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MAY 2017

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ON THE COVER



Michelle Slovak does her part to make the National Polka Festival a success.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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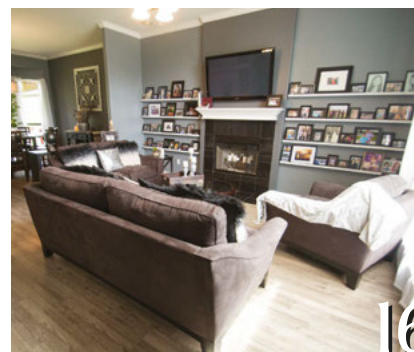
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Editor's Note

Happy Mother's Day!

May boasts of two very special days where some of the most dedicated, hardworking, committed people are celebrated — Mother's Day and Memorial Day. Mother's Day began in America in 1908 but didn't become an official holiday until 1914. The second Sunday of the month is filled with flowers, cards and special gifts. Memorial Day is celebrated on the last Monday of the month and was

originally called Decoration Day. This American holiday brings honor to the men and women who died while serving this great country.

I pray blessings over mothers. May your special day be filled with memories of time spent with those who love you best — your children and grandchildren. May the hugs be long and the laughter loud. As I meditate on Memorial Day, I get teary-eyed as I think about the individuals I will never know who paid the ultimate price for my freedom. May they rest in peace. Enjoy your mothers, but don't forget to thank those who gave it all so we could live free.

Be thankful as you celebrate and remember!

Sandra

Sandra Strong

EnnisNOW Editor

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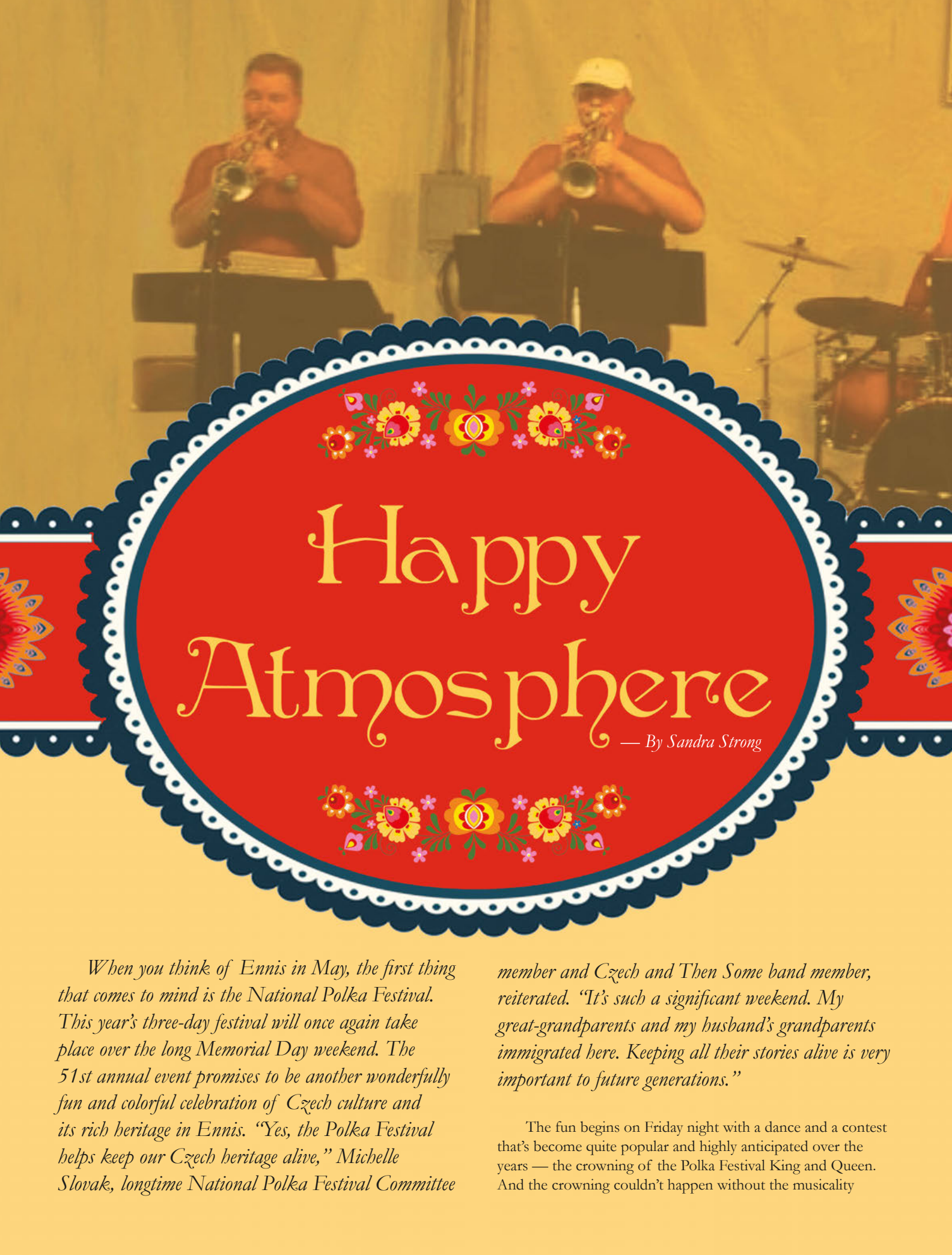
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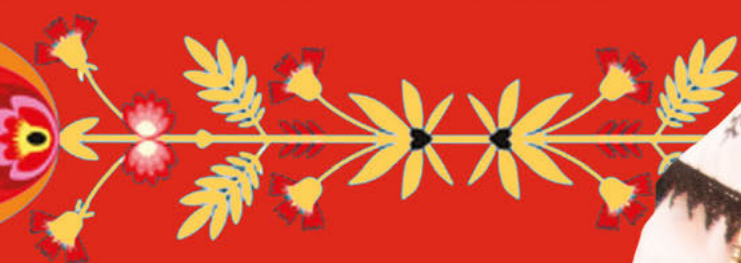
Happy Atmosphere

— By Sandra Strong

When you think of Ennis in May, the first thing that comes to mind is the National Polka Festival. This year's three-day festival will once again take place over the long Memorial Day weekend. The 51st annual event promises to be another wonderfully fun and colorful celebration of Czech culture and its rich heritage in Ennis. "Yes, the Polka Festival helps keep our Czech heritage alive," Michelle Slovak, longtime National Polka Festival Committee

member and Czech and Then Some band member, reiterated. "It's such a significant weekend. My great-grandparents and my husband's grandparents immigrated here. Keeping all their stories alive is very important to future generations."

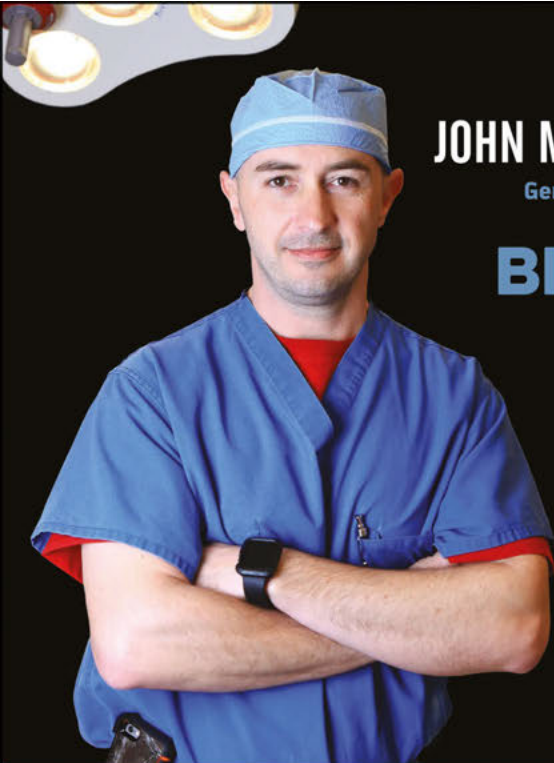
The fun begins on Friday night with a dance and a contest that's become quite popular and highly anticipated over the years — the crowning of the Polka Festival King and Queen. And the crowning couldn't happen without the musicality



of the polka band that is scheduled to play at the chosen hall that evening — The Czechaholics — nor could festival-goers dance the weekend away without the bands that come from near and far to play the music that has come to be expected.

Michelle has been with the local and always popular band, Czech and Then Some, on a full-time basis since 1999. Prior to that, she performed for a while with Harry Czarnek and the Texas Dutchmen. She began playing the clarinet in Ennis as a member of the sixth-grade band. She took up the saxophone sometime later, after she realized the clarinet limited her performing time. “I taught myself how to play the sax,” she admitted. “It’s the same fingering, so it wasn’t that difficult. The sax has allowed me to perform more, and I like that.”





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Her dad and mom both played in polka bands at different times when Michelle and her siblings were young. This is also when the children in the family learned how to polka. She remembers her brother and fellow band member, Danny Zapletal, basically teaching her the dance. She was 5 at the time. Michelle was shy when she first took her place on the stage, but that is no longer the case. "I just like playing the music," she stated, as she remembered



the first trip Czech and Then Some made to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. "That was such a memorable trip," she said. "We represented the Czech culture at that event."

Since forming the band in 1997, Czech and Then Some has traveled to and performed at many functions. They are always headlining at one of the three halls during the Annual Polka Festival in Ennis. They've also played the music they grew up listening to at Westfest, Accordion Kings in Stephenville, Texas; Heritage Festival at Six Flags Over Texas; Kolache Christmas; Oktoberfest in Fredericksburg; Kolache-Klobase Festival in East Bernard; Wurstfest in New Braunfels; South Texas Sausage and Polka Fest in Hallettsville, Kansas; Polkatennial; Denmark Polka Fest in Wisconsin; Starlite Polka Fest in Nebraska; Kolache & Sausage Fest in Oklahoma; along with many weddings, anniversaries and private parties. They have also appeared locally on *Good Morning Texas* and *Good Day Morning Show*.

Most of the band's members are of Czech descent, and they enjoy the music they play because it helps keep their heritage alive. The band plays everything from polkas and waltzes to country music. The band members are a talented group of artists. Michelle plays sax, clarinet and keyboards. Jennifer Slovak also plays sax and clarinet, as well as guitar and percussion. She, too, has been with the band since 1999. Zeke Martinez plays drums, guitar and sings, while the youngest band member, Josh Zapletal, plays trumpet and guitar. John Schumacher plays bass, drums and sings. David Czarnek has played sax, clarinet and guitar with the band since 2010. David Slovak, Michelle's husband, co-owner of Czech and Then Some and one of its original members, plays accordion, piano, guitar, bass guitar, drums and sings. Danny Zapletal, the other co-owner and original member, plays trumpet, keyboards, sings and arranges for the group. "We play between 20 and 30 shows a year, not counting the Polka Festival," Michelle said, expounding on the busy schedule the band keeps even



though every member works a full-time job and has family commitments. "Ennis is still the biggest three-day event around. It offers a happy atmosphere."

Michelle became a National Polka Festival committee member in 1994, several years prior to becoming a band member. Most of the work she's done over the past 30-plus years is done behind the scenes. As the acting secretary since 1995, she is responsible for organizing the bands each year and making sure contracts are signed, as well as helping promote the event through advertising



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and securing sponsorships. "Committee members do lots of things together all throughout the year in preparation," she said. "We are obviously devoted to what the Polka Festival represents and what it means to us." Other committee officers include Director Jean Paul Beebe, President Keith Kapavik, Treasurer Greg McElroy and Danny Zapletal, forever board member in good standing. "We try to mix up the bands from year-to-year," Michelle added. "Brave Combo is always on the schedule, but we are continually looking for younger bands as they bring a new flow to the festival for the new crowd of festival goers."

The main goal is to keep the Polka Festival alive, and in doing so, sometimes new things, such as younger bands, need to be introduced. "We have to get the younger generation involved if we hope to keep the Czech heritage alive," Michelle stated. "We just can't let it die by the wayside."

January of this year marked 20 years that Czech and Then Some has been sharing their music. What originally began as a one-time job evolved into a family band that's made many wonderful memories over the years and now includes the next generation — David and Michelle's children, Josef and Isabella. "Josef has been playing drums with an out-of-town band for the past two years," Michelle explained. "And we all love dressing up in our authentic costumes."

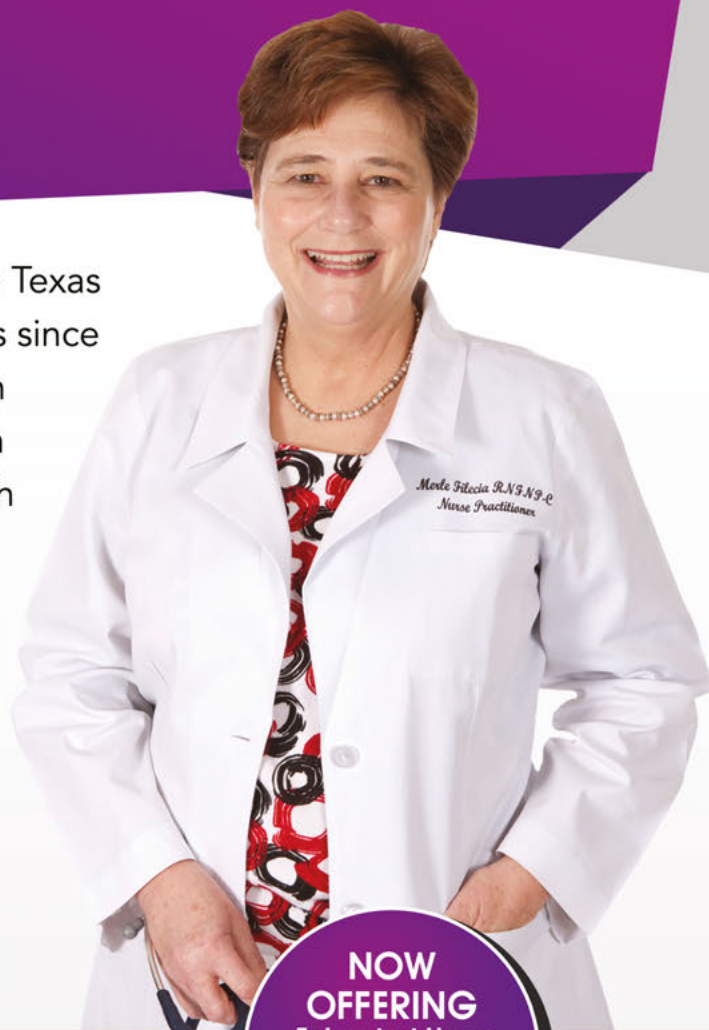
Michelle has many costumes to choose from because she has a wonderful seamstress in West, Texas, who enjoys creating authentic kroje for her. When counting, Michelle said, "I have six full kroje now, but in the past I had more," she confessed. "I've shared a few over the years."

Michelle and Danny's father, the late Raymond Zapletal, was one of the original founders of the National Polka Festival. The atmosphere during the 51st festival will be just as fun as the 50 that came before, as it's energized by the many festival goers who, like Michelle and her family, have a strong desire to keep their Czech heritage alive. "We have met so many friends along the way," she added. "The fans of polka music have been so gracious to us. They've become a big part of our lives." **NOW**

Merle Filecia

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Merle holds a master's degree in nursing from Texas Woman's University and has practiced in Ennis since 2006. Prior to her experience here, she was an accomplished cardiac and emergency nurse in Houston, Texas where she was recognized with numerous specialty certifications. She is very well-trained to provide the full spectrum of family care from infants to older adults.



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— By Virginia Riddle

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FAMILY

AT HOME WITH FREDDIE AND BETTY LOPEZ



A college dance and a shared commitment to family brought Freddie and Betty Lopez together. Betty was attending Golden West College, and Freddie was going to Cal Poly Pomona University on a baseball scholarship. "I normally wasn't the party-going type, but I had hurt my back playing, so I went," Freddie recalled. Fortuitously, Betty, studying cosmetology, had been invited by friends. "It was divine intervention," Freddie explained. The couple dated for two years and have been married for 20 years.

Freddie, a native of Ennis and graduate of Garey High School in Pomona, went to work for Coca-Cola, and now, after 20 years with the company, he is a sales development manager. Shortly after their marriage, the couple moved to Ennis at the request of his grandmother, Ama. "All my family is here, but Betty's family is in California. Luckily, she agreed to come with me," Freddie said.

The family lived happily in Ennis until 2014, when Freddie's job returned the family, which included daughter Alize, now 19; and sons Freddie III, now 17; and Sebastian, now 10, to California. "We lived in Orange County, 10 minutes from Disneyland, but Alize still wanted to come back to Ennis to graduate

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from EHS with her friends. California is expensive compared to Ennis, but we can live anywhere, as long as Betty and the kids are comfortable,” Freddie said. So the family began planning a move back to Ennis.

“I agreed to move back to Ennis since traffic in California is bumper-to-bumper from about 3:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. or later every day. It’s so peaceful in Ennis, and we go back to California during holidays to visit my family,” Betty said.

They bought their Ennis dream-of-a-home online while still in California. The couple had talked about building a house but decided, instead, on their

current home. “We trusted our real estate agent, and my family had looked at it and was there for the inspections,” Freddie explained. So, in 2015, the family returned to Ennis and began to put their unique stamp on their new home in one of Ennis’ newer neighborhoods.

A stay-at-home mom, Betty is credited with the remodeling ideas, but everyone in the family pitched in to do the work. “There were renters in this home before we bought it, so there was a lot of work to do,” Betty remembered. “But some of our best memories are of doing the work ourselves.”

Their home is now decorated in different shades of gray with white trim for each room. Throughout the open family/dining rooms and kitchen, new hardwood flooring was installed. The family room’s focal point is the elegant

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mantel flanked by bookshelves loaded proudly with family photos, many of which have been taken by Freddie III. Comfortable seating with a glass-topped coffee table and tiered candles complete the room. A plaque stating, *We will always serve the Lord*, emphasizes the family's commitment to their faith. Large celestial windows illuminate the room.

The family dining area features a large round table and buffet for serving. Space allows for extra tables for eating and card playing to be set out when extended family comes to gatherings. Seating is also available for snacks at the breakfast bar. Windows overlook the patio across a wide expanse of yard to a field. "I love this view," Betty said.

There's ample space in the kitchen for family projects and cooking for family and friends. A pantry and butcher block island provide added storage and counter space, and a wine rack artfully decorates a wall.

The separate master bedroom and bath provide a restful retreat with a sitting area for this busy couple. Freddie's collection of sports caps rests in a built-in cabinet. "I've been a Los Angeles Lakers and Angels fan, but I'll always be a Dallas Cowboys fan," he said enthusiastically.

The kids' wing of the home reflects the individual taste of each resident. Alize, who is a student at Navarro College at Waxahachie, has decorated her domain in everything Marilyn Monroe. "I like her fashion influence," Alize explained. The black and white theme contrasts with her collection of colorful EHS homecoming mums. Alize is planning to attend a university, and she is majoring in marine biology with a minor in law.

Freddie III and Sebastian's shared bedroom is also decorated in black and white, including Freddy III's collection of photos that are artfully hung. The hall bath accommodates all three kids and is decorated in blue, white and greens.





Through the utility room and housed in the garage is Freddie's pride and joy — a 1951 Chevy Deluxe sedan. "It runs but is still a project," Freddie said. "Sebastian says it's his car. I bought it on a handshake. Only in Ennis could I have done that."

With three involved children at home, Betty stays busy with activities relating to family. "She not only has come up with all the ideas to remodel this house, but Betty decorates the house and is at all the kids' programs and more," Freddie said proudly. "She stays up and waits for Alize to come home. Betty's one of the greatest mothers in the world."

"I've always traveled to Alize's softball games," Betty added. "It's been a blessing to have a husband who supports us."

All three children have attended Ennis ISD schools. Freddie III serves on EHS's yearbook staff, and Sebastian attends Jack Lummus Intermediate School. "Sebastian seems to be the sporty one now," Freddie said. "He's a born Texan!" Freddie and Betty have been actively involved parents. Freddie coached Alize's softball team before she played on the EHS team, as well as the high school's volleyball team. "All our hobbies are family oriented — sports, fishing and the car," Freddie added.

The family attends St. John Nepomucene Catholic Church, but their giving spirit doesn't stop at the church's doors. "Once a year, all our family raises money for a family in need. It might be for a nice dinner or to make their house payment," Betty said.

This family enjoys gatherings and outings with Freddie's extended family. "My sister, Cynthia, comes by and takes our kids and nephews out to hang together every week," Freddie said. "Our best times and memories are made here or at weddings, parties and other times together. We've implemented what my grandmother always used to do by continuing to hang out together as a family. Ennis is a place where I would like to retire. This has been a journey for our family, but we're now at home." **NOW**

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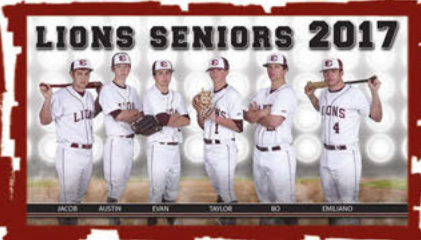
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Knights of Columbus
(850 S. IH 45, Ennis)



Sokol
(2622 E. Hwy. 34, Ennis)

TIME	EVENT / BAND	PLACE
FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2017		
6:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.	Czechaholics	Knights of Columbus
9:00 p.m.	King and Queen Dance Contest	Knights of Columbus
SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2017		
7:00 a.m.	Polka Fest Run 10K, 5K and 1 Mile Fun Run/Walk	Lonestar Fitness Center
10:00 a.m.	Parade	Downtown Ennis
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Arts and Crafts	Downtown Ennis
11:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Jerry Haisler & Melody 5	Knights of Columbus
11:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Dujka Bros	KJT Auditorium
11:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Ennis Czech Boys	Sokol
12:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Street Dance - Texas Sound Check	Downtown Ennis
1:00 p.m.	Kolache Eating Contest	Downtown Stage
4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	Texas Dutchmen	Knights of Columbus
4:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Jodie Mikula Orchestra	KJT Auditorium
4:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Fritz Hodde and the Fabulous 6	Sokol
9:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.	Country Concert: Bart Crow with with Special Guest, Ray Johnston Band	Knights of Columbus
8:30 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.	Brave Combo	KJT Auditorium
8:30 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.	The Moravians	Sokol
SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2017		
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Live Broadcast: KBEC Polka Party  KBEC1390 CLASSIC TEXAS MUSIC	Sokol
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Czechaholics	Sokol
11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Arts and Crafts	Downtown Ennis
12:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Street Dance - Czech Melody Masters	Downtown Ennis
12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Praha Bros	KJT Auditorium
12:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Czech and Then Some / Alex Mexiner	Sokol
8:30 p.m. - 11:30 p.m.	Brave Combo	Sokol



Polka Parade

Saturday, May 27, 2017 • Downtown Ennis
Start Time: 10:00 a.m.

Floats, bands and colorful costumes will kick-off the downtown festivities. The parade traditionally includes something for visitors of all ages. Enjoy the music of our polka bands riding on decorated floats or the sounds of our award-winning Ennis High School Marching Band. The Shriners make their annual appearance, as well as celebrities, public officials, motorcycles, horseback riders, clowns, kids and seniors! This giant parade twists through historic downtown Ennis and is sure to please. This year's theme is "Polka Paradise."



7th Annual Kolache Eating Contest Saturday, May 27, 2017 Downtown Stage

Registration Ends: Noon, Friday, Chamber of Commerce,
or noon Saturday, Downtown Stage.
Start Time: 1:00 p.m.

Prizes for Men's, Women's, Youth Boy and Youth Girl categories.



Brave Combo

Saturday, 8:30 p.m.-midnight, KJT
Sunday, 8:30 p.m.-11:30 p.m., Sokol

"If I had to pick a traditional Czech polka that stands out, I would go with 'Pretty Dancing Girl.' It has a great melody — quite stirring! And faithful Brave Combo fans who know their Czech songs can all sing along, even when we sing just one verse in Czech. For most people who come to polka shows, the song also represents a really important fan, Rosie Steinman, who passed away a few years ago. She was the queen of PolkaFest and always got on stage to sing the song with us. It became an expected event, and Rosie was not shy. We loved the energy she brought to the festival and still feel the need to honor her with 'Pretty Dancing Girl.'"

— Carl Finch

Alex Meixner Band

Sunday, noon-7:30 p.m., Sokol

"Why I love the genre is probably because of the song, 'Let's Have a Party.' It's a simple melody and lyric, which allows the musicians space to improvise, while also having a theme that relates to all party audiences. Originally written by Western PA Slovenian Button Box musician Ted Zalac, it has been performed and recorded by polka musicians throughout the USA and Canada for over 20 years."

— Alex Meixner



Czech and Then Some

Sunday, noon-7:30 p.m., Sokol

"My favorite song to play would be the 'Three Yanks Polka.' It's an upbeat song that really gets the crowd excited and was always one my papa liked to hear."

— Josh Zapletal

Czech Melody Masters

*Sunday, noon-3:30 p.m.,
Downtown Ennis*

"Our favorite polka is definitely 'The Shiner Song.' The Joe Patek Orchestra is a huge influence on our band, not only with their sound but also the precision and energy they brought to their music. This is one of their most famous numbers. We pay tribute to them every time we play it. It's also just a lot of fun to play!"

— Dennis Svatek





Country Concert

Saturday, May 27 — Country Concert

Doors open at 9:00 p.m. • \$15 advanced purchase/\$18 at the door
Tickets can be purchased in advance at Doc's Beverage/Kolache Depot
located at 1103 E. Ennis Ave., Ennis, TX 75119

Bart Crow



On Bart Crow's new album, *The Parade*, boundaries disappear and things get real. His music is a tangle of roots in blues, country and down-home rock 'n' roll, branded with his unique imprint. He has six No. 1 singles on the Texas Music Chart, one of which, "Wear My Ring," sold over 165,000 copies. He has sold over 40,000 albums and released five self-produced albums in just over a decade, including *Dandelion*, which debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Heatseekers South Central chart.

Ray Johnston Band

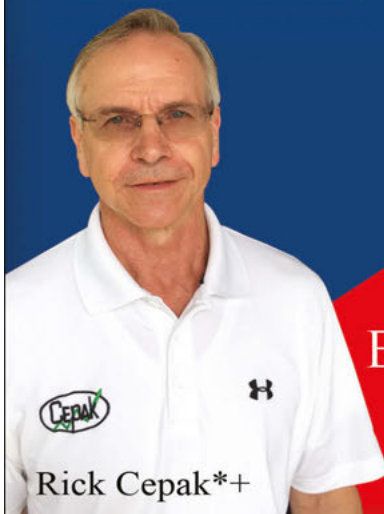


The Ray Johnston Band is set to release a new EP *#GoesGoodWith* on May 27. "I like the songs I co-write and sing to be the right balance of humor, joy, love, honesty, wit and always more sun than rain," Ray said. His successful previous album, *No Bad Days*, resulted in seven singles on the Texas Music Chart, over a quarter of a million streams online and national exposure garnered from songs co-written among a significant company of peers.

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Brad Cepak*



Czechaholics

Friday, 6:00 p.m.-11:00 p.m., KC
Sunday, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m., Sokol

“Our favorite song would have to be ‘Moon Over Moravia,’ a waltz, because our band originated from Moravia, Texas. The first booking we ever played was located at the historic Moravia store, which is noted in the song. Also, our accordion player and band leader, Mark Hermes, is the co-writer of the song.”

— Brian Svetlik

Dujka Brothers

Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m., KJT

“I think one of my favorite songs is ‘A Ja Sam!’ It’s a catchy, simple folk melody with lyrics that most folks in touch with their Czech heritage sing along to. It’s always a favorite sing-along song at dances.”

— John Dujka



Ennis Czech Boys

Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Sokol

“I would say our favorite is the ‘Tick Tock Polka.’ It was a crowd favorite of the legendary Johnny Mensik, who was a musician we all looked up to. We have closed every show with this song for the last 10 years. It’s a song that showcases all the best aspects of Texas polka music.”

— Trey Sylvester

Fritz Hodde’s “The Fabulous Six”

Saturday, 4:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m., Sokol

“My favorite polka song to play is ‘The Festive Polka.’ I like to play it because it seems to put people in the mood to dance!”

— Fritz Hodde



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Jerry Haisler and the Melody 5

Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m., KC

“I have been playing these tunes since I was 10, so to pick one is really a test. I’d probably pick ‘Arise My Darling Polka’ by Stavej Ma Mila. It was the first song I learned on a small 20-key accordion and practiced over and over for my grandmother on her front porch. She thought it was great no matter how bad it sounded!”

— Jerry Haisler

Jodie Mikula Orchestra

Saturday, 4:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m., KJT

“Our favorite polka to play has to be the ‘Dairy Maid Polka.’ It has all the bells and whistles — a good workout on the cornets, accordion solos, a tuba solo and the punch from the rhythm that just makes you want to dance. Plus, we get a lot of requests for this tune!”

— Ken Mikula



Praha Brothers

Sunday, noon-4:00 p.m., KJT

“We have many favorites, but one of our favored polkas for Ennis would have to be ‘Youth and Pleasure.’ It has a nice melody and is a get-up-and-dance, toe-tapping, energetic polka. We have played it for years, quite often as an opener, to get everyone out on the dance floor. Not only is it the theme song for the National Polka Festival, it is one of the very first songs we ever played as the Praha Brothers.”

— Billy Havlik

Texas Sound Check Band

*Saturday, 12:30 p.m.-4:00 p.m.,
Downtown Ennis*

“The Texas Sound Check Band has been playing music for many years. It’s hard to pick just one song because we like them all. The song that has recently taken off for us is a song we recorded called ‘Yellowbird.’ We heard it on the TV show, *The Wiggles*, but we recorded it with a little different twist. People come up as we are setting up to remind us to play it. It has taken the radio polka shows in the South by storm. You are guaranteed to hear it every day at 11:15 a.m. on a particular polka show. How crazy is that!”

— Ben Orsak



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The Bands



The Moravians

Saturday, 8:30 p.m.-midnight, Sokol

“Growing up, ‘If I Were a Bird’ was always one of my favorite polkas to hear. It was just so catchy and upbeat. It always made me happy. As I have gotten older and started playing with The Moravians, naturally, it is one of my favorites to play. I think we can all agree that it is and will always be a crowd favorite, and getting the crowd to sing along with you makes it an absolute blast to play.”

— Tyler Prasifka

The Texas Dutchmen

Saturday, 4:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m., KC

“One song requested often is ‘Pretty Dancing Girl’ — such a simple song with playful lyrics and a catchy tune. One of my favorite things is the smiles on the dancers as they get on the dance floor. They always feel pretty dancing to this song, and their partner is proud to be with a pretty girl. For some, this may be the first time they have danced together. Others may be reliving the first time they danced, maybe many memories ago. With this song, they always seem to dance with a bit more spring in their step.”

— David Czarnek



19th Annual PolkaFest Run *Hosted by the Rotary Club of Ennis* **Saturday, May 27, 2017** **Lonestar Fitness Center**

Registration/Pickup: 5:45 a.m.

10K Race: 7:00 a.m.

1-mile Fun Run/Walk: 7:10 a.m.

5K Race: 7:30 a.m. • Awards: 8:30 a.m.

Please call 972-351-2335.



31st King and Queen Dance Contest **Friday, May 26, 2017** **Start Time: 9:00 p.m., KC Hall**

The festival kicks off with an opening dance on Friday at 6:00 p.m., featuring polka music and the King and Queen Dance Contest at 9:00 p.m. Participants and non-participants are encouraged to wear traditional Czech *kroj* (costumes).



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KJT Hall

1216 S. Paris St. • Ennis, TX 75119 • Adults: \$11. Children: \$7. Price includes meal, tea/coffee and dessert. Food prices do not include admission.

Barbecue beef and klobase, parsley potatoes, green beans, sauerkraut, bread and Czech pastries. **Saturday and Sunday.**



Sokol Hall

2622 E. Hwy. 34 • Ennis, TX 75119 • Adults: \$11. Children: \$7. Price includes meal, tea/coffee and dessert. Food prices do not include admission.

Option 1: Barbecue beef and klobase, parsley potatoes, green beans, sauerkraut, bread and Czech pastries. **Option 2:** Pork roast, dumplings, parsley potatoes, green beans, sauerkraut. **Saturday and Sunday.**



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For so many, small-town living is preferred over city dwelling. Ashley Colunga is one of those people. She moved away from Ennis to attend university and live in Dallas, but after marrying a fellow Ennis native and having children, she knew she didn't want to stay. "I wanted to give my children a small-town experience," she said.

Upon returning, she and her husband built a farmhouse on her grandfather's farmland. "Ennis has and always will be 'home,'" she said confidently. "Some people view moving back to a small town as a failure. Not me. I love it and feel successful in doing it," she commented. She loves that her son and daughter can walk across the field to visit family members just like she did when she was young.

Ashley hopes that more people in her generation and future generations will feel the same as she does. "If people don't want to live in the small town, I hope they will at least enjoy visiting often," she said. To help ensure that Ennis is the best small town it can be, she took a job in August 2016 as the marketing and communications director for the city. She had been working in advertising for 11 years, so it was a natural fit. To work in and for the community she loves so much was an added bonus.

The city's economic development team that Ashley is part of has dedicated themselves to revitalizing the city.

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— By Jill Martinez

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Ashley is in the process of working with a destination branding agency to rebrand Ennis. The outcome will include a new logo, brand story and a visual representation and tagline portraying the city's core values.

Ennis has always enjoyed healthy tourism, thanks to several festivals that occur throughout the year. April and May are perhaps the most popular months for tourism due to the blooming bluebonnet trails and festival and the National Polka Festival. While tourism is important, developing a city for the benefit of its citizens is critical.

In 2014, Ennis citizens were surveyed about what they would like to see happen in the city. Many responded by saying they wanted places to shop, dine and be outdoors. The city listened and began devising a comprehensive plan. "Sometimes, on the surface, it may seem like nothing is happening, but there is lots going on behind the scenes. All of the plans being enacted are aimed at improving quality of life for our citizens, as much as they are about enhancing the tourism experience," Ashley stated.

Nothing draws a crowd like a crowd, so the city aims to create a downtown experience where people are willing to gather together. "If locals aren't hanging out downtown, visitors aren't either," Ashley said. With that in mind, several downtown buildings have been restored and beautified. Since many of these buildings are historical, preserving their cultural character is paramount.

A key part of the downtown beautification is the work planned for Dallas Street. It will be a pedestrian street featuring parallel parking, handicap accessible sidewalks, beautiful red brickwork and flower planters. People will be able to enjoy walking up and down the street while they shop and dine.

Of course, the farmer's market, open from April to October each year, is a staple in downtown. "I take my kids here every weekend. I'm the poster child for



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this place!” Ashley said with a chuckle. In the future, she would like to see events happening there nearly every weekend.

Currently, the Minnie McDowell Park is being constructed in the area where the farmer’s market is held. Groundbreaking took place in December of last year. This public space will include restrooms, climbing and water features for children, a performance gazebo where concerts can be held and an art wall, which will provide a gorgeous backdrop for photo opportunities.

Parking will be available on the outskirts of downtown so people can stroll around easily during their visit. “Trust me, people are going to want to park and stay for a while,” Ashley remarked confidently.

In keeping with the Information Age, a mobile app, Ennis Y’all, has been developed that includes listings of all restaurants, shops, hotels, attractions and events. “Every Ennis resident and visitor is encouraged to download it,” Ashley stated.

Ennis has experienced some growth in recent years, which has caused the city to consider changes to the traffic flow. Currently, railroad tracks near downtown cause significant backups when trains pass through town. An aesthetically pleasing trestle bridge has been designed for this area so the train will pass overhead in the future, relieving congestion on the roads and making it easier for people to move from the west side to the east side of downtown. “We want people to feel comfortable moving about on foot in the downtown areas. Statistics show that walkable cities end up being safer,” Ashley clarified.

Movement from the northern and southern sides of downtown will be essential because the city plans to erect shopping plazas in both of these areas. One of these will be where Plaza del Sol is now and the other where Safeway used to be. These plazas will be multistory, mixed use



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developments that will include city offices, retail shopping and residential living spaces. The city hopes to attract some major department store chains to anchor the plazas.

A welcome center will eventually be installed on Main Street where the pawn shop used to be. The facade of the building will be restored to a historic appearance. The economic development team and inspections team will be relocated there. This facility will also serve to greet visitors, display exhibits and house what is being called "small business incubators." These spaces will have small amounts of square footage with reduced rental costs to help people start businesses. "It is scary to start a business sometimes. These spaces will give people the opportunity to test their business model and build clientele," Ashley explained. "These incubator spaces will give people a safe way to start a business before moving into a permanent home in one of the many re-developed buildings."

The improvement planned for Ennis demonstrates that the city is listening to its citizens. The upgrades and additions should help to improve quality of life for locals and give tourists a great place to visit in their free time. "As the city undergoes changes, we ask for our locals to be our biggest cheerleaders. Tell our story. Let everyone know what awesome things are around the corner for our beloved hometown," Ashley encouraged. "Continue to shop local and support local during this growth period. Come downtown and see all the progress that has already been made with new restaurants, shops, a pub and public theatre." The change in energy can already be felt and will only continue to propel the city forward with the support of the community. It is Ennis' time to shine. **NOW**

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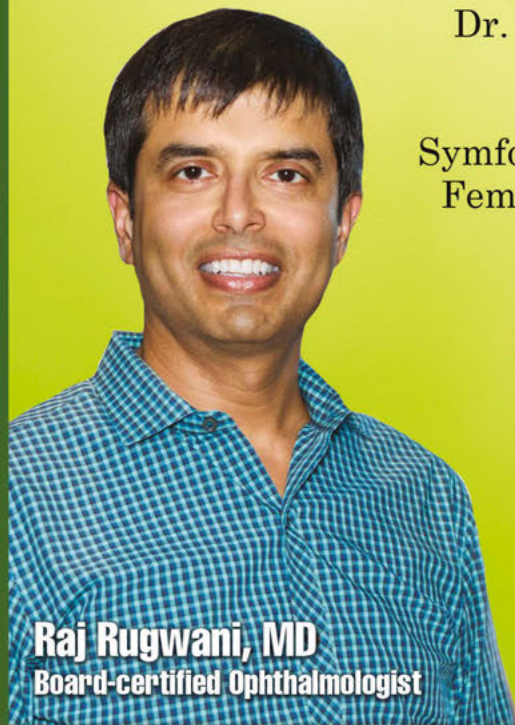
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Summertime Is Easy

— By Zachary R Urquhart



Every year, kids excitedly await the last school bell before vacation begins. And every year, a week after school is out, kids all around can be heard saying parents' least favorite two words, "I'm bored." But using this helpful guide, you can fill your summer with new, fun and, sometimes, free activities.

Sign up for camps!

- *Dance around town.* Every summer, there are dozens of local dance, cheer and art studios that offer one-week camps. These camps often double as a trial for prospective new patrons, so they are a great way to spend a week



and, at the same time, to see if there is long-term interest. Ask your friends what weeks they are signing up for, so your child will know some people when they arrive the first day.

- *Be a good sport.* Most high schools offer sports camps for youth up through middle school. These camps are a good way for high school coaches to meet future athletes, but they are also great for kids to learn fundamental skills,

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technique and strategy. While seeing kids that may eventually play for them is a bonus, schools do not limit attendance to those in their zones, so you can get football speed training from recent state champion coaches, or technical work from some of the most esteemed soccer coaches in the state.

• *Check dates.* With the number of studios, schools and private entities offering camps for all different ages and skill levels, you will want to spend some time looking for the right fit. Whatever else you do, though, make sure you know when the registration deadlines are. While some might extend registration with an added payment up until the day of the camp, staffing and equipment considerations may make others hold to a solid deadline, so do not let missing a postmark date keep your kid from the camp they want.



VBS, by many names.

• *Look for schedules.* With so many churches offering vacation Bible schools to the public, the first step needs to be looking for a calendar of the offerings. While you will not always find one codex with every option, you might call your city hall to see if they have something consolidated. You can also reach out on social media. There are Facebook pages where people throughout the area post their church's activities. VBS may be in the morning, afternoon or evening and, generally, goes for four to five days, with some churches using the following Sunday service as a grand finale.

• *Ask your friends.* There are literally hundreds of programs offered by local

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churches throughout the summer. It is not difficult to schedule a different vacation Bible school every week for a few months, if you are so inclined. Ask friends which ones they have tried, and find out what types of activities each one offers. Some churches do simple activities in the park, and you can show up for just a few days. Others, though, will require registration ahead of time, as they have professional instructors in various fields come to make the activity portion as great as possible.

- *Figure out the code.* These days, different churches take different philosophies when it comes to VBS. VBX typically means the kids will have one specific activity that takes a lot of their time. Kids' Camp denotes more of a camp atmosphere, with varied activities mixed with the study portions. VBS in the Park is often an outreach seeking to bring in guests from nearby areas throughout the week. And traditional VBS normally blends Bible stories with songs, crafts and large group games.

Free is a great thing.

- *Movies in different places.* While many movie theaters offer cheap summer showings once a week, usually for films that have been out for a year or longer,



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cities often run special movie days and nights throughout the summer, sometimes in local parks or at other outdoor venues. Most local libraries show movies as often as once a week in the afternoons. Because these city events are planned well in advance, they are advertised weeks before showings, so a quick check of your city's website will give you all the details you need.

- *Libraries have more than just books.*

In addition to family-friendly movie showings, most public libraries ramp up a full slate of summer activities. From bringing in magicians and other performers, to presenting informational sessions on a variety of topics, your local library is probably a great spot for free family fun, while you get out of the sweltering Texas heat. If nothing else, you can grab a summer reading log and have your kids earn treats and prizes for opening books during their months off from school.

- *Free events with memberships.*

If you have passes for local zoos, botanical gardens or museums, be sure and check out their catalogue of events. While they always offer exciting exhibits, most places add a few seasonal specials to entice new families. If you are not a member yet, it may be worth spending \$100 or so for a yearlong membership that lets your entire family have access to special activities, concerts and, usually, even gets you passes to bring friends along for a visit.

The summer can be a great, relaxing time to break from the routine of school and work, but it can sometimes turn into an exhausting endeavor trying to keep your kids from the doldrums of too much free time. With trips to these great local spots, you can be sure your summer is one to remember. **NOW**



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Liz Davis has carried her adolescent love for canines to adulthood. She is now offering a place where four-legged family members can run free.

If Canines Could Talk

Your dog will dig it at Camp FurBaby. — By Sandra Strong

Have you ever wondered what your four-legged family members would say if they could talk? As they playfully wag their tails, they may simply ask for a treat, but they may also tell you they want to go on a “playcation.” “Camp FurBaby is a dog boarding ranch retreat,” owner Liz Davis said. “Why not treat your dog to a ‘bed and barkfest’ designed just for them?”

Liz’s family history in Ennis dates to the late 1800s. Her great-grandfather Swafford once served as the chief of police, while her other grandparents were farmers, milliners and cotton producers. “My dad purchased the ranch in 1967,” she further shared. “I have rich family ties to this area.” Liz came back to Ennis in 1995, when construction of her Southwestern-style home began. It looks out over a tank where she used to fish with her parents.

She has also had a love for dogs since she was a little girl. “The first word I said wasn’t ‘mommy’ or ‘daddy,’ it was ‘Lazy,’” she said with a smile. “Lazy was dad’s bird dog. When I was old enough to walk, I started letting Lazy in the house.” She carried this love for dogs into adulthood.

The decision to start a dog boarding ranch retreat came to Liz after she got a new four-legged furbaby of her own. “I wanted a special place to leave my dog when I traveled,” she said. “At kennels I tried in Dallas, the dogs were kept indoors most of the time. I wanted a place that offered an outdoor setting so Zeb, named after my grandfather, could run free.”

As she looked around the ranch, it occurred to her to repurpose a building on the property. The lower floor of her art

studio was vacant. The space it offered was being underutilized, so Liz decided it would be the perfect place for the type of kennel she had been looking for. "I knew exactly what I wanted," she admitted, "so I decided to create it for myself and others who prefer that their dogs have space to run."

The dog retreat opened its doors to area furbabies last year. Because Liz lives on the premises, the dogs left in her care are treated to 24-hour, around-the-clock service. "Dogs get to frolic several times daily, and they definitely get a lot more potty breaks because I'm here," she stated. "I let them out for 8:00 and 11:00 p.m. breaks, too." Dog boarding at Camp FurBaby includes 10 spacious kennels, an oversized play yard, three doggie wading pools, TVs in the kennels and soothing music from CDs for the dogs.

No two days are ever the same at Camp FurBaby.

And if you're looking to share in Rover's "playcation," or take a "staycation" of your own, the Kick Ass Ranch Bed & Breakfast, also owned and operated by Liz, offers two bed-and-breakfast rooms for adults who are looking for a getaway. One room is decorated in antiques, while the other is cowboy chic with a Jacuzzi tub, aptly referred to as the Bonnie and Clyde Room. During their stay, customers will enjoy a private, keyless entry; a swimming pool; two large, covered patios; and more than one fire pit.

Liz has made booking stays for you and/or your furbabies quite simple. You can go online, view the calendar provided to check on vacancies and book your reservation. "It's set up just like a hotel registry," Liz said. "When you hit the 'book now' button, the page will give you pricing."

No two days are ever the same at Camp FurBaby. "One day, I might be getting one of the goats untangled," Liz confessed, "or I might be working on plans to expand to 'glamping,' which is glam-tent camping." **NOW**

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Asber and Erin Tyner enjoy a homeschool day at the Dallas Zoo.



Alex Wensowitch and Larry Fincher hold prints for a new bench to be added to the veterans memorial in honor of Lt. Col. Edgar E. McElroy.



Principal Dee-Dee Gryder begins the Crockett PreK Awards Assembly by welcoming family members to the event.



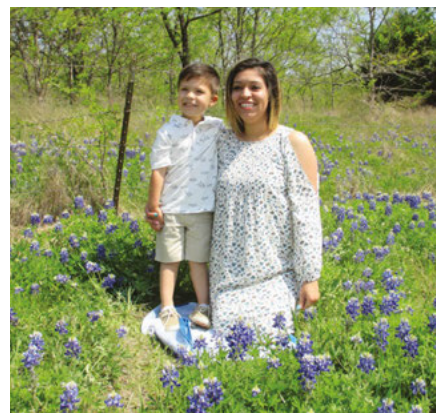
EnnisNOW's Linda Roberson, Wayne Wood and Bryce Anderson share good conversation during the recent ribbon cutting for Ennis Steel's new building.



Nancy Thomas and Pat Warren are on hand to talk about bluebonnets during the Spring Lawn & Garden Expo held at the Waxahachie Civic Center.



Rachel Smith, Mona Teodora, Kristin Armstrong and Lindsey Steger at Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, CA.



Valerie and Zane Robinson find a patch of bluebonnets perfect for a spring photo.



Daniela and Mairateresa Rico enjoy an evening of swinging at Lions Park.



Carlton Myers, of Bluehaven Kennels, works on strength training with two of his Pit Bull Terriers, Cali and Max.

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Estate Planning Tips for Blended Families

Most of us need to do some type of estate planning, but it's especially important if you are part of a "blended" family. And the best time to start is now — before these plans need to be implemented.

Estate planning can be complex, so you will need help from a qualified legal professional. But here are a few general suggestions that can be suitable for blended families:

- **Update beneficiary designations — and think about multiple beneficiaries.** Update the beneficiary designations on your retirement accounts and insurance policies to reflect the reality of your blended family. These designations can supersede the instructions you provided in your will. So, if your will states that your current spouse should inherit your assets, but you had named your former spouse, or a child, as the primary beneficiary of an IRA, then your former spouse or your child — not your present-day spouse — will indeed receive the IRA.

To ensure that "everyone gets something," you could name your current spouse as primary beneficiary and your children from a previous marriage as equal contingent beneficiaries. But the primary beneficiary will receive all the assets and is free to do whatever he or she wants with the money. To enact your wishes, you can name multiple primary beneficiaries and designate the percentage of the asset each beneficiary will receive.

- **Create a living trust — and consider a professional trustee.** A living trust can help you avoid the time-consuming and costly process of probate, while giving you great freedom to determine how, and when, you want your assets distributed. After you pass away, the trust, if structured properly, can provide your surviving spouse with income for life. Then, after your spouse dies, your children from an earlier marriage would receive the remainder of the trust.

So far, so good. However, issues can arise if you name your

surviving spouse or one of your children as the "successor trustee" who will take charge of the trust upon your passing. Your spouse, acting as successor trustee, could choose to invest only in bonds for income, but if he or she lives another 20 or so years, the value of the investments within the trust will probably have diminished considerably — leaving your children with very little. Conversely, if you name one of your children as trustee, the child could invest strictly in growth-oriented investments, leaving your surviving spouse with greatly reduced income. To be fair to everyone, you may want to engage a professional third-party trustee. This individual, or company, is not a beneficiary of the trust, is not entitled to share in the assets of the trust and, ideally, should have no "rooting interest" in how proceeds of the trust are distributed.

- **Consider a prenuptial agreement.** When it's time to settle an estate, a prenuptial agreement can help avoid disputes among members of a blended family. If you and your new spouse have agreed to keep your assets separate so that each of you can pass an inheritance to your own children, you need to spell out that separation in your "prenup," your will, your living trust and any other relevant estate-planning arrangements.

Above all else, share your estate-planning intentions with members of your blended family. You may not be able to satisfy everyone, but through open communications, you can help prevent bad feelings — and unpleasant surprises. **NOW**

Edward Jones, its employees and financial advisors are not estate planners and cannot provide tax or legal advice. You should consult your estate-planning or qualified tax advisor regarding your situation.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Jeff Irish is an Edward Jones representative based in Ennis.

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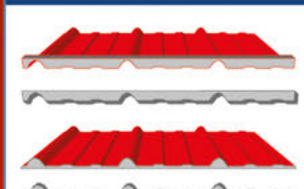


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Snow White: Theatre Rocks! Visit
www.TheatreRocks.com for more information.

May 12

FFA Farm Fresh Dinner & Dance:
historic downtown Ennis. For details,
call (972) 878-4748.

May 13

Our Sunflower Friends 3rd Annual Golf
Tournament: 8:00 a.m. shotgun start Country
View Golf Course, 240 W. Beltline Rd.,
Lancaster. \$125 per player or \$500 per team
with lunch and four drink tickets included. First
place team wins \$1,000. Two opportunities
to win \$1,000,000. Other hole-in-one prizes
include \$25,000 cash, \$10,000 cash or a car.
To register, call Vicki Grady at (469) 226-3080,
visit the Our Sunflower Friends FB page or
visit www.tinyurl.com/osfgolf.

19th Annual Corsicana Airshow: Gates
open: 8:30 a.m.; show begins: 11:00 a.m.,
Corsicana Municipal Airport, 9000 Navarro
Rd., Corsicana. Rides for an extra fee will be

available in several war birds both **Friday**
and **Saturday**. On **Saturday**, patrons may
walk among the planes until the show gets
underway. Cost is \$10 per person or \$20 per
car. Admission is free to U.S. military veterans
and active U.S. military personnel and their
families. For more information, visit www.coyotesquadron.org or call Dan Summerall at
(903) 467-7170.

May 13 — June 3

Wait Until Dark: Ennis Public Theatre.
For full details, pricing and curtain times,
visit www.ennispublictheatre.com.

May 20

Bristol Volunteer Fire Department 2017
Spring Fundraiser: 5:30-11:00 p.m., Bristol
Fire House, 101 S. Old Walnut, Bristol. A
barbecue dinner will be served from 5:30-8:00
p.m. Adults are \$10 and children are \$5. There
will be a silent and live auction, a bounce
house for the kids and dancing to the music
of Ira Bradford & Bustin' Loose. For more
info, call Ruth Pritchett at (972) 666-3802.

May 26 — 28

51st National Polka Festival: visit
www.nationalpolkafestival.com for a full
schedule of weekend events.

May 27

19th Annual PolkaFest Run: This event
is hosted by the Ennis Rotary Club. Call
(972) 878-4748 for more details.

Honey Tour Bike Ride: 6:30 a.m., Centennial
High School, 201 S. Hurst Rd., Burleson.
Enjoy springtime in Johnson County. \$25
per rider when registering before **May 15**
in groups of four or more to ride your
choice: 7 miles, 20 miles, 30 miles, 46
miles, 67 miles. \$35 at-the-door entry. Visit
honeytour.athlete360.com for registration
and additional ride weekend information or
contact BACC, (817) 295-6121.

June 3

Annual Pancake Breakfast Fly-In: 8:00-11:00
a.m., Mid-Way Regional Airport. Breakfast
tickets are \$6 for adults and children over the
age of 8. Children under 8 are \$3. Parking is
free. For more information, call (972) 923-0080
or visit www.mid-wayregional.com.

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In the Kitchen With Jess Haupt

— *By Virginia Riddle*

Jess Haupt developed a love for cooking early in life while watching his dad cook steaks for every family Sunday dinner using his special marinade. “I grew up in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, a mostly German community sprinkled with a little bit of Czech and Polish,” Jess recalled. However, it wasn’t until he grew up, married and met a new neighbor who enjoyed cooking that Jess made cooking his passion. “I’ve made homemade beer and tried my hand at cooking everything,” he said.

The owner of “hundreds of cookbooks,” Jess has taken some cooking classes, but is mostly self-taught. “I own every conceivable cooking gadget, knife and machine and a coffee roasting company, Buna Bean Coffee,” he said. “Cooking relaxes me, allows me to be creative and is satisfying.” **NOW**

Rosemary and Goat Cheese Stuffed Chicken With Wild Mushroom Sauce

- 1 whole chicken**
- 4 oz. goat cheese, room temperature**
- 1 Tbsp. rosemary leaves, freshly chopped**
- 3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil (divided use)**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste (divided use)**
- 2 Tbsp. butter (divided use)**
- 1/4 cup shallots, chopped**
- 4 oz. morel mushrooms, cleaned and sliced in half lengthwise, or 1 oz. dried morels, rehydrated**
- 4 oz. black trumpet mushrooms, cut into 1.5-inch pieces**
- 3/4 cup chicken stock**
- 2 Tbsp. chives, chopped**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 450 F. Remove the chicken backbone and wings.
- 2.** Press the chicken open like a book; carefully remove the bones, leaving the whole chicken intact with skin.
- 3.** In a small bowl, combine goat cheese, rosemary and 2 Tbsp. of olive oil; mash mixture together with a fork.
- 4.** Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Turn the chicken skin side up; gently loosen skin by inserting fingers underneath to make a pocket.
- 5.** Stuff the goat cheese mixture under the skin evenly over the chicken breasts and legs; tuck the skin over the chicken. Season both chicken sides with salt and pepper. Drizzle 1/4 Tbsp. of olive oil over the chicken; rub well.
- 6.** Heat a large, ovenproof sauté pan over high heat; add remainder of the olive oil to coat the pan’s bottom. In hot, simmering oil, add the chicken, skin side down; cook

about 8-10 minutes, or until deep golden brown. Roast for 10 minutes, or until the juices run clear; remove chicken, but keep it warm.

7. Remove all but 2 Tbsp. of fat from the pan; return to the heat.

8. Add 1 Tbsp. of butter and shallots; sauté for 2 minutes, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to loosen the browned bits. Add the mushrooms; season with salt and pepper. Sauté for 2 minutes, or until the mushrooms begin to brown.

9. Add the stock; bring to a simmer, and cook 5 minutes, or until mixture is reduced by 1/3.

10. Stir in remaining butter; remove from the heat. Pour the sauce over the chicken; garnish with chives, and serve immediately.

Braised Brussels Sprouts With Bacon

- 8 strips bacon, chopped**
- 2 large shallots, finely chopped**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 2 lbs. fresh Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved through stem ends**
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth**
- 4 tsp. sherry vinegar**
- 2 tsp. unsalted butter**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**

1. In a skillet, fry the bacon over medium heat for 8-10 minutes until crisp; transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Pour off excess grease from skillet.

2. In the same skillet, cook shallots over medium heat for 10 minutes until soft.

3. Add garlic; cook 30 seconds, or until fragrant; toss in Brussels sprouts; add broth, and reduce heat to medium-low.

4. Cover; cook for 13-18 minutes, tossing occasionally until paring knife can be inserted into sprouts without resistance.

5. Stir in vinegar, butter, bacon, salt and pepper; transfer to serving bowl.

Affogato

- 2 small scoops coffee, chocolate or vanilla ice cream**
- Shot of espresso, or 3 Tbsp. strong-brewed coffee**
- Dark chocolate, shaved, to taste**
- Hazelnuts, chopped, to taste**

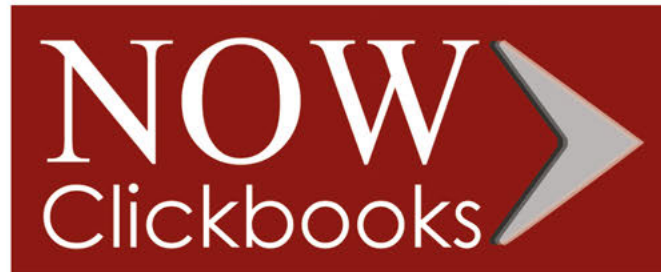
1. Place ice cream in a coffee cup; pour in espresso or coffee.

2. Top with dark chocolate and hazelnuts.

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