johnny volunteers about six hours a day, and at times he has been known to put in 17-hour days when assisting with the city's events. "Michael Hopping and I have done manual labor around the city," he said. That labor includes: creating volleyball courts, digging holes, making general repairs, as well as planning, coordinating and working different events. "Sometimes people don't realize how many hours are put into just planning," Johnny said, explaining that the work he puts in is definitely worth it.

"I believe Red Oak has all of the essentials," he said, sharing why serving the community is a key ingredient to positive city growth and change. We are the fastest-growing city in Ellis County, and Ellis County is the fastest-growing county in North Texas," Johnny continued. "So far, Red Oak has had a good growth and the majority of Red Oak's citizens want to see the area grow in the right direction." He believes the only way to ensure continued positive growth is by becoming involved. "Know about your government and have a say," he advised. "Come to the city's council, board and committee meetings and find out what is going on in your community by being involved. Then, if we all work together, we can accomplish anything.

"I think anyone of any age can, and should, be involved in our community," Johnny added. "I would like to see more parks, trails and a potential

sports complex or recreation center. Getting these things would be better for our community and everyone here. We want open spaces where the kids can get out under the big trees and nature. We also need 'green' areas which enhance our quality of life."

"If you keep a kid occupied and active, and if they have something to look forward to while accomplishing a goal, then you won't have to worry as much about them getting into trouble," he shared. "If they want to be in a gang, well, that's great; let them be in a gang of athletes or something positive where they stay out of



trouble." By giving youth the opportunity to express themselves, whether through sports, art or other positive means, the community has a good chance of growing together in a positive direction.

The more people become involved in contributing to their city, the more they want to protect and care for the community they love and those within it. Johnny is grateful for the opportunity to make a positive difference. "The city is going to make changes; so together, let's make them for the best," he said. **NOW**



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Her Paradise

— By Jaime Ruark

A little piece of paradise is nestled in Oak Leaf, just a few short miles from Red Oak. Abundant trees and a creek grace a landscape Jo Nell Wilson has worked hard to create. Flowers cascade in beautiful groups, hanging over doorways and creeping along arches. The eye is pulled in every direction, from the porch with its birdhouses and wicker chairs, to the rolling hills dotted here and there with sitting areas and wooden bridges. Jo truly has the gardener's proverbial "green thumb," and Mother Nature must be green with envy.

Jo's gardens make her land a paradise, while her décor inside makes her house a home. When it came time to build in 1972, this country girl, reared on a farm in Walters, Oklahoma, envisioned an open, airy space, with plenty of windows to let in the light. She recalled a time when her home was the only one standing. "The road out front was gravel, and there was no water any closer than half a mile. We had a hard time finding anyone to service us with electricity," she smiled, as in the background her antique grandfather clock chimed the hour. "It was really remote out here. The grass was knee-high."

Jo designed the house herself. "I think I was a little ahead of my time," she said, referring to her open kitchen and living area. "I was really proud of myself when I started seeing houses they were building with the same kind of big rooms." Indeed, many homes today

At Home With Jo Nell Wilson

echo her original floor plan. A long, curving bar is the only thing separating the two rooms; six chairs invite guests to sit and share some coffee. Blue and red are Jo's favorite colors, and they serve as accents throughout her home — in throw cushions and paintings as well as on walls. She has artfully arranged lighting to display her collection of blue-and-white dishware, with small lamps giving a warm glow to their designs. "I'm not one for the most expensive things. Some of these are pretty expensive, but they don't have to be for me to like them. I guess that's the country in me," she explained. A colorful rooster statue stands

guard on the kitchen island, and painted in swirling script over the window is one of Jo's credos: "Life is short; eat dessert first."

A black-stone fireplace grounds the living room — a lovely contrast to the khaki walls, even after Jo revealed a secret she is a bit sad to live with. "After the builders finished the house, I kept looking at it and thinking, 'Something's wrong.' I saw some leftover rocks in the yard shining in the sun, and that's when I realized they sealed it wrong. It's supposed to sparkle," she said. Many chairs and couches are grouped together, and a large painting hangs above the mantle. "My son, Ted Wilson, does oil paintings, so





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most of my paintings have been done by him," she boasted, lovingly referring to him as "Teddy." His artistry is found throughout the house; his landscapes brighten every room.

Tucked off to the side of the kitchen, the formal dining room is elegant and vibrant with rich red walls. The rounded entryway leads to the table displaying Jo's red glassware. "My sister couldn't believe the red walls," Jo laughed. "She told me I was nuts, but I love them!" More of Ted's work is showcased here, as well as a painting of a cantaloupe,



the orange a bright contrast to the rich wall color.

Jo often has company, and a charming guest bedroom, located off the hallway, is bright and cheery with canary-yellow walls and blue-and-white curtains as well as a guest bath that continues the blue motif. Like her gardens, Jo's house is a continuous work in progress. "I love to rearrange things. I can move almost all of my things around myself, except my big dressers that I can't get through the doors," she shared. "I just get tired of having things the same."

This sweet lady is clearly an art lover, and her bedroom showcases her son's talent, along with other paintings



— seven in all. Her curtains open to reveal her greenhouse, brimming with ferns, begonias and plants of all sizes and varieties waiting their turn to be transplanted to the yard.

Plush carpeting leads to the sitting room, with a convenient, adjacent half-bath. "This used to be a garage. We converted it into a game room with a pool table for my sons," she explained. Her youngest grandson now owns the table, and Jo has again converted the room into a large, comfortable space with a serene feel. Wicker chairs and a long, blue-and-white plaid couch face an old trunk she uses as a table. "That trunk was

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given to me by my brother, and I've got some plans for it. I'd love to re-cover it in cowhide," Jo revealed, always planning ahead to her next redecoration. An antique telephone hangs on one wall. "I bought that old ring telephone in Missouri. I found it in an antique store, and it was in sad shape, black as tar. I paid \$7.50 for it, brought it home and restored it," she recalled.

Nature is always calling this country girl to her yard — her favorite place to be. "I live out here in the summer," Jo expressed, as birds chirped and



twittered around her, making their homes in the many birdhouses her brother-in-law built. "I love it; plus there's just so much work to do. I'm out in the yard about eight hours a day, just to keep it up. It's work, but I love it. If I didn't have all this, I'd just go stark raving mad," she laughed.

Tree after growing tree and plant after prospering plant speak of the many hours Jo spends outside. Her yard is so lovely; in fact, with its archways and greenery, many couples have chosen to share their wedding



vows in her meadow. The gardens extend around the house, each planned and artfully arranged. Bits of whimsy share space with nature, from rabbit statues to an old bike and wheelbarrow. A red, wrought-iron settee and blue chair in front of the house show that Jo has put not only her time, but also her personality, into every aspect of her home. "I can't stand the winter because I'm cooped up in the house. My niece says I must just sit around and think about what I can do next. I'm always planning something," she said with a feisty glimmer shining in her eyes as she looked out onto her paradise. **NOW**

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ARTS NOW

Catching the

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

Shutter Bug

Throughout the year, local resident Amy Seiger loves to be outdoors. She especially likes to have her camera on hand, in case a perfect photo opportunity arises. “A lot of times, I will drive by something that would make a great shot, and will have to stop the car to take [a picture],” Amy shared. She likes to capture nature and its beauty. “I’ve always been an outdoors girl; I feel calm and at ease when I’m outside,” she explained. She credits her upbringing as the springboard for her love of nature.

Being reared on a cattle and pecan farm in Oklahoma, Amy continually found herself involved in outdoor projects or programs. She has also been taking pictures since she was in college. “My mom bought me my first camera, and it just started from there,” Amy reminisced. During school, she was hired to work at a photography business. “I worked there all the way through college,” she added.

While at Oklahoma State University (OSU), Amy majored in plant and soil sciences. So did her future husband, Jeremy. Eventually, Amy toured across the country to study and photograph different elements of nature. While in college, Amy was hired to take a picture of one of her roommates. “That was my first time taking portraiture shots, and it was also my first official photography job,” she reflected.

Not long after this opportunity, Amy’s past and present propelled her into her future. “After taking pictures for my friends, I went to work at the State Fair of Texas as a livestock photographer,” she shared. This was a perfect opportunity for the native Okie to use her livestock, land and photography experiences.

Since receiving the contract, Amy has traveled across the region photographing many livestock festivals and shows. She admits that some of her favorite places to photograph, however, are right here in her own backyard. “I love taking bluebonnet photos in April and May,” she exclaimed. She often takes many pictures before she feels she has captured the perfect one. “When I’m photographing, I take shots of the same subject from a lot of different angles. Many times, it is the least likely photo that turns out to be the greatest.”

Amy’s key to capturing special moments in nature is to



look beyond the obvious. “I always try to find some beauty in all of the pictures I take,” she shared. As long as she is outdoors, Amy is usually guaranteed to be inspired by something, be it animal, landscape or person.

She loves to add special touches to her photos and then share them with others. Sometimes, she will transfer her photos onto canvas or accessorize them with motivational thoughts, words or Scripture. “I try to make sure every shot I take has a special meaning. I then like to give my work as gifts,” Amy shared as she showed a picture she took of a cross. “I gave this photo as a gift to a friend who was going through cancer.”

Many times, Amy also finds herself making collages of her own family — especially her children, Garrett and Paityn. Her favorite subjects to photograph are children playing outside. “When they are outside they are the most happy and comfortable, and that is when you get the most smiles.” Photographing outdoors is usually the key ingredient to ensuring good lighting and relaxed subjects. “The outside lighting is more beautiful, and you can get a wider range of expressions,” Amy continued. “Everyone seems to be more relaxed when having their picture taken outdoors as opposed to when they are inside a studio.”

Another key to capturing candid moments is to just stand

ARTS NOW

back and “let them be.” When her subjects are having fun and interacting, “I’ll just stand in the background and that is when I get the best shots,” she explained. Amy believes this philosophy not only applies to people but to animals as well. “With animals, you just have to be patient. Sometimes, kids and animals can act the same way when you get them in front of a backdrop,” she laughed. “It’s like they can sense there’s something specific you want them to do, so they do the exact opposite. You just have to be patient to get their perfect moment.”

“Photography is very seasonal,” Amy shared. During the spring, she is busy with high school senior pictures, happily snapping shots both around town and on family vacations.

With summer coming up, Amy suggests having your camera ready and offers these tips to ensure you capture your family’s special moments: “In the outdoors, you have a wide variety of



things to shoot,” she stated. “If it’s sunny, you can always try to make the outdoor lighting work for you. During cloudy days, you can shoot with a flash and not have to worry about shadows.” She also believes it is worth the time to concentrate on using the softest light possible. “If you think about different ways to use the available light to your advantage, you can empower the whole picture.” With family vacations just around the corner, “Always keep your eyes open for the perfect shot,” Amy said. **NOW**

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Sports
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Hoops and Dreams

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

When Belvis and Nicole Noland met at Kansas State University, they never imagined they would have three amazing children. Nicole first met her future husband while he was playing on the university basketball team. She was a school newspaper reporter assigned to interview him. "At first, I was afraid to interview Belvis because he was very popular," Nicole shared. "I thought he was so handsome and so tall."

Shortly after their meeting, Nicole overcame her nervousness and began attending more and more K-State basketball games just to see Belvis. "After I interviewed him, we started talking and found out that we had a lot in common," she recalled. "We also thought a lot alike and both came from small towns. I was from Leesville, Louisiana, and Belvis was from Tuscaloosa, Alabama."

The relationship blossomed and Nicole and Belvis married. After they graduated, Belvis signed to play for a professional basketball team in Ben Bosth, Holland. The couple, along with their daughters, Brittany and Sydnii, moved overseas. "While in Holland, Belvis played basketball and Brittany learned to speak Dutch," Nicole said.

After Belvis' second season with the team, the family moved back to the U.S. The couple decided to follow a few more of their dreams and pursue their careers. Although Belvis no longer played professional basketball, he became a member of the Red Oak Youth Basketball Association and is now the organization's president. He and Nicole are also founders of the Ellis County Elite Basketball Club. Besides volunteering for the associations, Nicole decided to pursue her dream to teach children. "My mom was a school principal, and teaching children reflected my vision for my future," she said.

In 2002, the Noland's third child, Colbe, was born.



The Noland family spends quality time together both at home and on the court.

Throughout their children's formative years, the family not only focused on the importance of education, they also encouraged them to find and play a sport that would keep them busy and active. The Noland's were ecstatic when the sport all three children decided to pursue was basketball.

"Bible, books and basketball" is an important saying in the Noland home and is highly reflected in all three of their children. Their oldest, Brittany, is 17 and a player for a local AAU team. She also plays for Red Oak High School's girls' varsity basketball team and maintains a 3.7 GPA. "After high school, I want to get an academic or basketball scholarship so I can major in medicine," Brittany shared. Every year since the eighth grade, she has attended summer school and taken courses at Navarro in order to get a jumpstart on her undergrad studies. She volunteers for local hospitals and coaches for the RO Basketball Association as well. "During the summer, I will also be going to two basketball camps," she added.

Sydnii is the middle child and the most reserved. Like her sister, Sydnii does very well with her grades and is on Red Oak Junior High's girls' basketball team. She has won many awards in the classroom and on the courts. "Sydnii has scored an average of 16 - 20 points in some of her games. She is also

Sports NOW

5'6" and still growing," Nicole said. "Sydnii is also our serious one and keeps everyone on track."

Both girls are very good at motivating their peers at school, on their teams and even at their church. They also enjoy giving their male counterpart players a run for their money. "Brittany likes challenges," Belvis shared. On many nights, the girls can be found playing hoops with a group of neighborhood boys with whom they attend school.

The girls' 5-year-old brother, Colbe, often attends their games to cheer on his big sisters. Colbe can be seen playing on the Youth Basketball's pre-K — first grade team. "The pre-K — first grade teams are so fun to watch. They play their games using the eight-and-a-half foot goals, but Colbe has been shooting into the 10-foot goals since he was 3," Belvis smiled. "I wanna play ball for a million years," Colbe exclaimed. "I like it because it's really fun, and I run faster than everybody else." Colbe also reads 10 books a week from the Red Oak Library and is considered to be the preacher in the family. "He is really big on right and wrong," Nicole said.

When asked of their secret on how they reared such amazing children, Nicole shared a few insights. "Belvis focuses on basketball with them and I focus on the books," she said. "Being a teacher, I am around kids all the time so I tend to compare my students to my own children. This gives me good insights on how we want our own kids to be. We also talk to them a lot and encourage them to keep talking." Nicole believes that having open communication is a good way to gain insight into their children's lives. Usually, the girls can talk to both parents about anything, but there is one kind of conversation the girls say they cannot talk to their dad about: "He really gets queasy whenever they talk about boys," Nicole laughed. **NOW**



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Tiffany King and her Allstate Services Team.

It is not often that people truly understand the needs of their community. However, local business owner and single mom, Tiffany King, strives to do just that. Born and reared in Texas, Tiffany comes from a good family. “My mom has a really strong work ethic and always taught us to do our best,” she said. “She also encouraged us to work hard to get ahead and accomplish what you want to achieve. These values have helped to keep me grounded.”

After Tiffany graduated from Southern Methodist University, she worked for Electronic Data Systems and later as an employee of Texas Commerce Bank, where she was officially introduced to the banking industry. “Texas Commerce is now CHASE Bank,” Tiffany explained. “I was with them for over 11 years and was a small business relations manager for seven of those years.”

After a few unexpected adversities, Tiffany found herself faced with a career dilemma. “That is when I found I had two choices,” she said. “I wanted to move back to the Dallas area, and the bank said I could transfer.” While Tiffany was presented with this first option, her heart and soul presented her with another. “It was always my goal to have my own business,” she shared. Tiffany decided to follow her dreams.

Armed with her PR degree, financial background and one of the best support systems a person could have, Tiffany researched her options and sought the wise counsel of her mother. “My mom had worked for Allstate Insurance for over 35 years,” Tiffany shared. Seeing how wonderful the company had treated her family throughout the years was more than enough of a confirmation for Tiffany, and she decided to become a part of the Allstate family

and open her own branch.

“My background made this endeavor turn into a very smooth transition,” Tiffany recalled. “So, I started with Allstate in October 2006, and opened my own branch that December.” In essence, Tiffany has been in financial services since 1996. She now brings her banking, investment experience and finance expertise to the Glenn Heights agency. Tiffany also brings much life to the office as well. Her team of specialists at the 133 West Ovilla Rd. agency really love helping those within the community. “I have an excellent team, and we personally get to know all of our customers,” she said.

Tiffany and her team provide many types of coverages and services for health, life, auto and business, while providing customers with financial planning, investment and retirement needs. “We also assist small businesses

Business NOW

with their supplemental health essentials, too,” she added.


Besides having a fully prepared staff to meet a client’s needs, Tiffany also has her mom there to help. “My mom is on our claims team and really helps me at the office,” she said. Friends and family are as important to Tiffany as

“I have an excellent team, and we personally get to know all of our customers.”


helping her community. She truly believes in the importance of giving back to others, and loves meeting her neighbors through her volunteer efforts. “I am active in the Red Oak Chamber and support the Red Oak Education Foundation,” Tiffany pointed out.

Through her work and dedication to others, Tiffany has learned some valuable lessons when planning for the future. “No matter what your circumstances and life throw at you, it is important to stay focused and to keep moving forward,” she advised. “Our Allstate services are designed to be there for a customer during their greatest time of need. We want to be there with them throughout their situation and aim to make the process easy for them during those times.”

For further insurance insights and answers, Tiffany’s location is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and Saturdays by appointment. For more information, call (972) 223-0566. **NOW**




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Education **NOW**



agricultural science and wildlife. The national scope of FFA is wide-reaching, with many efforts concentrated on “going green” as well as helping teenagers prepare for their future careers in the field of agriculture and animal science.

FFA is indeed no longer just about farming, as junior student Emily Lord will attest. This curly-haired, bubbly young woman has a talent with animals, something she discovered later in life than others. “I didn’t grow up on a farm, like a lot of the kids,” she said. “I just wasn’t raised that way, so I got a late start.” Judging by her efforts thus far, Emily has quickly caught up with the others and has a very promising path ahead of her.

Emily, currently the FFA chapter president and district vice president, is well-spoken and confident. She seems a born leader as she details her responsibilities, her goals and her love of FFA as well as her plans for the future. “I want to go to Texas A&M when I graduate. I’m in the top 10 percent of my class, and that has always been my goal. Most of my family graduated from there, so it’s kind of a family thing, but I also just really want to pursue a degree in agriculture,” she stated.



Her passion for the agricultural department blossomed during her eighth-grade year. “My grandmother, who lived in Houston, had hip replacement surgery. She got a staff infection and was in the hospital for three months,” she shared. Her grandmother’s condition grew worse, and the family went

to Houston to be by her side over spring break. When her grandmother’s boss came by to visit and had an extra ticket to the rodeo, Emily’s family encouraged her to take a break from the hospital to attend. “I really wanted to stay there, but they said I needed to get away, so I went,” she said. “I just fell in love with it, and that summer before I went into high school, I went and got a heifer and ended up showing it the next year.” Her grandmother passed away at the end of that week, and Emily calls that the “turning point” in her life. “She was really a strong influence in my life. She was always there for me. I didn’t realize it at the time, but looking back I see that was where it all started,” she expressed.

Emily, who as a freshman was the only one in the program to work with cattle, spends time twice a day at the school barns. “I go to the barn in the morning before school to clean the pen and water and feed, but after school is where all the work comes in. You try to feed the animals 12 hours apart, so that means I’m back there at seven at night.” There is much responsibility that comes with being an agriculture student. Emily usually spends about two hours a day with her cattle — feeding, watering, exercising and grooming. As is natural, bonds form between the students and their animals.

Working Their Tails Off

— By Jaime Ruark

Students enrolled in the FFA program at Red Oak High School are lucky students indeed. They are part of a curriculum that enables them to earn money, take an active role in nature and learn skills that will help them both now and as they grow to adulthood. Perhaps just as important, they are part of a team of students sharing a common goal and passion.

Older generations may recall FFA being the acronym for Future Farmers of America. In 1988, the name was changed to simply FFA, because it was decided the previous title was too limiting. The agricultural department now covers a vast spectrum, from horticulture and landscape to applied

Education **NOW**

Emily's first heifer is named Sophie. "She is a family pet. We will never be able to let her go," she laughed. "We probably got too attached, because now she follows us around. She's really funny."

When asked what she would tell future students looking to become



"Having something depend on you and look to you prepares you for the real world."

involved in the FFA program, Emily's enthusiasm bubbles over. "Having something depend on you and look to you prepares you for the real world. I have to plan for things, so I'm learning time management and how to prioritize. Everyone should try it. It's not just about animals; this teaches you responsibility and life skills. You learn people skills, how to be personable, how to be a leader. It really just teaches you everything you need to know!" she smiled. "I'm excited to tell my story. It seems like everyone in ag [agriculture] has a story to tell. We all just share a passion for this."

Emily credits her family with a key element to her success thus far — their abundant support. Truly Red Oak has to be proud of students, such as Emily. She and her fellow FFA students are working hard to become the future leaders of our community. As Emily said, "You have such a sense of accomplishment inside. You can say, 'You know what, I worked my tail-end off all this time, and it's paid off.'" **NOW**

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Around Town

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Mr. and Mrs. Gibson, top left, enjoyed getting ready for a party. A father and son, top center, enjoyed the day shooting hoops. TSO Construction, second row center, celebrated their business with a Red Oak Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting. The Nelson family, top right, held a cookout for family and friends. Ms. Dixon and her young family, bottom left, shared an afternoon stroll in the sunshine. Ms. Perez and her granddaughters, bottom row center, watched a game at the baseball fields. Youngsters, bottom right, played outside over the weekend.



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— By Stephanie Brewer

IN THE KITCHEN WITH TERRY WHITLEY

Terry's love of cooking began as a young bride. "It was a challenge to see how far I could stretch a pound of hamburger," she said. She was self-taught by the *Better Homes and Garden Cookbook*. "I couldn't boil an egg at first, but I looked it up in that cookbook and still use one today," she added.

Simplicity inspires Terry's cooking. She prepares meals that her husband can reheat in the evenings. Terry enjoys desserts of all kinds, especially wedding cakes, many of which she bakes as a side business. However, in the spirit of simplicity, Terry advises to add garlic to any recipe that does not contain sugar. **NOW**

To view more of your neighbors' recipes, visit our archives at www.nowmagazines.com.

POPPY SEED CHICKEN

4 - 6 chicken breasts
1 10 3/4-oz. can cream of chicken soup
8 oz. light sour cream
1/4 cup milk
2 Tbsp. poppy seeds
2 cloves garlic, crushed
salt and pepper to taste
1/2 cup butter, melted
1 sleeve Ritz Crackers, crushed
Preheat oven to 350 F. Boil, de-bone and chop chicken into bite-size pieces. In a 9 x 13-inch baking dish, mix soup, sour cream, milk, poppy seeds, garlic, salt and pepper. Gently stir in chicken pieces. In small bowl, toss melted butter with crushed crackers. Sprinkle crackers over top of chicken mixture. Bake for 30 - 45 minutes until bubbly.

SHEPHERD'S PIE

4 large potatoes, peeled and cubed
1 Tbsp. butter
(Or use 8 servings prepared instant mashed potatoes)
1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese
salt and pepper to taste
2 lbs. lean ground beef
2 cloves garlic, crushed
3 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
2 Tbsp. ketchup

1 cup beef broth
1 15-oz. can green beans, drained
Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add potatoes and cook until tender but still firm, about 15 minutes. Drain and mash. Mix in butter. Season with salt and pepper to taste; set aside. Preheat oven to 375 F. In large frying pan, cook ground beef and garlic until well-browned. Pour off excess fat, then stir in flour and cook 1 minute. Add ketchup and beef broth. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste. Spread the ground beef in an even layer on the bottom of a 2 1/2-quart casserole dish. Place drained green beans on top of meat. Top with the mashed potato mixture and sprinkle with shredded cheese. Bake in the preheated oven for 20 minutes, or until golden brown. Serves 6 - 8.

BASIL CHICKEN AND PASTA

1 lb. skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
8 to 10 oz. pasta (any type noodle works)
3 Tbsp. margarine
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 Tbsp. dried basil
4 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
2 Tbsp. butter-flavored granules (like "Butter Buds")
4 tsp. reduced-sodium chicken bouillon granules
1 1/2 cups boiling water
1 1/2 cups fat-free milk
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
(Optional: 10-oz. chopped broccoli, defrosted and drained

can be added to complete the meal.)
Boil, de-bone and chop chicken into bite-size pieces. Cook pasta according to package directions using the water the chicken was cooked in. Drain pasta. Set aside. In a saucepan, melt margarine. Stir in garlic, basil, flour, butter-flavored granules and bouillon until blended. Gradually add water and milk. Add chicken and cheese. Bring to a boil; simmer and stir for 3 - 4 minutes or until thickened. Toss with pasta and serve. Serves 4.

WHITE TEXAS SHEET CAKE

1 cup butter or margarine
1 cup water
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups white sugar
2 eggs
1/2 cup sour cream
1 tsp. almond extract
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking soda

FROSTING

1/2 cup butter or margarine
1/4 cup milk
4 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
1/2 tsp. almond extract
1 cup chopped walnuts

Preheat oven to 375 F. Grease and flour 10 x 15 x 1-inch baking

Who's Cooking **NOW**

pan. In a large saucepan, bring butter or margarine and water to a boil. Remove from heat, and stir in flour, sugar, eggs, sour cream, almond extract, salt and baking soda until smooth. Pour batter into baking pan. Bake for 20 - 22 minutes, or until cake is golden brown and tests done. Cool for 20 minutes. **FROSTING:** Combine butter or margarine and milk in a saucepan; bring to a boil. Remove from heat. Mix in sugar and almond extract. Stir in walnuts. Spread over warm cake.

ITALIAN CREAM CAKE

1/2 cup margarine, softened
1/2 cup shortening
2 cups white sugar
5 egg yolks
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 cup buttermilk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 1/3 cups flaked coconut
1 cup chopped pecans
5 egg whites

FROSTING

8 oz. cream cheese
1/2 cup margarine, softened
4 cups confectioner's sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1/2 cup chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 350 F. Grease and flour 3 8-inch round cake pans. In a large bowl, cream 1/2 cup margarine and shortening till light. Add white sugar, beating until fluffy. Beat in egg yolks. Stir together flour and baking soda, and add alternately with buttermilk into the creamed mixture; mix well after each addition. Stir in vanilla, coconut and pecans. Beat egg whites until they form stiff peaks. Fold beaten egg whites into cake mixture. Spoon into prepared pans. Bake for 25 - 40 minutes. Cool in pans for 10 minutes. Remove to wire rack to cool completely. **FROSTING:** Combine cream cheese, margarine, confectioner's sugar, and vanilla in mixer bowl. Beat till smooth. Frost the cooled cake. The remaining 1/2 cup pecans can be stirred into frosting or sprinkled onto the cake after it is frosted.


MICROWAVE MISSISSIPPI MUD CAKE

1 cup butter or margarine
2 cups white sugar
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
4 eggs
2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 cup coarsely chopped walnuts
1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 cup miniature marshmallows

FROSTING

1/2 cup butter
1/3 cup milk
1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 lb. confectioner's sugar

Put butter or margarine into large mixing bowl. Microwave on high 1 to 1 1/2 minutes, until melted. Stir in white sugar and cocoa. Add eggs and vanilla; beat vigorously until well-blended. Stir in flour, nuts and salt. Let batter "rest" for 10 minutes. Pour into an 11 3/4 x 7 1/2-inch pan. Place on a plastic trivet or inverted saucer in oven. Microwave on medium for 9 minutes, rotating dish 1/2 turn after 3 minutes. Microwave on high 3 - 5 minutes, rotating dish 1/2 turn once, until top is mostly dry with moist spots and pick comes out clean. Sprinkle marshmallows evenly over top of cake. Let stand about 5 minutes until marshmallows are slightly melted. **FROSTING:** Melt butter in large bowl. Stir in milk, cocoa and vanilla. Add confectioner's sugar and beat vigorously until smooth. Pour evenly over marshmallows. Let stand on flat surface 30 minutes until slightly warm or cool completely. Makes 16 very rich servings, as this is a very dense cake.



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Women and Investing: Your Special Financial Considerations — By Renee Chase

It is unfortunate, but still true, that if you are a woman, you face a variety of challenges in the workplace. These issues translate into potentially serious problems for you as you save for retirement. To avoid these difficulties, you need to take action — now.

Let us consider some of the facts that underlie and illuminate the formidable tasks that women face:

• Lower Earnings

Over the past few decades, women have made great strides in the quest to achieve earnings equality — but they are not there yet. Women currently earn, on average, about 80 percent as much as men, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

• Less Time on the Job

Women are more likely than men to take time away from their careers to rear children or care for aging parents. Consequently, women typically work 32 years, compared with men's 44, according to a study by the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College.

• Lower Income in Retirement

The total median annual income for women 65 and older is 43 percent less than the median income for men of similar ages, according to the Older Women's League, a research and advocacy group.

• Longer Life Spans

Women live an average of seven years longer than men, so they are more likely to outlive their financial assets.

So, there you have it: Lower earnings, extended time away from work, lower retirement income and longer life spans. Together, these factors point to a huge need for women — whether married or single — to do some serious investment planning. Fortunately, there are many steps you can take. Here are just a few:

• Pay Yourself First

Every time you get paid, turn around and write out a check to whatever savings or investment vehicle you have chosen — before you pay any other bills. Better yet, take advantage of payroll deduction, bank authorization or systematic investment plans so that your money is automatically invested before you even receive it. Such a plan, however, does not assure a profit and does not protect against loss in declining markets.

• Invest for Growth

Many studies have shown that women tend to invest more conservatively than men. Yet, to achieve your retirement goals, you may need to put some of your investment dollars into “growth” vehicles, such as stocks or mutual funds. Historically, stocks have appreciated more than other types of investments. More importantly, other types of investments, such as CDs or Treasury bills, may not even keep up with inflation, so you could end up losing purchasing power if your portfolio is not well diversified.

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You are in control. By following the steps described above, along with any others that make sense for your individual situation, you can take charge of your own financial future. It will take some time and effort — but the ultimate goal is well worth it. **NOW**

Renee Chase is an Edward Jones representative based in Red Oak.

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Health NOW

Allergies

— By Betty Tryon

The allergy season plagues many sufferers with the all too familiar symptoms — red eyes, runny nose, postnasal drip, sneezing and itchy throat — complicating their daily lives. Allergies are responses, which the body's immune system has to foreign substances in the air. The body acts out of self-defense, but the misguided allergic responses to harmless substances do damage.

Consider some of the substances that can trigger an allergic response: dander, dust mites, some food items and pollen. These substances are called allergens. The initial allergic response usually manifests itself at the first place the allergen touches the body. If an allergen, such as pollen, is in the air, then the nose and respiratory system will respond. Ingestion of an allergen, such as peanuts, fish and wheat, will cause a reaction in the digestive system. Some people are very sensitive to the scent of household cleaners or even perfumes. Sometimes the allergic reaction will be systemic, resulting in hives, or in anaphylaxis, an extreme reaction which can be life threatening.

Avoiding the trigger or allergen provides the best cure for allergies. In order to do that, determining which allergen is

causing the problem calls for an accurate assessment of many factors. Your physician can make a clinical diagnosis from your physical exam and by evaluating a detailed history of your symptoms. The doctor will want to know when and where your symptoms started, what they are, what brings them on, how long is the duration and what medication you are taking. Diagnostic tests are helpful in confirmation of the diagnosis.

Sensitivity to specific allergens needs to be identified by the most common diagnostic tool — the allergy skin test. A small amount of the substance you may be allergic to is injected under the skin to test for a reaction. Blood tests are available to determine allergens, but those tests are more expensive and the results take longer. Some treatment plans include medications such as antihistamines, nasal sprays and allergy shots. Elimination of allergy triggers in the home such as plants; dust, which harbors dust mites; pet dander and mold can be useful in controlling symptoms.

Another tool which is useful to determine if one is allergic to certain foods is the food elimination diet. Under a physician's supervision, the diet starts with a limited number of foods that usually do not cause an allergic reaction. Foods added back to the diet one at a time will reveal which one causes the allergy symptoms. Awareness and avoidance of that food remains the best treatment. Allergic symptoms, and the suffering they cause, can be alleviated with proper help.

This article is for general information only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult with your physician for questions regarding this topic.



Young, growing church is in need of musicians to help us in our praise and worship.

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If you are interested in this position, please call Pastor Karen at 817-994-8049.

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May 2008

Community Calendar

First Monday

Care and Share, a support group for bereaved parents: 7:00 p.m., Red Oak Elementary. Contact (469) 437-2537.

First and Third Tuesdays

Preschool story time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m., Red Oak Library. (469) 218-1230. www.redoakpubliclibrary.org.

Red Oak Lions Club meeting: 7:00 p.m. at 207 West Red Oak Road. (972) 617-3577.

Tuesdays and Thursdays

Alcoholics Anonymous: 7:00 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, 600 Red Oak Rd. Non-smoking. (972) 617-9100.

Wednesdays and Thursdays

Senior citizens meet for food and fun from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., Lion's Club, 207 West Red Oak Road. (972) 617-3577.

Second Tuesday

Wagon Wheel Saddle Club meeting at 7:30 p.m. (972) 223-8118. www.wagonwheelsaddleclub.com.

Third Wednesday

Ellis County Christian Women's Connection luncheon: 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., Waxahachie Country Club, 1920 W. Hwy. 287 at I-35 South in Waxahachie. Cost: \$13.00. Vouchers for child care available. Call (972) 937-2807 or (972) 937-9984.

Second Thursday

American Cancer Society support group: 7:00 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, 600 West Red Oak Rd.

Last Thursday

DeSoto Art League meeting. www.desotoartleague.com.

Every Friday

Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered recovery ministry, meets at First Baptist Church of Red Oak, 103 West Red Oak Road. Call (972) 617-3591 or visit www.redoakcelebraterecovery.com.

First Saturday

Red Oak Fire Rescue CPR classes: 9:00 a.m. To register: (469) 218-7713 or visit www.redoaktx.org.

May 3 and 10

Red Oak Pee Wee Football Association sign-ups for football and cheerleading: noon - 5:00 p.m. at Brookshire's parking lot. (972) 576-2211.

May 10

Corsicana AirSho* at Corsicana Airport (CRS), five miles south on Highway 287. Gates open at 8:30 a.m. Show starts at 10:00 a.m. Admission: \$5 per person or \$10 per car load. Veterans free. www.ci.corsicana.tx.us/resident/airport.php. (Airsho* is a trade name.)

4th Annual Mother/Daughter Banquet: 5:00 - 9:00 p.m. at the Cowboy Church of Ellis County. (972) 935-9801. Tickets: \$10 per person.

May 15

American Business Women's Association (ABWA) Express Network meeting: 5:45 p.m. at the Waxahachie Civic Center. \$25.00 for dinner. For reservations: (972) 938-0703. For membership: (972) 723-6551 or visit www.abwa-empowering-women.org.

May 28

Red Oak Baseball Association North Zone Little League

Tournament. www.redoakbaseball.com/index.html.

June 7

Mid-Way Regional Airport's Annual Pancake Breakfast Fly-In: 8:00 - 11:00 a.m. Breakfast tickets \$6.00. One child under 8 eats free with a paid adult ticket. Event and parking are free. (972) 923-0080.

For more community events, visit our online calendar at www.nowmagazines.com.

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