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On The Cover



Marilyn Simmons and her daughter, Donelle, love spending time together in their inspirational gardens.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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Editor's Note

Hello Friends,

I've arrived! You know, there really are some wonderful "perks" after 50. I'm finally "of age" to join the Waxahachie Senior Center. A couple months ago, I started meeting my mom to lift weights, walk a mile on the treadmill and ride a stationary bicycle. Once I mastered those three cardiovascular nightmares, I decided to step it up a bit.

I bet you're wondering what I did? Well, I joined the Zumba Gold class. I'm dancing my way to healthy on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. At my old age, I'm finding it very difficult to keep up with the other ladies who have also "arrived," but it never hurts to keep on trying.

I know I say this every August, but remember school resumes again in a couple of weeks. Let's remember to slow it down in those school zones. Keeping this next generation of leaders safe is our first priority.

Sandra

Sandra Strong
WaxahachieNOW Editor
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Be Inspired

— By Sandra Strong

Marilyn Simmons has always loved gardening. She grew up watching her grandmother. But her gardening gloves were put aside when she and Donnie, her husband of 38 years, left the farm in Gary, Oklahoma. “I started gardening at a young age, that’s true, and I did work alongside the best gardener I know,” Marilyn said, referring to her grandmother. “Once my daughters, Deva and Donelle, were born, they became my priority.” She didn’t start gardening again until the age of 40.



It’s a good thing that Marilyn got back into gardening when she did. It gave her plenty of time to prepare for Deva’s high school graduation in 2001. “Deva wanted an outside party. I had planted the Mexican buckeye from seed a few years earlier,” she said, pointing to what is now a very large tree beyond the patio.

That once small garden has been transformed into a backyard oasis that offers peace and tranquility to visitors of the human kind and a colorful, all-natural haven for birds, bees and butterflies. It’s a natural habitat far removed from the concrete jungles of the 21st century. “Everywhere you look, there’s glorious color,” Marilyn stated. “My goal was to create a place where people could come and be inspired. I want my gardens to be a blessing to others.”

On a bad day, working in the dirt has always encouraged Marilyn. Getting her hands dirty and watching something she’s planted flourish makes even the worst of days so much better. “Working in the soil is medicine for my soul,” she admitted. “Flowers are beauty for the soul.”



Marilyn has her hands in lots of pots. Not only does she work tirelessly in her gardens nurturing all types of flowers from roses and verberna to acanthus and lantana, she also serves as a garden consultant and designs landscapes. Most importantly, she finds a great deal of satisfaction teaching others the art of gardening, for pleasure, as well as purpose. Currently, Marilyn is closely involved with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a program that educates others on how to plant it, grow it and pick it. "We have over 15 families participating in the program," Marilyn explained. "We plant the gardens for



"My goal was to create a place where people could come and be inspired. I want my gardens to be a blessing to others."



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the families. We grow it and pick it. The families receive the bounty.” Her goal is to teach the families how to successfully garden themselves. “They [the families] have the opportunity to come out anytime and work in the vegetable garden,” Marilyn added. “The main goal with CSA is to teach families to do it all themselves. I want them to learn where our veggies are grown. How much food could they grow if they needed to grow their own food? I’m teaching people to be self-sufficient.”

And she’s doing it the only way she knows how — the all-natural way with no chemicals. She collects rain water. She makes and uses “compost tea,” while also maintaining her own compost pile. “I also plant plants that thrive well in Texas,” she stated. “If plants thrive well in their surroundings, you don’t need chemicals to help them grow and survive. Gardens are a lot like people,” Marilyn added. “As they grow and mature, they come into their own.”

Marilyn takes great care when making her planting selections. Specific plants are added to the garden to entice birds, bees and butterflies. The Carolina buckthorn, possum haw holly and rough leaf dogwood are just a few trees that produce berries. “The birds love the berries,” Marilyn said. “This past year was the year for cardinals. There must have been 15 of them in the Mexican buckeye after the snow. It was definitely a site to behold.” Other birds that find nourishment in the gardens include chickadees, thrushes, wrens, red belly woodpeckers, hummingbirds, cedar wax wings, house finches and several species of buntings.



Marilyn and Donelle, who now lives in Dallas but comes home almost

A large, modern kitchen with a central island. The island has a light-colored countertop and a wooden base, with three black bar stools tucked underneath. The kitchen features white cabinetry, a stainless steel refrigerator, and a double oven. The floor is made of polished wood. Two pendant lights hang over the island.



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daily to help with the business, Garden Inspirations, just smile when they overhear people saying they don't have room for a garden. They've learned over the years that most anything can be transformed into the perfect vessel for a garden. Unique displays within Marilyn's gardens are a testament to her beliefs. A Radio Flyer wagon is home to an assortment of flowers and trailing potato vines and an herb garden is flourishing in a nonfunctioning barbecue grill.

When thinking of a garden, it's best to think outside the box. A new gardening craze that Marilyn and Donelle debuted at the downtown Farmers Market this year was "truck farm" gardening. "It started with one man in Brooklyn, New York," Donelle explained, "It has exploded to include 25 farms throughout the United States." Truck farm gardening is an educational program that teaches individuals how to garden from the bed of a pickup truck. "Everyone can learn how to garden successfully," Donelle added.

Donnie has been the one to mow and edge around the gardens, but just recently he added another duty to his list. "He started taking photographs of the flowers, the birds and the butterflies," Marilyn said, pride for her husband apparent in each word. They never knew how many colors could be found on a bird until he began using a telescopic lens. Donnie's photographs tell the story better than Marilyn ever could. Marilyn is surely providing just the right natural environment where inner peace and tranquility can be found. Yes, her gardens are quite inspirational. **NOW**

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**“We’re following
on a long tradition
of amateur radio.”**



Can Anyone Hear Me?

— By Jeremy Agor

Amateur radio — often known as ham radio — has provided an outlet for operators to socialize with people around the world and provide a valuable community service since the 1940s. The Ellis County Radio Club’s nearly 70 members continue those activities as storm spotters and emergency communications providers, as well as talking to friends around the country and around the globe. “We’re following on a long tradition of amateur radio. When amateur radio first started, it was to help the government during World War II. Then it became a hobby, and now we serve the public,” explained club president, Johnny Grant.



Although some radio operators probably existed prior to World War II, amateur radio came into its own during World War II when the military uncovered Japanese plans to use balloons to start wildfires in the Pacific Northwest. The military wanted a civilian group which could assist by watching for anything unusual and then report back. Much of the equipment used at that time was homemade from army surplus parts.

Once the wartime need faded, ham radio became a hobby for even more people. There was an allure to being able to talk to friends and strangers in

the next town or overseas. Members of the Ellis County group have reached hams in Russia, Japan, the Philippines, Bali, Europe and many other places in between, all with a transmitter and an antenna on the roof or strung up in trees. To talk, a ham powers up his equipment and calls out “CQ.” This is the gateway to conversation in the amateur radio world, and its roots lie in the shorthand made necessary by Morse code. A ham can specify in his CQ call which region he wants to reach, thus limiting replies to people there. Then, the challenge is breaking through the rest of the chatter.

One member of the club mentioned a recent session in which a ham operator in Asia “had the whole Western hemisphere hollering at him.”

Another draw for amateur radio operators is that you never know who you will be talking to. There are more amateur radio operators in the U.S. than ever, and nearly every country has a




presence on the airwaves. Each ham is licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States, and each has a unique call sign (for example, Johnny’s is KB5YYK), used to identify himself over the air. Once contact is established, the ham will often switch to his “handle” — his first name. Many famous people, such as former U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater; newsman, Walter Cronkite; King Hussein of Jordan; General Curtis LeMay; and local FOX television meteorologist, Ron Jackson, have all taken to the airwaves.

While amateur radio continues to be a popular hobby, it also has evolved into an outlet for operators to provide key community services in emergencies and bad weather, as well as during large events where ham operators can take the burden off police and fire communications.

The Ellis County club provides storm-spotting services for the National Weather Service and provides emergency

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communications to the American Red Cross, through the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES), which is the only private group recognized by the FCC. "Members are trained by FEMA for the Incident Command System and go out in an organized network to watch storms as they come in and report to the weather services what they see," net controller, Richard Bird explained. "Amateur radio operators know their



equipment and can set up in adverse conditions. We watch the weather as it comes in, and the National Weather Service puts out a call for Ellis County to give them a heads-up."

The National Weather Service has radar that shows atmospheric conditions that indicate tornadoes and storms,



but its forecasters cannot verify those conditions, which is where the storm spotters come in. They are able to see rotational clouds and personally confirm what forecasters suspect. Based on reports from storm spotters, the weather service is able to issue watches and warnings and keep people from harm. "The tornadoes that hit Alabama hard recently came through Ellis and Johnson



counties first, and we had spotters out for eight hours straight," said club member Jerry Pomeroy, whose wife, Joan, is also a ham operator. "Ellis County has one of the strongest groups in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. The information we provide is invaluable because before the emergency managers sound the tornado sirens, they

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Ham operators also provide backup communications in case of emergencies or major events. "After Hurricane Katrina, amateur radio was the only way to communicate to and from New Orleans. In the days after 9/11, hams provided emergency communications. We're here to serve the public," said club member Tim Powers. "It's not just major emergencies either. There have been many instances where a person at sea has sent a distress call, which was picked up by a ham operator and relayed to the authorities so a rescue could take place."

The Ellis County group volunteers at the Tour d'Italia bicycle race in Italy, Texas. Members patrol the route and summon help for riders with mechanical problems or those who are injured or cannot continue the race. Their presence allows the police and other emergency responders to focus on crowd control and safety issues. The club also holds field days in local parks and campgrounds where they meet to socialize, use their radios and talk to interested passersby about their hobby.

Earning an amateur radio operator's license is relatively simple. To do so, a person goes through a testing process in which he studies a 350-page question-and-answer book, and then answers 35 questions given by a certified tester. If the candidate answers 26 questions correctly and pays \$14 for paperwork, he earns his technician's license and can get on the air. Technicians may choose to upgrade their licenses to allow access to different broadcast modes and frequencies.

Amateur radio operators are proud their hobby has endured advances in technology. Although modern ham radios are technologically advanced and many operators are beginning to include Internet and digital voice feeds, the equipment does not rely on the grid and runs on batteries. Ham radio operators pay for and maintain all of their own equipment, and most have radios at home and in their vehicles.

"Every time there's a leap in communications, like the introduction of the Internet and cell phones, people think ham radio will go away," Tim said. "But ham stays, and we help our communities and build international goodwill talking to friends worldwide." **NOW**

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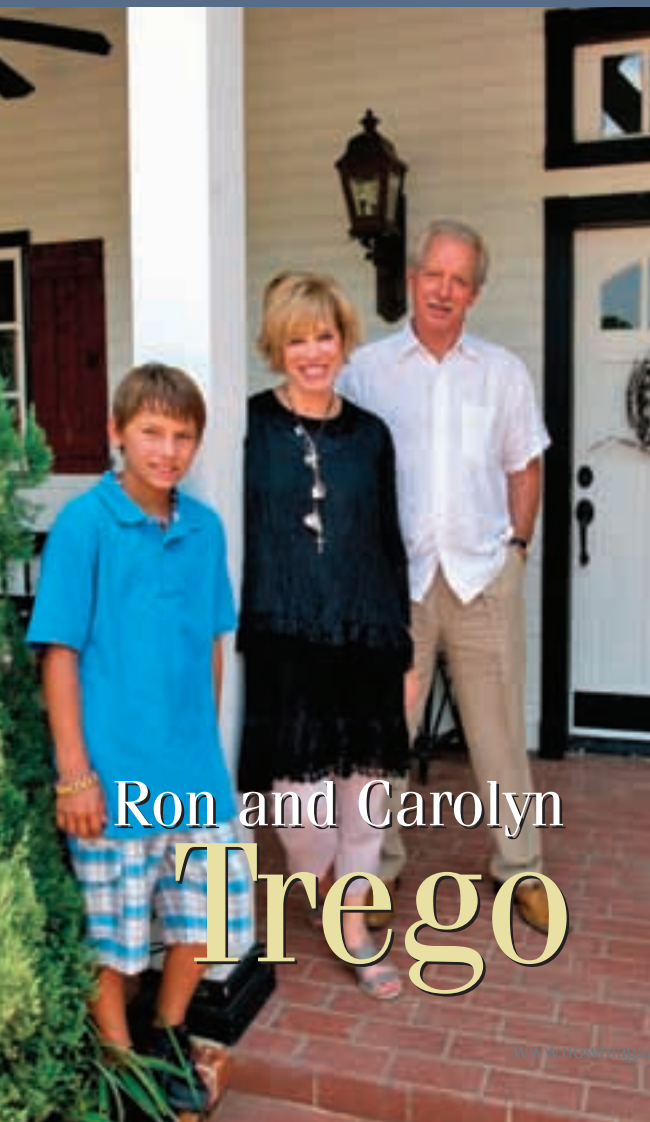
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Built Around *the View*

— By Sydni Thomas

At Home With —



Ron and Carolyn
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A spontaneous Sunday drive in the country ended one couple's search for a piece of land where they could build their dream home. Ron and Carolyn Trego were living in a cottage in the Lakewood area of Dallas when they began dreaming of moving to the country. That Sunday, as they drove past the property, they noticed a small for sale sign attached to the barbed wire fence. They called the landowner, Joe Wilson, who, despite it being the middle of the game on Super Bowl Sunday, told them not to move, he would be there quickly. "We got in the owner's truck, and he drove us around the property," Ron said. "When we reached the top of this hill and looked across the valley, I knew this was it."



"It" was over 60 acres of cattle land and mesquite trees, but Ron and Carolyn could see their dreams building up around them in that instant. They made an offer and closed by the end of the week. After years of hard work, it's a far cry from the cattle land it used to be. From the road, trees shelter the house, and as the gravel driveway curves, the German-barn-inspired home with a Tuscan flare comes into view surrounded by a well-manicured yard. A large water wheel attached to the side of the house



was found on one of the couple's trips to Fredericksburg, Texas. The water wheel had been built for a Willie Nelson music video and was on display outside the reclaimed-wood business where they purchased much of the wood used inside the home.

Entering the two-story house, visitors will likely be greeted by a fresh batch of chocolate chip cookies and warm Texas sunshine beaming in through the large windows. The Tregos disbanded from the Tuscan theme when it came time to add windows to the home. They wanted to see the view from every room. "The house was built around the view," Ron said. "We wanted to position everything

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from the traditional decor and created a room designed around conversation. The long island provides plenty of space for several cooks in the kitchen. Red paneling disguises the refrigerator amongst the other barn red cabinets. In the corner, a door from an old freight elevator, found during another trip, encloses the built-in wine closet. "When we decided we wanted to move out of the city, I began shopping even though it would be years before we moved," Carolyn said. "Almost everything I purchased was put into storage until I could incorporate it into the new house."

so that it faced the back of the property."

The floor plan follows an open living format. The formal living room is the first room entered, and its ceiling with old wood beams is the highest in the home. The room opens up into the dining room and kitchen. When planning the kitchen's layout, Carolyn strayed

Just off the dining room is the family room where guests can watch television or enjoy an air-conditioned view of the back property. Carolyn filled the room with treasures from her and Ron's childhood. Included are Ron's father's Underwood typewriter and a clock that belonged to Carolyn's grandmother. "My

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mother always hated this clock," Carolyn said. "It used to ding every time she was supposed to be home from a date. She would sneak in and set the clock back so she could stay out later."

Back in the kitchen an old door with a stained glass window closes off a hallway leading to the grandchildren's bedrooms. Carolyn is quite proud of her granddaughter, Liz, who is the star of MTV's *My Life as Liz*. When it came time to find doors, windows and hardware for the home, Carolyn took a recycling approach. One particular door used to belong in a church in Missouri. In several other rooms in the home, Carolyn had



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stained glass windows installed in the walls to give the room an old story. "I think I drove the builders crazy," Carolyn said. "None of the windows and doors were standard size. Everything had to be custom installed."

A library loft, enclosed by a reclaimed wooden banister, overlooks the living room and leads to the master bedroom. This afterthought in the design now provides a reading nook guests can enjoy. The master bedroom also overlooks the living room, but can be closed off for privacy by two shutters that used to be a door. The home office adjoins the bedroom and is where Carolyn spends



most of her days working. Originally, the bedroom had a balcony attached, but recently it has been enclosed and converted into a conservatory, which features a view of the backside of the property. "This is where we start and end our days," Ron said. "In the mornings, we will bring our coffee in here and relax before starting the day."

Taking the slower country living to heart, Ron, a consulting psychologist, moved his office to the property, next to the creek, to avoid daily Dallas traffic. One day while Carolyn was in Maypearl, she came across the old cotton weighing building, which was about to be torn down to build a new post office. She was intrigued with the pieces of history, including the furniture and business ledgers, left in the building. As she was looking around the owner drove up. "I thought for sure that I was going to be



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in trouble for looking around,” Carolyn said. “He said, ‘Take a good look, it’s going to be torn down in two weeks.’ I told him it would be a travesty to tear that historical, old building down. He told me he’d give it to me if I paid to move it. It took 12 hours to move it three miles, but we didn’t give it a second thought.” Today Ron uses the building as his office.

The outdoors has as much to tell about the couple’s life as their house does. Since purchasing the property, Ron has dug five different lakes. He had each filled with a different type of fish to cater to various types of fisherman. Ron’s pride and joy is the 60-foot steel bridge he had put in down by the creek. “No matter what storms we may have, that bridge will always be here,” Ron said. “It will be here for the test of time.”

Two years of searching, another two years of labor, and a lifetime of dreaming have been poured into this piece of land. When Carolyn met TCU (Texas Christian



University) Horned Frog Ron, she never dreamed what her life would turn out to be. “I was a very lucky girl to have met Ron,” Carolyn said. “Our life has been great, and we love having a home where we can entertain our family and friends.” **NOW**

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Picture PERFECT

— By Randy Bigham

A Waxabachie painter who admits she's had no formal training is doing very well without it. Ann Clagett is modest about her talent for making decorative art out of the humble gourd plant, but she admits she enjoys the hobby more than any other. "As a kid I just colored in coloring books," she said. "I never thought I could paint. But after I retired in 2000, I had time on my hands to do something new. I started out painting rocks and then anything that would sit still long enough!"

From painting flowers on river rocks, Ann gravitated to crafting designs from gourds, the pumpkin or squash-like vegetable some consider a fruit, and she has found her niche. Her specialties are bird houses and Christmas ornaments, but she has also crafted and painted wind chimes and garden decor pieces.

"The drawback to outside items," she warned, "is they only last for a season or two." Ann thinks the appeal of working with gourds is their range of shapes and sizes, relative low cost and quick growth. "Gourds are easily acquired and no two are ever alike," she said. "I'm told if you stick a gourd seed in the ground,

it'll grow. Well, I'm going to find out — I've got some planted!" The only real challenge in vegetable painting, Ann cautioned, is the amount of preparation time involved. "You have to clean the gourds, but before they can be cleaned they must dry for at least a year."

Ann thinks the wait is worth it, and so do her friends and family, the only admirers this creative soul needs. "I don't sell my gourds," she stressed, "and I have never exhibited them." She believes keeping her hobby personal makes it all the more special when she presents one of her pieces as a gift. People have suggested she market her designs, but



Ann fears it would hinder her creativity. "I'm enjoying what I'm doing," she added, "but if I had to do very many copies of the same thing it would be less fun for me."

The gourds Ann paints, which take about two days to complete, are remarkable for their stylized "character" faces: Santa Claus, a pipe-smoking, spectacled farmer she calls "Grand Pappy" and a series of fat, wide-eyed frogs nestled in lily pads. Ann's designs are recognizable for the whimsical strokes of her brush and the bright, expertly blended colors she uses. She styles more conventional articles out of gourds, too, such as containers with a Navajo motif or ones that look like baskets, trimmed with miniature pine cones. Although some painted gourds are priced by other artisans as high as \$300, Ann said she still has no desire



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to sell her own work. With her large circle of friends and relatives across the country regularly receiving prized pieces as gifts, she likes knowing people throughout Texas, and as far away as Colorado, Tennessee, Florida and Ohio, are admiring her designs.

Ann's inspiration for the gourd items she produces is varied. "I get ideas from nature, from a picture in a magazine, anywhere." Other than the gourds, she still paints rocks, usually with pastoral scenes, and she has recently taken up hammering flowers which she then frames. A favorite is a grouping of morning glory and star hibiscus surrounded by dianthus and lantana. Ann contributed lightly painted tracings to enhance the petal shapes and the veins in the leaves and mounted the collection on a cream gauze backing.

The Ennis-bred artist, who now makes Waxahachie her home, appreciates having time to lavish on her newfound hobby and other interests that keep her busy and motivated. After over two decades

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in the printing industry, she and Donn, her husband of 25 years (and who is also retired from a printing career), enjoy vacations together, time spent with their children and grandchildren, as well as maintaining the lawn and garden of their beautiful home in the country.

Working together in their yard has won the Clagetts a measure of local fame as Waxahachie's friendliest neighbors. Known as "the couple that waves," Ann and Donn claim they don't know how the custom arose, but they are happy to continue waving and smiling to motorists. The pair has also met as many as 40 commuters over the last six years who have stopped by to chat. They were all strangers, Ann clarified, but she and Donn know them now. The most surprising visitors they have had were the original owners of their home, now residents of Missouri, who showed up one day and spent the afternoon.

"After we finish mowing the lawn, we sit down and rest in the shade with an iced tea or a Coke," Ann said, "and when



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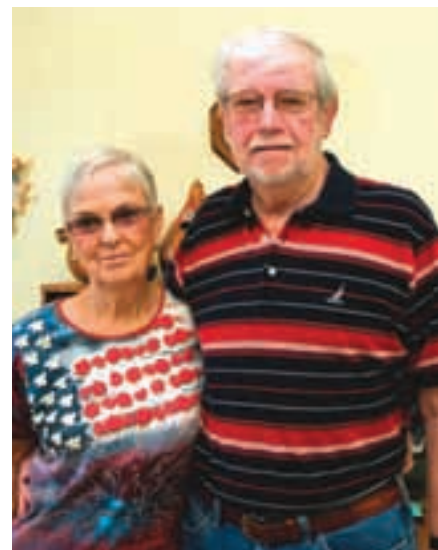
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people drive by and honk at us, we just wave back.” Donn added they are usually outside every day between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m., so they see the same people on their way home from work. The couple has been told their hospitality is a throwback to a simpler time when people were nicer to each other, and their example is inspiring neighborliness in others. Ann and Donn hope that’s the case, and are happy to share a few minutes of conversation and a laugh or two.

When she isn’t making new friends in her front yard, Ann is working on her gourds or whiling away the hours enjoying another pastime, such as




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quilting, usually with one or both of her beloved cats (Foxi and Cali) at her side. “I’m a third-generation quilter,” Ann said. “I have a quilt that my grandmother on my father’s side made; it’s 111 years old. And my mother’s mother used to quilt, too. She was from Rice, and the women of the town would all get together at her house once a week and quilt.”

Ann carries on her family’s quilting tradition with pride and in an official capacity as vice president of the Ennis Sewing Circle. “We meet once a month at the Sokol Hall in Ennis,” she said. “I went to a quilt show there and friends asked me to join so I did, and I have learned so many tips.”

Whether Ann is designing gourds, quilting or joining Donn in the shade to sip tea and wave to friends, she is content with life. “It’s more than having something to do,” she said. “It’s about having something to do that you love.” **NOW**

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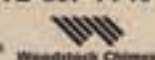
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A Different Kind of GRACE

— By Alex Allred

Nothing in life is free, except maybe for the skaters at the Skate Church, a division of the Community Life Church in Waxahachie. The skating ramps and equipment, the guidance and leadership, the friendships and camaraderie are all free. In fact, the time and devotion, the love and the ministry are all given freely to the skating youth. But the experiences drawn from those things have all come at a great price. "I started to notice that I was a punk, and I didn't want to be that way anymore," Jacob, 15, said. "When I started to come here, it made me think about the way I was acting."

For Pastor Ken Ansell and his youth director, Brandon Jones, this sentiment is just what they had hoped for. "You could say the Lord gave us the idea," Pastor Ken said. "What happened was we were looking for a ministry, a way to reach out to the Waxahachie community that would be different."

As he and his wife, Jennifer, were driving around the city, they noticed the number of youth skating on sidewalks and through




parking lots. "I knew that the city had been thinking about building a skate park," he said, "but there was nothing for the kids now. Business owners see them as being nuisances, but they're just kids."

While Pastor Ken has ministered for more than 10 years, eight of those years being in Ellis County, this was an entirely new flock he hoped to reach. But before he could hope to reach them, he needed to do some research. He found a church in Forney that had created its own skate park in its parking lot, using portable skate ramps. "We talked to their youth pastor and developed the idea of how to create our own park," Pastor Ken explained.

He bought portable ramps and a large trailer to transport the equipment. He found advertisers to place ads on the trailer to offset the costs, and they





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worked out an agreement with the Waxahachie Chick-fil-A restaurant to use their parking lot on Monday evenings, between 4:00 and 6:00 p.m.

That's when Brandon became instrumental in this ministry. Having been a part of the "skater culture," he instantly understood the skaters. "I skated in high school and get where they're coming from," Brandon said. "These are kids who don't have a lot of direction, but they're smart, imaginative and fun. They don't always fit into the mainstream high school sports." Brandon understood this just as he understands the stereotype of the skater. "They're not all troublemakers," he said. "They really are good kids."

"What we noticed right away is that these are normal, nice kids with great potential," Pastor Ken said. "It's true a lot of these kids come from single-parent homes, but a lot come from very nice homes, too. They're just looking for a place to skate."

"We wanted to make sure we didn't fool anyone though," the Pastor added. "We want people to know there will be a God side to this. We put about two dozen signs out around town calling it just what it is, a Skate Church."

Initially, there were growing pains. As the skaters came in, many were not interested in any sermons and drifted away. But over a dozen regulars stayed. "I really thought all the ramps would attract skaters," Brandon said. Instead, they found that the skaters were coming for the camaraderie and lessons. "I like coming for the church service," Jacob said. "I can skate anytime, but I can't get this anywhere else."

While Pastor Ken insists the "lessons" are free, a value cannot be placed on

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what is happening within the Skate Church. Older teenagers are helping younger ones with difficult stunts. They act as mentors and role models. The skaters show up early to help set up the ramps for everyone to use and slowly, a quiet respect for the pastor, their youth director and their ministry is taking hold. "They are learning grace with accountability," Pastor Ken smiled.

"This is our world," Ben, 15, said. "We skate, learn about God, and I'm learning what real friends are about. They're always there."

But it is a world that can sometimes be frustrating. For Pastor Ken and Brandon, it seemed fairly simple. Offer a safe place to skate where parents can drop the kids off or even older skating fans can come and test their abilities on the ramps while also sharing the Gospel. "The very people we are trying to reach are the most difficult to reach," Pastor



Ken mused. "Of course, there is no obligation with the skating. The lessons are free. But it can be frustrating when they [skaters] disappear when they see the preaching coming." Then, quite out of the blue, there comes a question from a self-described punk.

"We were going home after skating one night," Brandon said of Jacob. Brandon had volunteered to take the skater home. "He just asks, 'So, what's it like to have a relationship with Christ?' I said, 'What?' That's why I do this," Brandon smiled.

In the skater world, you can be "stoked," but you don't want to be a "poser." A stunt can be "sick," but you don't want to be "sketchy." You can learn a "fakie" an "Indy" or a "kickflip." The



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skaters will talk about who can “drop in” or “hang” or “grind.” The language is all foreign to Pastor Ken. For him, it’s the lessons, not the language, that matter most. “We’re trying to build relationships with people. That’s the long-term goal of our church, but we’re really just glad to see them be a part of the community!”

“Last year, we did what we called a full-blown Skate Church service in the Big Lots parking lot. We set up ramps, had a live band and about 150 people showed up. We had a message with hot dogs! It was kind of neat because it was more family-oriented. There were a lot of families and individuals who came, but weren’t sure what to expect,” Pastor Ken said.

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All were pleasantly surprised, including the pastor. Defying the skater stereotype has been a quiet reminder that we must not judge and should strive to love our neighbors. Nothing could mean more for the skating youth director than when his skaters embrace faith with the same gusto they would for a perfectly executed “ollie”. While they glided over the asphalt parking lot, cheering each other on, learning new stunts and new lessons from the Bible, Pastor Ken could only smile as he added, “It is grace with accountability.” **NOW**

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— By Sandra Strong

Craig Anderson has always had a passion for automobiles and everything associated with them. So much so that he went to work for his mom and dad, Chuck and Maxine Anderson, as soon as he graduated from high school. "When Chuck made the decision to retire from the collision repair business in 1986," Rhonda, Craig's wife, said, "it was only natural for Craig to take over. Craig has always had a passion for the business."

Rhonda came to Ellis County Auto Repair in 1990, when she was hired to oversee the secretarial duties associated with the business. She was soon referred to as the "Rhonda of all trades." Rhonda remarked, "I guess you'd say I was the office manager. I handled almost all aspects of the business including: accounts

payable, accounts receivable and payroll and, eventually, all of the estimating."

Before long, the working relationship between Craig and Rhonda became a partnership. "We married in 1996," she explained. "We've been married now for 14 years, and this business is our second home. It's our livelihood, so we spend more time here than anywhere else."

Over the years, the couple has seen the business undergo several changes, with the most notable one being the move from historic downtown Waxahachie to their present location. Business growth warranted the need for a new facility. "We moved here on April 15, 2009," Craig stated. "We went from

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A Pox on You

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

If you were invited to a party that promised your child would be in absolute misery in a couple of weeks, would you go? For some moms, the answer is an enthusiastic yes! The new trend for parties involves gathering healthy children to congregate together with a child inflicted with chickenpox. It sounds strange, but mothers have been pairing their healthy children with one who has chickenpox for years. Only recently has it developed into a party gathering. Is this a good idea?

The popular train of thought is if the child gets the illness early in life, it is better than getting it as an adult. There is merit to that line of thinking, because it can be more severe in adulthood. Another thought is to plan for the child to get the illness during a time when it will not interfere with school. And, some moms just want to get it out of the way, while others do not trust vaccines because of possible unknown risks.

Chickenpox, of course, has its own set of risks and complications. Teens, adults, newborns and those with compromised immune systems can develop serious complications. Even healthy individuals can develop a secondary infection of the lesions. With the invasion of chickenpox, even after the illness has run its course, the virus remains in the body in a latent or inactive form. This can cause shingles. However, the possibility of developing this is less with the vaccine. Another complication is varicella pneumonia. People can, and do, die from chickenpox.

Chickenpox appears as red, blistery spots all over the body that itch like crazy. These spots can appear inside the mouth, nose and genitalia, as well as the trunk, limbs and face. When the blisters break open, the spot becomes an open sore and crusts over. Cases can be mild or severe enough to cover every square inch of the body. Treatment is aimed at making the person



as comfortable as possible. Fever is common. Cool baths or compresses along with medication can help. Aspirin is never to be used with an individual under the age of 19 because of the risk of Reye's Syndrome. Your physician can provide guidance in this matter. Calamine lotion and oatmeal baths may prove useful for the relentless itching. Your doctor may recommend an antiviral medication soon after exposure. Of course, you can avoid all of this with a vaccine. So, are pox parties a good idea? Weigh the risks and potential complications and make the best decision for your child. **NOW**

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

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Hot, Hot, Hot

— By Nancy Fenton

How's this hot weather treating you? It's got me in the air-conditioning more than I like, and it is scorching many of my plants. Since we are entering the hottest, driest part of our year, I thought we might look at one more specialty garden, the drought-tolerant and succulent one. Really, drought-tolerant and succulent are a bit different, but both stand up to the heat and dryness. Succulent usually refers to a plant that stores water in fleshy leaves or stems, such as yucca, aloe and cactus. They use their stems as the main site of photosynthesis, rather than their waxy, hairy or spiny leaves. Their roots are very near the surface, enabling them to use the least amount of moisture. A few bulbs really like it dry, but they don't do well in our water-retaining, alkaline clay. In contrast to the drought-tolerant, our true succulents almost take a soil makeover, but it is an easy one. One part regular soil to two parts sand will keep cactus, sedum and others alive and happy, whereas drought-tolerant plants will need more organic material.

Let's talk about where these hardy plants could help us out. How about those areas the sprinklers don't reach? No grass is a sure indication that drought-tolerant or succulent plants are needed. Cast-iron plants will stay green, as will red and yellow yucca, in areas where no grass is an indicator of dry soil with few soil additions. A

grouping of iris, lantana and Mexican mint marigolds will keep your area in blooms from spring to summer with little extra water. They will even survive a light freeze and come back year after year once they get going. Combining a few of the succulent such as the Soft Leaf Yucca, which grows up to 6 inches high, with Blackfoot Daisy and gaura under it will give you color, as well as significant savings on the water bill.

Watch your friends and neighbors' yards for plants that do well in our hottest months. They may even have enough to share! Aloes, Sedum (stonecrop and Autumn Joy), *Sempervivum* (hen and chicks), Echeveria, some cactus and yuccas are all considered succulents and can be found doing well despite our alkaline soils in North Central Texas. Turks' cap, Russian sage, gourds, vining geranium, Copper Canyon and Blackfoot Daisies, as well as agaves are all considered drought-tolerant. A drought-tolerant plant, a bit of organic matter added to the soil plus 3 inches of mulch will make you and your plants a lot happier in this hot weather! They get what they need, and you not only don't have to go out so often, but you can go to an air-conditioned movie with your savings on the water bill! **NOW**

Nancy Fenton is a Master Gardener.

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The Time Is Always Right to Start the Savings Habit

— By Aaron Penny

Have you noticed how low deposit rates get when the country is in an economic recession? The government does this by design. It wants us to spend money, because that is what stimulates the economy. Lower interest rates make it easier for people to buy things that they typically need loans to purchase, such as cars and homes. Unfortunately, when loan rates go down, so do savings rates at most financial institutions.

What you may not realize is that although rates are lower, saving money during a recession is even more important than saving money when the economy is booming. Have you seen the unemployment rate? In the last two years, it's only gone down by one percent. Businesses are still closing unexpectedly, and employers are still laying off without much notice. In the past, financial experts recommended having three months worth of income in savings. Now, they recommend *at least six months* of income in savings to help with unexpected job loss and other financial emergencies. Just like many governments have a "rainy day" fund, you need one, too.

Having a solid emergency fund is not the only reason to start the savings habit. When you create the habit of saving, you automatically give yourself future options and flexibility. Do you want to go on a sabbatical? How about starting a second career to pursue your passion? Or maybe, you would like to live in a different part of the country. The future of Social Security is unclear for many of us, and longstanding pension programs are no longer the norm. Saving is also critical to building your *wealth*.

Now that you're convinced to get started, or if you are already on board with the savings habit, perhaps you need to boost it a bit. While the savings rates are still low overall, there are some deals out there if you search for them. Check out your local financial institution or www.interest.com for competitive



rates and compare the annual percentage yields. It pays to be knowledgeable. For example, with a rate of 2.50 percent APY on a 60-month CD at a minimum deposit of \$2,500 you'll earn nearly \$330 on your initial investment over the course of five years. The same deposit of \$2,500 will earn you only \$193 for a 60-month CD at a rate of 1.50 percent APY.

Whether you are building your "rainy day" fund or the funds to chase your dreams, the time to start or move to the next level is now. Purchasing one less latte per week or brown-bagging it once a week can make a difference in maximizing your savings. Do your research and choose an account that's going to give you the best return. After all, you work hard for your money. It's time to start letting it work hard for you. **NOW**

Aaron Penny is the branch manager at the Neighborhood Credit Union in Waxahachie.

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August 9

Operation First Day of School: 9:00 a.m.-noon and 6:00-8:00 p.m., Turner Learning Center Gymnasium. Free school supplies, immunizations, gently used clothing, haircuts and so much more. To find out how to qualify, contact the WISD Administration office at (972) 923-4631.

August 12

Summer Moonlight Movie: *Footloose*. 9:00-11:00 p.m., downtown Waxahachie at Franklin Street between Jackson and College streets. For more information, call (972) 937-7330, extension 198.

August 13

REACH Historic 5k Run: 8:00 a.m., downtown Waxahachie at 109 South Jackson Street. Registration is \$15 for children under 12 and \$25 for runners and/or walkers over 12. A late fee of \$5 will be charged for those registering the day of the event. Proceeds from the event provide drug prevention programs for area youth. For online registration and information on the 5k and REACH, call Nisa at (972) 723-1053 or visit www.reachcouncil.org.

Saturday Social Dance presented by For

Maddie's Sake, Inc.: 6:00-8:00 p.m., Midlothian Civic Center located next to Dairy Queen. The event is for children with and without special needs. The theme is "Rock-n-Roll Summer" and includes DJ music, dancing, photo booth, door prizes and refreshments. Door admission is \$6.50. For more information, visit www.ForMaddiesSake.com.

Ellis County SPCA New Volunteer Orientation: Noon-1:00 p.m., 570 FM 878 Waxahachie. Meeting for new volunteers with the Ellis County SPCA or current volunteers who would like to be more involved with the organization. E-mail Kari at spcaevents@gmail.com.

Red Oak Opry: doors open: 6:30 p.m.; concert begins: 7:00 p.m., Lone Star Cowboy Church, 1011 E. Ovilla Rd. Live performance of the Opry Band. Visit www.redoakopry.com for more details.

August 18

Rise and Shine Networking Event: 7:00-9:00 a.m., DeSoto Chamber of Commerce. For more information, call (972) 230-7000.

August 22

First Day of 2011-12 school year.

August 28

Stacy Arnold Classical Guitarist Performance: 7:00 p.m., St. Paul Episcopal Church, Waxahachie. Stacy will be performing the music of Albeniz, Ponce, Morel, Villa-Lobos, Bach, Barrios and more. Concert is free to the public.

September 9

Dedication Stuart B. Lumpkin Stadium: 8:00 p.m. For more information on how you, as an alumni, can be part of this event, contact Nicole Mansell at (972) 923-4631 or by e-mail at nmansell@wisd.org by August 19.

Ongoing:

Third Fridays

Veterans Networking Group: 6:00 p.m., Zula's Coffee House, 1804 West Highway 287 Business. For more information, contact Mike Lamb at (214) 763-0378 or at vetsnetgrp@att.net.

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your event details to sskoda.nowmag@sbeglobal.net.

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In The Kitchen With Greg Timberman

— By Sandra Strong

Greg Timberman began cooking at the age of 8. “My mother gave me a *Betty Crocker Cookbook*,” Greg remembered. “She encouraged me to learn, explaining it was one of the necessary skills to accomplish in my growth toward independence.” Skill soon developed into a love for cooking, as well as a form of recreation and self-expression. “I’m not a gourmet cook,” he explained, “but I’m an eclectic one.”

Greg enjoys barbecuing on the grill, and since his wife is of Cuban descent, he also enjoys preparing traditional Cuban cuisine. “Once you have mastered the basics of following the recipe you are liberated,” Greg explained. “You can make the recipe yours by ‘tweaking’ it with a particular seasoning or omitting an ingredient you don’t like while adding one you *do* like.” **NOW**

Picadillo

2 garlic cloves
1/2 small green pepper
1/2 small red pepper
1 medium white onion
1/4 cup olive oil
1 lb. ground sirloin (or round)
1 cup canned tomato puree
1/2 cup dry white wine
1/4 tsp. oregano
1/4 tsp. cumin

1/4 cup raisins
1/2 cup olives
1/4 cup canola oil
2 medium red potatoes, peeled and diced into 1-inch cubes
Salt and pepper, to taste

1. Finely chop the garlic, peppers and onion. In a skillet over medium heat, sauté the peppers and onions with the olive oil, until the onions become translucent. Then add the garlic.

2. Turn the heat up and place the chopped ground sirloin into the skillet, simmering until brown, not crisp.
3. Drain liquid and grease away. Add tomato puree and wine along with the oregano and cumin. Bring to a simmer.
4. Add raisins and olives. Turn the heat down and cover. Let simmer for 15 minutes; remove from heat.
5. Using canola oil, fry the cubed potatoes in large skillet until golden brown. Add to picadillo just before serving. Potatoes should be crisp.
6. Salt and pepper to taste.

Yucca Fritas (Fried Yucca Root)

1-2 medium yucca roots
2-3 cups canola oil
Salt and pepper, to taste
Mojo Criollo (Goya product found in a bottle)

1. Cut away the brown outer covering on the yucca roots with a paring knife. Cut yucca up as though you were making French fries.
2. Heat canola oil in skillet to 350 F and gently place French-cut yucca strips in the oil. Fry until golden brown.
3. Remove and place on paper towels to absorb excess oil. Salt and pepper to taste. Put used canola to the side for use when preparing Platanitos Maduros.
4. Heat Mojo Criollo in the microwave for 1 minute. Use as a dipping sauce. Or you can use any of your favorite dips.

Platanitos Maduros

2-3 plantain bananas, very ripe and mostly black in appearance
Canola oil, leftover from Yucca Fritas

1. Cut the skin lengthwise and peel it off the bananas. Slice the bananas diagonally into 1-inch slices.
2. Put the banana slices into the leftover canola oil. Fry on one side until golden in color then turn and do the same on the other side.
3. Drain. The sugar in the bananas should caramelize so that they become delightfully sweet.

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



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