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On the horizon

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Faces and Places

Looking at intriguing subjects within the county

Having lived the majority of my life a half-hour from Rockwall, I’ve always had a sort of distant relationship with the community and the county it resides in, visiting only when our family was looking to get away from our everyday life.

However, having worked in Rockwall and the county as a whole for the past year as editor of our newspaper, I’ve had the pleasure and honor of developing a much more personal relationship not only with the city itself, but with the entire county and some of the fascinating people and places therein.

This year’s On The Horizon magazine is a sampling of some those people and places. I’m proud of the collection our staff was able to put together, as I feel it encompasses the county as a whole, reaching from Royse City to Heath and into Rockwall and covering everything from politics to sports and entertainment.

We’ll take a look at people – whether influential in their particular field or just simply interesting for one reason or another – and get a detailed look at who they are.

There are also some local structures – old and new (brand new) – that have caught our attention and inspired us to take a deeper look inside.

We are extremely pleased to present Rockwall County with this special look into some of the people and places that make this area so unique. We certainly hope you enjoy another look at what’s On The Horizon.
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Rockwall-Heath High School has seen some highly successful athletic programs since it first opened in 2005, but none more than its varsity baseball and volleyball squads. With multiple winning seasons and a ton of hardware between them, the two programs have seen a fair share of great talent pass through, and currently boast a pair of coaches who just plain know how to win.

Before he started coaching varsity baseball at Heath, Greg Harvey played a large role in implementing the school’s baseball program.

“From the very beginning has been how I wanted to set it out, and how I wanted to plan it,” Harvey said. “From the baseball fields all the way to building the program how we want to build it.”

A 10-year Rockwall resident, Harvey has been coaching baseball for 19 years, 18 of those in Rockwall ISD. His Rockwall coaching career began with a nine-year stint at Rockwall High School before he landed at Heath in 2007.

Giving credit to the program’s quick success to the talent he has had to work with, Harvey said the commitment to excellence the coaching staff wanted to build the program around helped the players to develop a competitive mentality, regardless of what their aspirations after finishing high school were.

“I think what we’ve done is that we’ve built a reputation that we’re going to be good, and an expectation for every single player that comes through here that if you’re going to play for Heath baseball, you’re going to be good,” he said. “You couple that along with some really good talent and it raises the level of play of everybody.”

That mentality has certainly been instrumental to Harvey’s rapid success at building a winning baseball program at Heath.

In his seven years coaching varsity baseball at Heath, the squad has achieved four winning seasons, the first coming in the Hawks debut season in 2009 when it compiled a 27-10 record and went four rounds deep in the playoffs to become regional semifinalists.

The following season, the Hawks won 38 straight to earn a record of 39-3 and ended their playoff run as regional finalists.

The 2011 season saw the Hawks post a 36-9 record and go five rounds in the playoffs to once again finish as regional finalists.

Finally, in the 2012 season, Harvey and the varsity squad would achieve the prize they had set their sights on since the Heath baseball program’s inception – a state championship.

Not only did they earn the first-ever state championship for Heath that year, they were absolutely dominant in the final game of the 4A season, routing Cleburne 10-1. Jovan Hernandez had a night to remember both on the mound and at bat, posting a complete-game, four-hit effort and driving in a team-high three RBIs, including a home run.

The Hawks finished 36-9 that season. Coach Harvey has a near 80 percent win percentage since he started coaching at Heath, with an overall record of 199-60.

“Each year we obviously adapt to the talent that we have,” Harvey said. “We’re certainly flexible enough to realize that one year we might have guys that can hit the ball out of the park, and some years we might have to be a little more creative with how we score runs. It’s the same with pitching, So we
adapt by evaluating our talent level, looking at the players and their mentality and competitive attitudes, and we just combine all of that stuff together, come up with a plan and go for it.”

After experiencing success coaching baseball at Rockwall High School, Harvey’s goal was to transition that same success to the new baseball program at Rockwall-Heath.

The going was a bit rough for in the program’s first couple of years because there were no seniors yet on the active roster. But the rocky start quickly became smooth sailing once the program picked up some seniors.

“One once we started to get seniors and the talent kept coming through, we were able to be successful right away, at a brand new school,” Harvey said. “That was my goal. I knew I wanted to come here and win a state championship. I want to win another one. That’s my mindset.”

Sharing a similar mindset is Maggie Younger, head coach of the Lady Hawks’ volleyball squad, who has also found a lot of success in building her program from the ground up at Heath.

Younger, a 10-year-Royse City resident, has been coaching volleyball at Heath since the high school first opened.

“I’ve managed to create a pretty strong work ethic within the program,” Younger said. “I think that’s what keeps me here as well, is the enjoyment of seeing the kids come in and take care of business. The school board members have always shown their appreciation, and obviously the parents have been huge supporters of the program.”

Younger built the volleyball program at Heath into a program with a winning tradition. She led the Heath Lady Hawks to a regional runner-up finish in the 2011 season in Class 4A, and saw her 2012 and 2013 squads earn district championships. The Lady Hawks became the first undefeated district champions in school history during the 2012-13 season.
Like Harvey’s baseball program, the volleyball program suffered through a bit of a shaky beginning. Younger said that at the start of her coaching tenure, it took consistency and a lot of hard work to eventually build up enough talent to have a team capable of competing at a high level. The process required a lot of resiliency, but Younger said that over time she was able to build up her players’ loyalty to the program to the point where it eventually became more like a family than just a team of players and a coach.

“Eventually, the kids were the ones that did all the work,” Younger said. “I get to just sit back and enjoy the process now because they’ve created a pretty neat environment for younger kids to come in to.”

The Heath volleyball program has seen several standout offensive players in its nine-year existence, and while offense still remains critical to the squad’s success, Younger said that her more recent teams have been transitioning to the defensive side of the game.

“Ball control is pretty dominant in the game of volleyball,” Younger said. “We’ve had some strong offensive teams in the past few years. But we have come into the defensive role and we’re stronger defensively, and that’s kept us in the runnings, especially in 5A.”

The talent level has also changed tremendously over the years, going from players who had little to no experience to players with a well-rounded knowledge of how to play the game. According to Younger, the kids are beginning to develop an understanding that to play for Heath volleyball means to be a “utility player,” or a player with enough knowledge of the game to be able to fill multiple roles on the volleyball court.

“The reputation in the program is that they work hard and train hard, and kids know that coming in they’re going to be well-coached and well-respected, and that they’re going to be pushed,” she said.

One of the risks that Coach Younger said in pushing the girls during each and every season is that there comes a point in time when they might get a little burned out, and that it can be difficult for her to sometimes keep her players engaged and motivated enough to give their best night in and night out.

“To be up here late at night practicing, and then to have to come back and endure the daily grind of academics and tests is hard on them,” Younger said. “I think the toughest part about coaching is just keeping them focused on why they’re doing what they’re doing, and knowing that I love them. That’s hard for them to see at some points throughout the season when I’m trying to push them to the next level. It’s hard for them to know that we do those things because we love them.”

### A winning legacy

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<thead>
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<td>Total: 162-42</td>
<td>Total: 151-49</td>
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0.790 win percentage 0.760 win percentage

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District Attorney Kenda Culpepper may be one of the most visible figures in Rockwall County, and for good reason. Elected to the position a little more than five years ago, she not only serves as one of the county’s most prominent elected officials, she’s also had a role in countless local organizations. But, how many residents actually know Kenda or the road she took to becoming the most powerful woman in Rockwall County?
Kenda's path to Rockwall starts in South Texas. She was the first of two daughters born to Betty Parker Culpepper Jones and Ronny Culpepper. Her parents met as students at McMurray University, her mother a freshman and father a senior at the time. Betty was a majorette and all-state debater in school while Ronny was an all-star basketball player who, after college, earned a job in Amarillo as a teacher and basketball coach.

Shortly after Kenda was born, the family moved to New Braunfels, where Ronny took a job as the head basketball coach at a local high school. Not long after, Kenda's sister Karla was born, and the family made another move, this time to San Antonio where Ronny was named the head basketball coach at San Antonio College.

"He coached there for the majority of my childhood. My mom was a substitute teacher at times but was home with my sister and I for the most part," Kenda said. "I went to Churchill High School and took mostly honors classes and just had a normal childhood. We'd head to my dad's basketball games during the week, and I learned math from watching those games ... I learned how to add by twos."

With her father working closely with high school and college students, those same students played a part in the Culpepper family, in more ways than one.

"The players' girlfriends were our babysitters, the captain of the swim team taught me to swim and we were in the parades because our dad was the coach," Kenda said. "It was just a fascinating way to grow up. When dad was away on road games, we stayed home and had time with mom. It was a very tranquil and blessed childhood."

The special bond between Kenda and her sister certainly played a big part in that childhood.

"She's my only sibling, and we're very close," Kenda explained. "We were best friends growing up, not the traditional 'sibling with sibling' fights, and we're still best friends today."

While Karla has made her own life as an elementary school teacher with a family in St. Louis, it hasn't severed the tie between the sisters.

"Before my daughter was born, we'd head up there or they'd come down here once a month," Kenda said. "Now it's less, but we still see each other on all of the holidays and talk on the phone all the time. We're very close."

A close familial relationship was a staple of the Culpeppers during Kenda's childhood and still remains today. A perfect example would be their annual summer trips, when the family would pack up the car and take off for up to a month on a good, old-fashioned American summer vacation.

"Dad was a coach, so he always had a lot of the summers off," she said. "We were very insulated and self-contained as a family. Every summer we went on a big vacation. We drove everywhere, to the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Canada ... just pack up the car and go. We drove through Los Angeles the summer they hosted the Olympics, and I can still remember the traffic. It was just one of those beautiful parts of my life."

Ronny's brother, Jerry, often joined the family on summer trips, and his influence on Kenda was huge. In fact, Uncle Jerry was a big part of why Kenda had set her sights on becoming the first woman in space.

"When I was a kid, he was working with NASA on radar systems for space rockets," she said. "I grew up wanting to be him ... wanting to be an engineer. He made me love physics and was always inventing something. He was a real inventor, creating important things for the defense industry. When I left high school, I was going to be an astronaut ... I was going to space. I was actually disappointed when Sally Ride went up because I couldn't be first."

Kenda's love for science – and many other subjects – helped her become a star scholar in high school, where she participated in science and history fairs, Latin, and even Certamen, a quiz-bowl competition with a Greek and Roman focus. She also had another passion.

"It's the other part of me, really," she said. "Uncle Jerry gave me his 1970 GTO, and on the weekends I'd go with my friends to some country road and run the quarter-mile. So, I was on the dance/drill team and the Latin team ... and I was into fast cars. I still have a Corvette... I've just always had a thing for fast cars."

But ultimately, it was her passion for academics that took up most of her high school years, and it was at an academic competition where she decided first where she wouldn't be heading for college.

"My history fair partner and I went to the state competition after winning at the other levels, and it was the first opportunity I'd had to visit the campus at the University of Texas,"
she said. “For a girl like me, who had grown up in a kind of isolated environment, UT was a little scary for me. We were invited to a couple of parties and had a good time … but I remember thinking afterward that Austin was a little much for me.”

Following her culture-shock experience in the state capitol, Kenda decided instead to head off to Austin’s rival school, Texas A&M University.

“There was never a question that I’d go to college; it was just a matter of where I would go,” she said. “During high school, I had always thought I’d go to UT, but that one experience changed my mind. However, so many people I knew … so many people I’d found interesting, went to Texas A&M. On top of that, their engineering program is great. So, I got a scholarship and went to College Station.”

But it didn’t take long before Kenda’s mother intervened, concerned about her choice of major.

“She sat me down and asked me what my favorite subjects were in school, and I told her ‘I love English and Latin, Science and Physics,’” she explained. “Mom asked, ‘Where’s Math?’ and all I could tell her was that it wasn’t a favorite of mine. Then she brought up a great point. She said, ‘Why are you going to spend the rest of your life as an engineer if you don’t love math?’ … It just made perfect sense.”

Instead, her mother offered up an alternative – law. So, during the summer before starting college, Kenda went to work at a family law practice owned by Beni Dean, who would end up becoming another major influence in her life.

“She shared my passion for reading … that’s how I got the job,” she said. “I didn’t have a lot of typing or word processing skills – even though I was definitely willing to learn – but once we started to talk about books, we found a common ground. A former diplomat’s wife, she was a larger than life figure to me. She would give me suggested reading lists of books and once I’d read them we’d sit down and talk about what I’d just read. She gave me a very classical education … a priceless education.”

Beni also introduced Kenda to the courtroom, taking her along to trial proceedings. It was during one of those court visits that she found her calling.

“Once when she took me to court with her, the trial judge was [now United States Senator] John Cornyn,” she said. “I sat in his courtroom all day watching, and he eventually invited me into his office to talk law and politics. By the time I left the courtroom that day, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer.”

But what kind of lawyer would she be, exactly? That question wouldn’t be answered until sometime later while she was in law school. Kenda initially leaned towards international environmental law, studying at Oxford University in England and interning at the Environmental Protection Agency. But criminal law is where she landed. Why? Well, she’s kind of a ‘courtroom junkie’.

“I knew I needed to be in the courtroom … that’s my element,” she said. “There just isn’t enough of that in environmental law. But, when I got involved in the criminal clinic at law school, I had the opportunity to go to trial and that was “it” for me. Everything fell into place. To me, you have to love what you do, and I LOVE being a lawyer. I absolutely LOVE being in the courtroom.”

Kenda’s resume can certainly support that statement. She graduated from the Southern Methodist University School of Law in 1992 and joined the Dallas County district Attorney’s office from 1992-1995, where she was a prosecutor in the misdemeanor and felony trial sections.

She entered private practice in late 1995 and became board certified in criminal law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in 1999.

Kenda relocated to Rockwall in 2001, jumping in feet first, looking to get involved in the local legal scene in any way she could. “I sat in [John Cornyn’s] courtroom all day watching, and he eventually invited me into his office to talk law and politics. By the time I left the courtroom that day, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer.”
could. That “doer” mentality can be traced all the way back to her college days at Texas A&M.

“I’m a joiner. When I was in college I joined everything,” she said. “In my freshman year I was in the college yearbook more than anyone else because I joined so many things. That’s when I developed a passion for service … and I have always had a hard time saying ‘no’.

In 2004, she and former judge Jim Pruitt created the law firm of Culpepper & Pruitt, with offices in Dallas and Rockwall.

That partnership between Kenda and Jim started in a Dallas courtroom about two decades ago.

“I was one of the prosecutors on the John Wiley Price probation revocation hearing and Jim was the trial judge presiding over the case,” she said. “I remember it being a pretty exciting time, and I met Jim there. We later became good friends, and we got married in 2003. He shares my love for travel and loves being a lawyer. He’s a very smart, vocal person … one of the smartest people I’ve ever known. He and Kaylen [the couple’s 6-year-old daughter] are the best things in my life.”

Her heart for service is evident today, as Kenda has put her footprint in a long list of local organizations, including Rockwall MusicFest, Rockwall Noon Rotary, Rockwall ISD’s Educational Foundation, and the chambers of commerce in Rockwall, Royse City and Fate.

She’s also involved in the Rockwall Women’s League and Rockwall County Friends of the Library, among many others.

“From the moment I came to Rockhall it just felt like home,” she said. “I felt like this was where I was supposed to be. I immediately got involved in the political situation, and people welcomed me with open arms.”

Kenda was elected as the Rockwall County District Attorney in 2008 to finish two years of a term that had been vacated. In 2010 and 2014, she was reelected to full four-year terms.

Just last year, she received a tremendous honor, as one of two lawyers in the entire state to receive the prestigious Certificate of Merit from the State Bar of Texas Board of Directors, an award recognizing her outstanding contributions to the legal profession.

Somehow, a household with two lawyers and public servants (husband Jim is also a Rockwall City Councilman) manages to function as a normal family, despite some pretty demanding schedules.

“We’re busy, sure. But we have a 6-year-old daughter, and it’s important for us to have a stable family life,” Kenda said. “We go to meetings and events together. She may be the only child at a meeting, but she’s very smart and an extreme extrovert … Not shy at all. And she’s also a very normal child who loves to sing, dance and play piano. She’s well-adjusted, and I’m so, so proud of her.”

Kenda credits the school district for their role in Kaylen’s development as a child and made sure to point out just how fortunate she is to have her child in the good hands of Rockwall ISD.

“I’m very lucky - and I don’t think most parents in Rockhall know how lucky they are to have such a wonderful school system for our kids,” she said. “Rockwall is phenomenal … a small town feel with all the amenities. The teachers and schools district are amazing.”

Yes, the road has been nothing short of interesting for Kenda. It’s had a number of stops, each one leaving its own mark in her life. However, she’s given no indication that the road will have a new stop … at least not anytime soon. For the foreseeable future, Kenda is looking forward to being part of a historical period in Rockwall County.

“I feel so lucky to not only be the DA here in Rockwall County, but to be the DA at this point and time in the county,” she said. “This county is at a crossroads, and in 100 years, people will be looking back on what we did here and now. It’s part of why I’m so sensitive about doing things the right way … about perception. I want our community and our county to be looked at for all the right reasons.

“Any mom and dad had such a positive influence on my life and instilled in me the fire to see that the right things are done. I’ve been very lucky in this life and, if I do what I believe is right, I can wake up every morning and feel like I’m helping to make Rockhall County a better place to live.”
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For more information, go to BaylorRockwall.com.
Meet local man, Paul Harrington: manager of the Pool Stop in Rockwall, harmonica player, teacher, husband and father. But anyone who has ever walked into the Pool Stop and seen the white-haired man with the thick-rimmed glasses standing behind the computer at the front desk, has just seen the face behind the extremely catchy harmonica riff heard throughout music star Pitbull’s smash hit, “Timber.”

Paul has been playing the harmonica for the better part of 50 years, a passion he says began back when he was just a little boy.

“I was consumed with playing the harmonica by the time I was 9 years old,” Paul said. “I was crazy for it. So I’ve always wanted to play it and still want to continue to play it.”

Not only does he still continue to play, Paul also offers lessons to locals. In fact, his harmonica lessons are exactly how he landed the “Timber” gig in the first place.

One of Paul’s former students from 15 years ago, Jason Rudd, had taken a particular interest in Paul’s skill with the harmonica. Rudd said he planned to open his own studio one day and asked Paul for his number if ever he came across a gig he thought Paul might be interested in.

Little did Paul know that Rudd would open his own studio 15 years later and offer Paul the gig of a lifetime.

“I kept the same phone number for 15 years,” Paul said. “I was going to get rid of it, but for some reason I kept it. He gave it to somebody else who had the connection with Pitbull, and how that came about I don’t know. So when I did the session, I had no idea who it was for.”

The harmonica riff that Paul recorded for “Timber” is based off the work of the Danish harmonica player Lee Oskar and his rock-funk fusion band, War. 30 years ago, Oskar had recorded a song called “City by the Bay,” which later became the blueprint for the notes played in “Timber.”

“They took the chords or the changes from that song to be the basis for Pitbull’s song,” Paul said. “Then, there was a harmonica melody that ran through it but it was very, very slow and beautiful and melodic.

“The producer played that for me and said, ‘Those are the notes, only much faster,’ and so that’s what I did. It sounds like I did it once and looped it. No. He had me play it all the way through the song. They turned me up real loud in the mix, which is great.”

Not exactly a stranger to recording sessions, Paul began earning compensation for his harmonica-playing ability in 1973 recording jingles for radio in Aspen, Colo. One of the first well-known jingles Paul recorded was as “garlic” in the track for Wick Fowler’s Two-Alarm Chili.

He ended up earning around $5,000 as the jingle played over and over on the airwaves the following year. The money reeled in, and hooked Paul into wanting to pursue the jingle business. “That’s when I thought, yeah I need to do this,” he said.

In 1983, Paul moved to Dallas, known then as the jingle capital and an ideal place for those pursuing careers in radio, to continue recording jingles and to hone his musical craft.

“Recording, especially jingles, is about the money,” Paul said. “I want to be a good craftsman, you know, build the house properly.”

While the industry is not as lucrative as it once was in terms of finding recording opportunities, Paul continues to stick in the industry to this day recording jingles and pieces of music for different bands and artists.

At 60 years old, with a steady, flexible job as retail manager of Pool Stop, his own band, and the odd recording job, Paul sees no reason to stop playing the harmonica anytime soon.

“I’m still healthy and I really, really like to play,” Paul said.
At Spine Team Texas, our Spine Specialist's mission is to help you get back to what is important – your quality of life! Our goal is to help integrate your back and neck pain treatment seamlessly into your daily living. All non-surgical treatment options are explored before surgical treatments are considered.
A Team Approach to Individual Care
At Spine Team Texas, one of our key differentiators is in our name. Our specialists truly work as a team, involving spine fellowship-trained physical medicine and rehabilitation physicians, spine surgeons, nurses, X-ray technicians, physician assistants and spine-focused physical therapists to diagnose and treat back and neck pain. It all begins within our weekly team conference meetings.

Hosted at the beginning of every week, the medical professionals of Spine Team Texas meet to discuss the most critical and challenging back and neck pain cases at hand. Often including neurosurgeons, PMR/physiatrists, spine-focused physical therapists, nurses and physician assistants, as well as X-ray technicians, these team conferences offer us the opportunity to pool together a wealth of expertise and skill to focus on individual cases and uncover the best back and neck treatment options available. This unique process of gathering and integrating knowledge not only differentiates Spine Team Texas from the competition, but also serves to provide a more comprehensive, customized back and neck pain treatment plan for our patients.

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- Diagnostic testing
- Acute spine pain management
- Physical therapy
- Minimally invasive spine surgery

Your First Visit
At Spine Team Texas, our first goal is to ensure our patients are as comfortable as possible. That’s why our friendly physicians and nurses are trained to provide expert back and neck care utilizing a simple, yet comprehensive, three-step process.

Health History & Consultation
One of the most important skills the Spine Team Texas staff maintains is the ability to listen to our patients. That’s why when you first visit our facility, you’ll have the opportunity to share your unique symptoms, personal medical history, and more, through our in-depth consultation process. During the conversation we may ask you a few questions, such as:

- When did your neck or back pain begin?
- What increases or decreases your back and neck discomfort?
- Is your back or neck pain better or worse in the morning or evening?

Through this process we’re able to better understand your individual symptoms and assess which of our physicians would be best to conduct your physical examination.

Diagnostic Testing & Physical Exam
During the physical examination portion of your visit, one of our spine-specialized physicians will perform an extensive evaluation to assess your overall physical health, including your state of flexibility, muscular fitness and current bone and nerve condition. We do this by performing a series of diagnostic procedures such as:

- Skeletal X-rays
- MRI or CT scans
- Electromyography
- Bone scans
- Discography

Customized Treatment Plan
After our physicians have thoroughly assessed your symptoms and examination results, we will work together with you to create a customized back and neck treatment plan based on our findings. These personalized back and neck treatment options may include one or more of the following components:

- Spine-focused physical therapy: a customized treatment program.
- Manual therapy: a physical therapist will provide hands-on movements to vertebrae and soft tissue areas to help relieve back and neck pain.
- Injections: Pain-relieving injections provide a bridge to physical therapy and can offer the physician important information about the problem.
- Minimally invasive spine surgery: a neurosurgeon will make a small incision to treat the problem, often on an outpatient basis.

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Royse City Mayor Jerrell Baley was faced with a dilemma.

It didn’t involve a city business matter. It involved a Zaner Robison Historical Museum question.

The question: If the museum was going to close and he could “save” one item, what would it be?

It was a dilemma for Baley because he has donated so many items to the museum. How many? Nobody – not even Baley – knows for sure.

As he was trying to answer the question, the mayor walked through the museum that’s located at 124 S. Arch St., just off Main Street in downtown Royse City.

He started listing items he had donated to the museum. “I gave all those toys, that record player, that lamp, that clock, those uniforms, that Dictaphone, that washing machine, that console stereo TV, that Hoover vacuum cleaner, those pictures...”

He finally decided on the item he would save, and it won’t surprise anyone who knows about Baley’s prized discovery when he bought a mini-warehouse storage unit.

His prized find and his choice for the item he would save was a Church of England Bible printed in 1752. The Bible has no Royse City connection, but it’s significant because it’s the oldest item in the museum.

According to handwritten information inside the Bible, it was owned by Abraham Luken – born July 16, 1703, died, June 1, 1776.

Baley said the Bible was in the bottom of a box that had been stored in a mini-warehouse storage unit he bought. Initially, the book was thrown aside.

During closer examination later, Baley said, he realized he had just bought a very historic book. Several sections of the Bible were separated from the book, so Baley began searching for someone who could repair it.

He had to pay only $235 to have the Bible repaired to a condition that was consistent with the rest of the book.

Several other Royse City residents were asked the same question that Baley was
asked. They didn’t have any problems making their choices.

Deloris Cross Ballard, museum curator
She would save the World War I quilt that’s attached to a wall of the museum.

Ballard said the quilt was made by the women of Royse City between April 1917 and November 1918. On the quilt are names of all the men from Royse City who served in the military during that period. She said there is a symbol by the names of five men. They are the men who were killed in battle.

Barney C. Jones, Member, Friends of the Museum
Jones’ museum treasure is a saddle he found several years ago in a trash pile on the curb in a Richardson residential area.

He stopped, picked it up, threw it in his car and drove directly to the museum.

He went into the museum, placed the saddle on a table and told Ballard to throw away the old saddle that was currently displayed.

“You’re not going to believe what I’m about to tell you,” Ballard said she told Jones after inspecting the saddle.

She said the saddle was made by Billy Cook, who was born and reared in Royse City. On the museum wall above the saddle is a picture of Cook at the age of 16, when he made his first saddle.

A stamp on the saddle states: “Billy Cook Maker Greenville.” On the horn is additional information: “Billy Cook Saddlery Greenville, Tx.”

Cook now lives in Campbell, according to Ballard. Jones, a Royse City resident since 2005, said the saddle apparently is a “prize saddle” that was made as a prize for a rodeo or related event.

“It was a fluke,” Jones said of his discovery in Richardson that has such a strong Royse City connection.

Janet Nichol, Royse City Mayor Pro Tem
No question about it, Nichol favored the fire hat worn by Clarence “Hardball” Gentry, who was fire chief during her growing up years.

Ballard raised a question, however. “Hardboil” or “Hardball?”

Nichol admitted that maybe “Hardboil” is the correct nickname. But she grew up knowing him as “Hardball” Gentry. So, “Hardball” it is.

“He was witty, funny and picked on all of us kids,” she said. “All the kids loved ‘Hardball’ Gentry.”

A treat for Royse City kids back in the 60s was getting to go to
the fire department’s “fire practice.” Yes, that was a fire training activity and kids were allowed to watch.

Nichol said Gentry was fire chief when her father, Jimmy Wright, served on the Royse City Fire Department.

**Carl Alsabrook, City Manager & cub scout leader**
The museum item Alsabrook would save is an item he donated to the museum.
And it’s a unique item: Official Boy Scouts of America shoe forms that date back to 1913.

Alsabrook said he got the shoe forms from a retired Sherman police officer, who found them in a box of military artifacts he bought at an estate sale.

The shoe forms are displayed in the museum’s scouting corner that focuses on Royse City’s rich scouting history. The museum curator said Texas’ first three Boy Scout troops were started in 1912. The Royse City troop was one of the three.

Ballard said the First United Methodist Church of Royse City was then and is now the local troop’s sponsor.

**Virginia Cross Anderson, lifelong Royse City resident**
The museum item that’s important to Anderson is a picture of her late husband, Sgt. Harry H. Herndon.

His picture is on the “Wall of Hometown Heroes,” a special display that features photographs of Royse City residents who have served in the military.

Her husband was killed in Vietnam on Oct. 18, 1968, one month to the day after he arrived in the country.

Ballard said Herndon was the only serviceman residing in Rockwall County to be killed while fighting in Vietnam.

The museum is open from noon to 4 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. For tours, call 972-635-7438 for appointment.
Continuing to Grow

Rockwall County’s growth over the past decade has been the envy of communities around the nation. One of the fastest growing retail markets and population centers in the state of Texas, and the entire nation, Rockwall County is clearly still in the midst of major economic growth. But just how fast is the county moving, and what direction is it going?

- One of the most telling statistics that demonstrates Rockwall County’s rapid growth is population.
  In 2000, Rockwall County had a total population of 43,080. Fast-forward 13 years, and that number has almost doubled. Between the 2010 census and 2013 estimates, Rockwall County grew by almost 6 percent.

  43,080 in 2000
  78,337 in 2010
  83,021 in 2013

- The median age in Rockwall is 36. The median house value in 2013 was $195,701, while the median house income was $79,163. In 2013, the median house income for the state of Texas was between $55,895 and $67,296.

- Rockwall County is the fastest growing county in Texas, according to the US Census Bureau. The county’s population is set to expand to more than 100,000 this year, and almost 150,000 by 2030. The city of Rockwall is projected to hold more than 50,000 by 2030.

- The major employers for Rockwall are: Rockwall ISD (1,365); Lake Pointe Medical Center (700); and Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital (592).

- The median age in Rockwall is 36. The median house value in 2013 was $195,701, while the median house income was $79,163. In 2013, the median house income for the state of Texas was between $55,895 and $67,296.

- Multiple restaurants are scheduled to come into Rockwall in 2014, including Rosa’s Cafe, Fuddruckers, Dunkin’ Donuts, Family Table, Mellow Mushroom and Londoners Pub and Grill.

- Channell Commercial Corporation, a California-based telecommunications company, is moving their headquarters and opening a production facility.

- Trend Tower, a seven-story corporate officer tower built in the Harbor District, will finish construction in 2014.
Every year, there are dozens of events in Rockwall County that entertain, foster networking, or support great causes. Below is just a handful of these great events, with information that we hope you’ll find valuable as you plan your year.

April 2014

April 3 | 21st Annual Taste of Rockwall and Business Expo | Rockwall High School

April 5 | Battle of the Bulldogs | Royse City High School

April 12 | Rockwall Women’s League Charity Ball | Omni Dallas Hotel

April 12 | Rockwall Easter Egg Hunt | Harry Myers Park

April 19 | Heart of Heath 5K | Heath City Hall

April 26 | Aspasians Arts & Crafts Fair | Wilkerson-Sanders Memorial Stadium

May 2014

May 2 | Scholarship Golf Tournament (to benefit RCHS seniors) | Twin Lakes Golf Club, Canton

May 3 | Family Fishing Derby | Harry Myers Park

May 3 | Outdoor Living & Home Expo | The Harbor

May 19 | Cars for CASA | The Harbor

May 26 | The Patriot Half | Harry Myers Park

June 2014

June 7 | Swim Across America | Lake Ray Hubbard

June 9 | Rockwall Classic golf tournament | The Shores

June 15-20 | Dallas Race Week | Lake Ray Hubbard
July 2014

July 4 | Rockwall 4th of July Celebration | City of Rockwall

July 4 | Heath July 4 Parade | City of Heath

August 2014

August 8 | Casino Night & Silent Auction | Occasions at Stone River

September 2014

September 8 | Ambassador’s Golf Tournament | Helping Hands

September 13 & 14 | Rockwall Boat Show | The Harbor

September 20 | Rubber Duck Regatta | The Harbor

October 2014

October 1 | 12th Annual Senior Health Fair | The Center

October 11 | Art & Jazz Festival | The Harbor

October 18 | Royse City FunFest | Downtown Royse City

October 25 | Harbor HOWL-o-ween | The Harbor

November 2014

November 14 & 15 | Festival of Trees | Helping Hands

November 15 | Harbor Holiday | The Harbor

December 2014

December 6 | Holiday in the Park | City of Heath

Remember to visit www.rockwallheraldbanner.com and www.roysecityheraldbanner.com throughout the year for event previews, photos and reviews.
program

MAKEROVER

Webb takes Rockwall to next level

Story & Photo by Cliff Gibson

In order to change the course of history for a football program that hadn’t won a playoff game in more than two decades, somebody special was needed. Maybe “specialist” would be a more accurate description: a coach with a proven track record of transforming programs from underachievers to winners. That’s what Rockwall High School got when it hired Rodney Webb.

Not that Webb is a stranger to the area. After all, he’s lived here for more than a decade and coached at nearby programs in Royse City and Mesquite Horn. His hiring last year was not only a true homecoming for Webb (he’d always hoped to one day land the RHS job), but a much-needed resurrection for a struggling program.

In 2013 – Webb’s first as head coach of the Rockwall football team – the Jackets dealt with their share of adversity, mostly due to injuries mounting up throughout the course of the schedule. But, they survived and not only made it to the post-season, but also brought back the first playoff football trophy Rockwall High School has seen in 22 years. However, if you know anything about Webb – and his journey from Royse City to Mesquite and finally, Rockwall – you’ll easily see that this sort of thing is nothing new.

His first program makeover came at neighboring Royse City, a Class 3A team at the time, and a school in dire need of a coach who could win. Webb, who had just spent the previous two years at Garland’s Naaman Forest as an assistant after a successful 7-year run in New Mexico, got the job by default.

“My first year we went 5-5 and I think I could’ve run for mayor at that point,” Webb said. “Then, in the second year, we went 12-3 and to the state semifinals. Things took off from there and the program came to life. Kids started moving in and the community support was great.”

After five years with the Bulldogs, Webb had the program heading in the right direction, which helped him feel better about leaving for another program struggling to find its way.

“My first season at Horn we went 5-5 and I think I could’ve run for mayor at that point,” Webb said. “Then, in the second year, we went 12-3 and to the state semifinals. Things took off from there and the program came to life. Kids started moving in and the community support was great.”

Leaving was tough … It’s always tough to leave a place you love,” he said. “I was very attached to those kids, but I knew I was leaving the next coach with a strong program. I felt that their move to 4A and the new stadium was a great starting point for a new coach and a good time for me to leave if that’s what I chose to do.”

Ultimately, Webb did choose to leave for the relatively-new Class 5A program at Mesquite Horn. And again, he was taking over a program hungry for change.

“I looked at Mesquite Horn and saw a program that was identical to Royse City,” he said. “My first season at Horn we
were in the playoffs and in the quarterfinals in the third year. I felt like it was a good five years, very similar to the five years at Royse City. And again, I felt good about leaving the program in the shape it was in.”

Despite the success at Horn, the chance to join his wife and daughter (a teacher and student at RISD) in Rockwall had its pull on Webb. And although it was hard to leave the program in Mesquite, coming to Rockwall felt like coming home.

“When I was at Royse City I felt like I wouldn’t be able to get from there to Rockwall. I felt like it was too big a jump,” Webb said. “Once I was at Horn, it got to the point that I could’ve seen myself ending my career with that program, but I always felt the only place I’d leave to go to was Rockwall, because it’s my home.”

Finally where he belongs, Webb wasted little time in changing the culture around the football program. However the team was devastated with injuries before the season hit the halfway point.

“It was a myriad of injuries: high ankle sprains, lower body, ACLs, broken legs, broken thumbs, dislocated shoulder, and even something called ‘jersey finger,’” he said. “After the fourth game of the season, we had no more than two-thirds of our roster suited out for any game.”

However, the Jackets pushed through, beating rival Heath in the I-30 Classic and pulling off a stunning 64-61 overtime win at Mesquite that could be considered a strong candidate for “Game of the Year.” The Jackets went into the season finale needing a win or some help to get a playoff berth. Nursing a banged up squad, Rockwall fell behind to heavily-favored Longview, 21-0 at halftime.

“We were down at the half so the mindset went from ‘let’s win the game,’ to ‘let’s keep guys healthy’ in the chance that Horn beats North and we get to the playoffs,” Webb explained.

“Our game ended early and when I talked to the guys after the game, I didn’t know what to tell them because we had no idea if we were in or not. We turned the game on the radio when we got back to the locker room and when Horn kicked a field goal to win, our locker room erupted.”

“We didn’t feel like we backed our way in at all,” he said. “With as much adversity we had faced, we felt we had certainly deserved it. The school was hungry for the excitement and it was so fun because it was new to so many. The frenzy it created was incredible.”

The Jackets went on to beat Naaman Forest in the bi-district round, avenging a season-opening loss to the Rangers. The ride came to an end in the next round as Rockwall fell to Jesuit at the Cotton Bowl, but by that point, the foundation for future success had already been poured.

“You want to build on each previous season, so we want to take last year and build on it,” Webb said. “Last year our goal was to win a playoff game. This year we want to win district. We’re gonna talk about taking it deeper, not just winning one playoff game, but taking this thing even further.”

“Each week we step on the field next season, our mindset will be that we expect to win each game.”

By the Numbers

Yellowjackets Football

22 – seasons since the Jackets’ last playoff win prior to 2013 season

350 – Number of rushing yards by Chris Warren in Rockwall’s season opener

125 – Total points scored during Rockwall’s 64-61 overtime win at Mesquite

682 – Total yards gamed by the Rockwall offense against Mesquite, a season high

1,384 / 18 – Total yards and touchdowns by receiver Xavier Castille, the District 12-5A Most Valuable Player
A New Twist on an Old Classic

Story & Photo by Austin Wells

Those in Rockwall looking for a fun, hip place to enjoy a great slice of pizza are in for a treat when the new Mellow Mushroom restaurant finally opens its doors to the public this spring.

Located off of I-30 next to Logan’s Roadhouse, Mellow Mushroom will offer tons of hippie-style art to gaze at while enjoying a variety of pizzas, hoagies and beer.

Manager Brian Aubuchon said he and his father first got the idea to open their own Mellow Mushroom when they took a trip to Destin, Fla., about six years ago. Having never heard of the pizza joint, they decided to heed the urgings of the locals telling them to try it.

“We walked in, and the ceiling was mushroom-shaped and it had all these crazy paintings on there and was just really psychedelic,” Aubuchon said “It looked like it took a lot of time and was very neat. We got our food and it was fantastic.”

The first Mellow Mushroom sprang up on Spring Street in Atlanta, GA in 1974, and got its “Mellow” moniker due to the hippy culture of the time period.

The restaurant opening in Rockwall is certainly no exception. Customers will be able to watch the chefs making and spinning their pizza at the open-style kitchen located immediately to the right of the entrance. The kitchen will also sport six ovens.

The 1,100 square-foot restaurant will have 32 beer taps both upstairs and downstairs, and all manner of crazy artwork hanging just about everywhere one could sit down to eat.

“It’s a massive restaurant,” he said. “Every time you sit somewhere in the restaurant you’ll notice something different, so it keeps your eyes wandering around and keeps you entertained. Upstairs, we don’t really know what we’re going to do with it yet. It has full seating, and we’re going to put a drop-down screen in there for Cowboys’ games.”

The second floor also has a large patio with a great view of Lake Ray Hubbard and gives a rooftop dining-type of feel. In the summer time, diners can lift up the garage-like shutters to feel the warm air and sunshine while they eat.

“Eventually the restaurant will take a life of its own,” Aubuchon said. “You can kind of predict what’s going to happen...”
but ultimately you don’t know until you get started. We’d like
the upstairs to be centralized for sports. We’ll have a ton of TVs
everywhere.

“We’ve been pondering some ideas for trivia nights, being able
to do beer bingo, and some fun things to go along with it.”

According to Aubuchon, the pizza at Mellow Mushroom is just
as unique as its atmosphere.

“We have some very unique pizzas, and we have your regular
pizzas too,” he said. “You can make your own pizza as well.
What’s so good about our pizza is just all of the fresh ingredi-
ents. Everything’s cut fresh, every single day, which is where
I think we differentiate ourselves from other pizza places. We
build our own crust. It’s a big, thick crust with garlic butter
and parmesan all around it, almost like a breadstick. We have
some vegetarian options. We have a pizza which has 13 differ-
et vegetables on it.

“There are just a lot of unique things that you wouldn’t nor-
mally see on a pizza but it kind of all comes together. We also
have your run-of-the-mill stuff: Supreme (we call it our house
special), Mighty Meaty with all your meats, and Vegetable
pizza. Obviously we’re called ‘Mellow Mushroom’ so we have
a really good shitake pizza that’s everyone’s favorite and has
three different mushrooms on it. Once you try it, you’ll be sold
for life.”
Moms Run This Town

By Jim Hardin

Jessica Thompson “stumbled” upon a running club two years ago and several hundred Rockwall County women are glad she did.

Thompson wasn’t looking for a running club.

What she really needed at the moment was a pattern for a skirt or some other form of appropriate attire to wear while running the Disney Princess Half Marathon.

During an online search, Thompson found what she needed -- a tutorial for making a skirt. The tutorial was produced by Pam Burrus, founder of a nationwide running club for women called Moms Run This Town (MRTT).

Thompson’s search for a pattern had ended, but she had a new online project -- finding out more about MRTT.

After learning there apparently were chapters in Dallas and Fort Worth, Thompson filled out an application to start one in Rockwall County.

She met Burrus at the Disney Princess Half Marathon. And right away, Burrus suggested that Thompson start an MRTT chapter.

"I was a step ahead of her," Thompson said. "I had already filled out the application."

Thompson went public with the MRTT chapter after returning home from her Disney run. Her initial method for letting prospects know about the group was simple, but effective.

"I started inviting my friends. They invited their friends. People just kept adding more and more people and eventually we had almost 350 members," she said.

Thompson also announced the new group on the Rockwall Running Club’s Running Buddies Facebook page. That announcement got the attention of Ashley Crews, who joined Thompson right away.

And Sarah McCutcheon, who has become a "super involved" member and is considered a co-leader, joined after seeing an announcement on a Rockwall buy-sell-trade online page.

Shelly Pfuhl also was among the firsts to join. Pfuhl said she was “ecstatic” to learn about the new group.

MRTT is a social running club that provides free memberships to mothers of all ages, ability levels and types -- and, yes, even including pet “moms”.

The club’s main mission is to seek out like-minded women and offer them support and motivation to overcome the many obstacles of motherhood while encouraging them to stay physically active.

On a daily, weekly and monthly basis, the club’s chapters -- totaling about 360 across the United States and in Canada -- provide fun ways for moms to get together to run, walk and socialize.

MRTT has also built a thriving online community where members can connect with one another, answer running
questions, train with each other, and share their personal running stories. Thompson listed several reasons she believes the local MRTT chapter has had rapid growth.

“We run routes that are safe in neighborhoods and a lot of us have strollers. That encourages other moms with strollers to run,” she said.

“And we aren’t running 7-minute miles.”

A lot of the women run a per-mile pace between 11 and 12 minutes. Some runners, she said, may consider that pace to be slow.

“But we don’t use that word and we don’t think it’s slow,” Thompson added. “We want people to feel comfortable and feel that they fit in even if they’re just beginning.”

Thompson said the group even has runners who are just starting Couch To 5k, a program for brand new runners.

“They still feel they can run with us,” she said. “Even if we aren’t side by side, we are still running together and starting together.”

Thompson said the group’s 9 a.m. runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday -- usually at Woodcreek in Fate -- feature beginner and seasoned runners. She encourages beginners to come to those running opportunities.

McCutcheon leads a subgroup that runs at 5 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays with the Rockwall Running Club.

This group, Thompson said, is basically for runners who can wake up early, are “more seasoned,” working moms and those who want to run without their kids. Weekends are organized activities for longer runs of five or more miles.

The Monday-Wednesday-Friday participants usually run two or three miles, unless they’re training for a race that requires training runs of longer distances.

But she stressed that the group is "very beginner friendly."

“We don’t leave anybody behind,” Thompson said.

“There’s no runner left behind, ever,” Pfuhl added. “We don’t want them to be discouraged by being left behind.”

Thompson said some women don’t want to participate
because they’re not at the group’s level yet.

"Even if you’re just walking or whatever you’re doing, come," Thompson said. "We’ll start together and usually we finish together. We try to stay together and we’ve been really, really pushing that everyone is welcome. All paces, all levels and everything."

Many of the moms bring their children along for the runs. Most have running strollers for one child, some for two and at least one has a stroller for three. Weather shields protect the children on windy or rainy days.

Thompson said she has plenty of success stories.

A highlight involves Alyssa Beirne. Thompson singled her out because she has seen Beirne’s rapid progress, starting with Couch to 5k in January of 2013 and running a half marathon less than a year later.

Beirne had a one-word answer when asked about what part MRTT has played getting her up to speed — and distance — with her running?

"Everything," she said.

She added more words later, like accountability, support and encouragement.

Pfuhl talked about the relationships that have developed among the MRTT members. She had been asked about the runner relationships before, so she wrote down her thoughts and feelings. Tears rolled down her cheeks at times as she read what she had written.

Even if you didn’t know the runners who showed up for a run, Pfuhl said, you knew you had a kindred spirit with them.
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