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Winter Edition 2026



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Photo by  
Mandy Corbell

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# COOPERS TURN BARN INTO RURAL PALACE

By Wendy Burton

Steve and Carla Cooper dreamed of a barndominium – or more accurately, a “barndo-palace” – for their sweet retreat on 40 acres filled with natural beauty and wildlife galore.

“The bayou goes through it – lots of hills, a pecan grove, lots of old oak trees,” said Carla Cooper. “It’s just beautiful out here.”

Beyond the beautiful surroundings, the interior suits them both perfectly.

“I love decorating, and at our farmhouse, I had it very western style with cowhide furniture. When I got over that, I went kind of a French country style,” Carla said, with a laugh. “But over here, it’s pretty normal, except my bedroom and bathroom, which are kind of wild French country. It looks a bit like Bridgerton in my bathroom. If it was up to me, the whole house would be eclectic, but my husband built it for me, so I decided to make the rest with his taste. We could call that ‘modern cowboy.’”

The couple started out by simply building a barn on the 40 acres, while keeping their farmhouse in Fort Gibson where all the work takes place, Carla said.

“There’s no work over here,” she said. “Well, I guess the only work over here is the lawnmower; the rest is still at the farm.”

Their peaceful retreat turned into a home somewhere along the way, Steve said.

Steve, left, and Carla Cooper designed their dream home together – a beautiful “barndo-palace.”





The living room has comfortable furniture with a stunning view.

"We found some windows on sale and suddenly it became a house," he said. "The beauty of building it this way is it was kind of a design-as-you-go – put a bedroom here, a bedroom there, and it just kind of happens."

They looked over more than 100 blueprints, but none suited them, he said. So Carla and her boss, Jarod Mendenall, sat down and put pen to paper and graphed out what the couple really wanted.

"And so we built it," Steve said. "We picked what we wanted, including our color of metal. It's white because Carla said so, and we built it our way. This is a barn with Carla's junk in it."

Carla laughed.

She would have made it bigger, he said, but "it's plenty big."

The "barndo" is 2,400 square feet, a single story, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a utility room, walk-in pantry, and porches and tall windows around all three sides for ultimate viewing enjoyment.

A large island separates the living area from the kitchen in this open floor plan.



Carla keeps her mother's Mason Vista Pink vintage china on display in the dining room.



"We have a wood stove and we'll sit there and watch the elk, turkey, deer. We've woken up and come in here before to find elk just lying down outside all around the house," Carla said.

Theirs is a big family, so Carla's vision was to have her dream entertaining space. The floor plan is open with vaulted ceilings, featuring exposed rafters and white blow-in insulation.

The kitchen/dining area is open to the vast living room space, which with Carla's impeccable sense of style might be expected to be so upscale as to be "untouchable."

But it's not. Instead, it's comfortable – bright with great views – and doesn't make guests afraid to put their feet up.

Large, arched double doors overlook the west porch, and tall double doors form the main entry on the south side. Natural pine lines the interior main walls; the rest are painted white.

The tremendous kitchen island seats four, with luxurious padded seating, and includes the sink, dishwasher, pull-out trash bin, and ample storage. It's painted wood, but isn't "matchy matchy" with any of the rest of the kitchen cabinetry. That's not how Carla designs, and the result is beautiful.



The guest room is filled with vintage collectibles.



The master bedroom is airy and light, with high ceilings and light wood accents.



A Glitterville Eiffel tower adorns the top of the wardrobe in the master bedroom.





The master bath features an array of French-country decor.



White pine, large windows, and vaulted ceilings create bright comfortable spaces throughout the home.



The main entry features tall double doors overlooking an expansive porch and natural beauty.

"I've got stained wood, painted wood, white cabinets, gray cabinets, and a copper pot filler by the stove with tiny swan heads in the water spigot," Carla said. "I designed my kitchen how I wanted it."

In the dining room area, her mother's Mason's Vista Pink vintage china holds pride of place in a tall, white hutch bought in Canton, Texas. One corner of the dining room features one of her most unusual finds: a carved palm tree.

"We stayed at a house in Broken Bow once and I thought I had to have one of these, so I called my friend Jan and told her, 'We have to drive to Texas this weekend,'" she said. "They carve these in Indonesia, and I bought it at Storied Roots in Frisco, Texas. The carvings tell a story."

Next to that she has two of her favorite chairs: Hooker brand, upholstered in soft, furry white.

Among other eclectic decor items are "cowhide" floor rugs.

"I love cowhide and wanted to incorporate it, but I didn't want white," she said. "So I went with metallic – one in silver by the woodstove and one in gold in my bedroom."

The spacious living area includes an electric fireplace, large entertainment center, warm rugs, and overstuffed furniture.

On the other side of the kitchen is a walk-in pantry with floor-to-ceiling white cabinetry and storage for all of Carla's cooking appliances. Granite countertops are throughout the home, including the large laundry room.

The guest bedroom has more French country-style decor, with an iron bedstead and antique cedar chest.

"The bedstead is from a little antique shop in Fort Gibson; the cedar chest I got at the Briarpatch years ago," she said. "There's a little French armoire, and decorations from the Antique Farmhouse website. I love the French country table in there."

The guest bathroom is equally lovely, with a tall travertine tile shower.



The pantry offers ample storage to keep clutter away.

An airy, white master bedroom is a palace itself. Pine walls, tall windows, white accents – “French country all the way,” Carla said.

One of the most unusual items in the house is a French wax bust on the dresser, found in Fort Smith in a shop called Now and Then.

“She’s so pretty. She has human hair, braided and held back with old hair pins, real eyelashes. It’s just beautiful,” Carla said.

On either side of the French lady are two Glitterville lamps, and a Glitterville Eiffel tower perches on top of her armoire.

The master bath is an oasis, with a Victorian-style clawfoot tub and a chandelier Carla got at the Briarpatch.

“I always wanted a chandelier hanging over a claw-foot tub,” she said.

There’s a gilded chair upholstered in a hot pink zebra stripe, and Florentine furniture from the '60s she collects, including a chest and cabinet.

“I’ve just got my favorite things in here,” Carla said. “There’s even these Staffordshire poodles that you don’t see a lot of, with little baskets of flowers in their mouths.”

Steve’s personal space includes a large walk-in closet of his own.

“I have my own closet because my stuff is too bougie,” she said with a laugh. “This is the bougiest barn-dominium anyone has probably ever seen.” 🏡

Steve and Carla Cooper enjoy the serene view from their front porch.





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# Originality highlights Farmer home

By Cathy Spaulding

Sheila and Jerry Farmer's home is a gallery of antiques, heirlooms and fine art.

"Fine" may be a stretch," Sheila said. "It's all original."

She said the collection includes nothing found at HomeGoods or Hobby Lobby.

The Farmers built and designed the four-bedroom house and set up their home in 2021.

"Jerry did the floor plan," Sheila said. "We were fortunate enough to work with my uncle, Jared Bruce, originally from Muskogee. He was an antique dealer and designer and helped us along the way."

Shelia recently retired from U.S. Office of Information and Technology. Jerry retired from from public schools and later worked for the Veterans Administration. They have been married 27 years and have five children between them. They also have seven grandchildren.

"The house we lived in was not suitable for us to grow old in," Sheila said. "We wanted to make sure it

A baroque mirror adds elegance to a bathroom's modern style.





was accessible – rolling doors, wide showers. I have parents who are getting older, if and when the time ever came, so we built a two-bedroom suite."

The house sits on a little more than an acre that slants north to Coody Creek. A circle drive passes the red brick house. The entry is white, accented by a black front door.

"[It's] a little different from what we traditionally see for architecture," Sheila said. "We didn't do painted brick or anything crazy, nothing faddy."

She said they wanted a blank palette inside.



The breakfast area features a hutch displaying books and plates.

"We wanted all our furnishing and art to provide the color," she said.

A big black mirror with gold Baroque trim hangs in the entry. It belonged to Sheila's mother.

"I asked her for it," she said. "I grew up with that; it was a mirror in my home."

A red Chinese prayer altar below the mirror was found at an estate sale in Tulsa. A brown jug on the altar belonged to Sheila's grandmother. A Middle Eastern tribal wedding rug lies in front of the ensemble. It matches rugs in the kitchen, living room and front office.

The front office has deep, dark



A baroque mirror adds elegance to a bathroom's modern style.

Sheila and Jerry Farmer enjoy showing color against their white walls.



A stairway displays a gallery of modern art.

walls, which draw attention to an original painting. The rug in the living room grounds different styles of furniture. Red stools face a white fireplace, and hickory chairs with red cushions are on each side of the fireplace.

"They're a million years old," Sheila said, adding the rickety-looking chairs are old but sturdy. "The hutch was two pieces bought at different times, and we married them together."

An antelope head adds more height to the hutch. Sheila got it from a Haskell auction.

"I don't have much history on it," she said. "I just knew I wanted it and adored it."

The open plan includes the dining area and kitchen. White cabinets and a white island counter make the kitchen seem more spacious. A bar with a wine fridge and sink features white cabinets below and black cabinets above.

Farmer said all the kitchen art and decor were found at flea markets. A whiskey barrel was made into a lamp, and the top



The front porch adds a white spark to the brick house.



A black Chinese screen makes an original art work pop.

cabinet displays Spode china. A sign from a grocery store Jerry's grandparents owned is above an antique dining area hutch. Sheila said Central High was a tiny community near Checotah, destroyed by a tornado about 65 years ago.

The bedrooms, across the living room from the kitchen, display fine art. In the master bedroom, a massive black Chinese screen provides a backdrop for an abstract painting by her son, Austin Evans, who attended Hilldale schools. Sheila said several rooms feature her son's paintings.

A laundry room right off the bathroom goes into a walk-in closet with convenient nooks for shoes. A bonus room and office are upstairs.

The Farmers find new uses for cherished items. Sheila said they painted her grandmother's white wrought-iron garden table black and brought it inside.

"It worked fabulous for a side table," she said.



A wood dresser and wicker-like shades add warmth to a bedroom.



A kitchen bar offers a variety of hot and cold beverages and beverage containers.



A black door and art adds contrast to the clean, white master bath.



The back porch offers a variety of seating arrangements.



The open kitchen invites visitors to enjoy the island bar.



A fire pit offers an expansive view in the back.

A coffee table used to be a dining room table until Jerry Farmer cut the legs and refurbished it.

The back patio features a dining table Jerry rescued from a barn and restored. He converted a wrought-iron foyer table into an outdoor display by removing its glass top and replacing it with a concrete half-circle.

They took leftover brick from an old pool and hot tub and made a fire pit area.

"Sunsets are amazing," Sheila said, adding that they see armadillos, deer, rabbits, foxes, possums, raccoons and squirrels.

The Farmers can deposit groceries at a service entry before driving into the garage, Sheila said.

"It's great in the fall," she said. 🏡



The open living area features a fireplace, antique chair and an antelope head.



An old sign in the breakfast area came from a family store.



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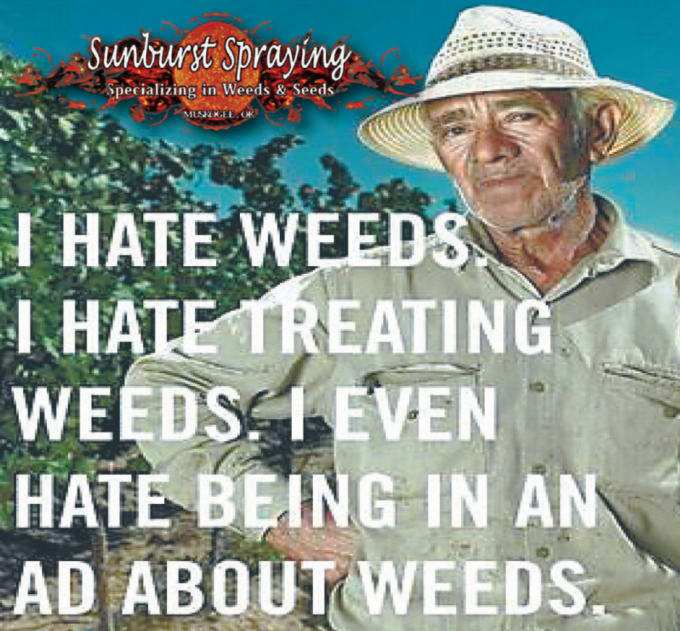
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# HOWELLS LIVE FORTUNATE LIFE

By Ronn Rowland

The first thing a guest notices when entering Dave and Tammye Howell's home on the northwest side of Muskogee is the baby grand piano.

"Our family's very involved in music," said Dave Howell. "I play guitar as well, since I was about 6 or 7 years old. My wife, she plays piano as well. When she was in college at Northeastern State [University], she competed in the Miss Cherokee pageant and won the talent division, playing either Bach or Beethoven."

Howell said the family does not limit performing to the house.

"We're involved in the music industry," he said. "We do a lot of music with the church. We have concerts like a Branson style. It's wholesome, clean music."

The home is a five-bedroom, five-bath ranch style on a big lot. An in-law suite is off to the side, and an expansive yard surrounds the house.



A brick fireplace with an enormous chimney is the focal point of the family area in the home of Dave and Tammye Howell.

The Howells' home in northwest Muskogee highlights their love of music, as featured by the piano in the living room.





A long hallway with plenty of photos and artwork leads to the master bedroom.

"Part of the back is ours and part belongs to Dr. [Tracy] Hoos," Dave said. "Quite often there are Wiffle ball games out there. And that guest house, quite often it's occupied by family or someone who's in stress. That's something that we diligently pray for – to be able to help."

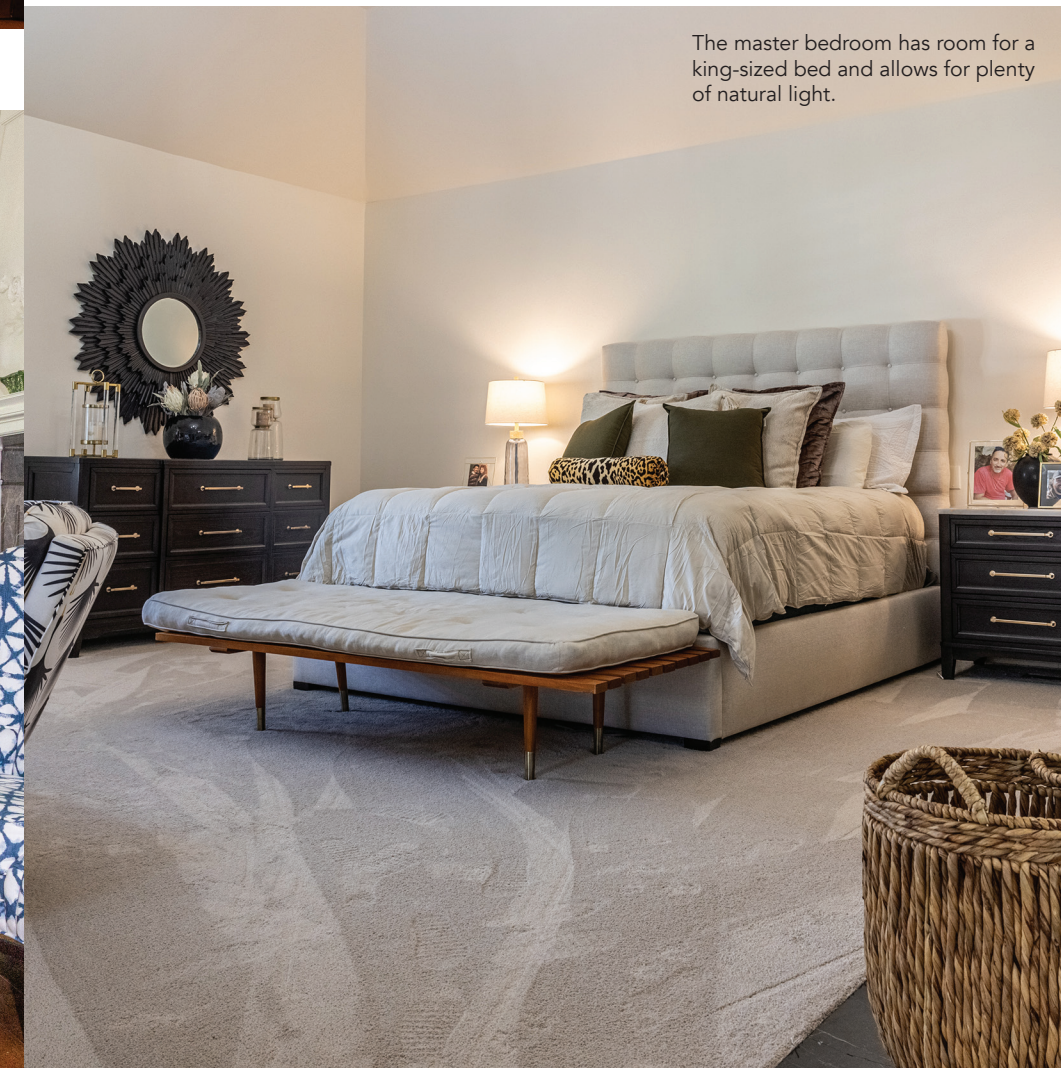
The Howells have not always been able to live the lifestyle they now enjoy.

"There were years ago that we were in distress and we needed help," Dave said. "Our company [Premier USA] gives us an opportunity to help, whether it's a forklift driver that needs a job who feed his kids or we're consulting with a business to help them find a better path."

The Howells are empty nesters but not isolated. Their one son, Austin, and his wife, Kaitlyn, have two children: son Graham, 10, and daughter Hollyn, 8.



A small room offers plenty of room for creative activities and a place for the pets to eat.



The master bedroom has room for a king-sized bed and allows for plenty of natural light.



A breakfast nook in the kitchen offers a relaxing meal in front of the fireplace.

The patio at the back of the house provides a peaceful atmosphere to relax and read a novel, or entertain.



"Hollyn is taking piano lessons at the moment," Dave said. "Graham is taking drum lessons."

Dave said while the house is more than what they need, it's along the lines of what they can offer.

"It's just the two of us, and we obviously don't need a home this large, with all the bedrooms, bathrooms and living spaces," he said. "For us, it's not about what we need. We have a lot of groups in our home: prayer groups, study groups, worship groups. That's something we're thankful for."

Howell said helping another family put them in their current home.

"A house we had several years ago, we felt like we were supposed to get it fixed up and sell it," he said. "Sure enough, there was a family that came by and were in distress and



The rear of the house features plenty of area for entertaining guests.

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The Howells can enjoy time with their grandkids in the play room or watch the children entertain themselves.

we were able to help them get in that house. We didn't have another place to live but we found another place."

Howell said the Beckman Drive home couldn't be more perfect for his family, even with its almost 5,000 square feet of area.

"The architecture in the house is remarkable," he said. "The patios that are out back allow us to have guests over. We're able to cook hamburgers."

Howell also said they've hosted more than family gatherings.

"We've had two weddings here in the back, and the courtyard," he said. "I don't know how many birthday parties for kids and friends. It's just beautiful and peaceful."

Also occupying the home are the Howell's two goldendoodles.

"They're sisters; they came out of the same litter," Howell said.

"One has a smooth coat and the other is curly. When they were born,



Family dinners can be conducted in the dining with room for eight at the table.

Guests can sit and relax while looking out upon the Howells' backyard.





The rear entrance to the Howells' home has two spacious doors



Another bedroom in the home also has a desk from which to prepare work.



Family and friends can sleep or watch television in the master bedroom.



Lounging around on another patio can become habit-forming while looking out onto the backyard.

The master bathroom allows for plenty of space to get ready for the day's activities, or to prepare for a good night's sleep.



Exposed wood rafters highlight the vaulted ceiling in the family room.





A bookcase and desk are features in the creative room.

the curly one was red haired and my wife named her Reba. The smooth one was blonde haired and we named her Dolly."

For a household that entertains and helps others, a big kitchen would seem to be a necessity. Howell said their kitchen is ample-sized.

"There are two ovens; both are convection," he said. "There's a gas, fire-burner top. Countertops are all granite."

Howell said they don't eat at home very much because of their busy schedules.

"When we do get to cook, we have both ovens going," he said. "Cooktops are going, we have the grills outside. I don't know how to overstate it but I feel so blessed." 🏡



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## FEATURED HOME: LINDSAY

The Lindsay's back yard and pool offers diverse ways to enjoy the outdoors.



# John and Gayla Lindsay decorate their house for fun

By Cathy Spaulding

People have a lot of fun at the home of John and Gayla Lindsay. Their welcome mat says "Yay, you are here."

The Lindsays are empty nesters now that their three children are grown. But that doesn't keep them from hosting all sorts of gatherings, including Muskogee Little Theatre cast parties.

John is a therapist and marketing coordinator for Green Country Behavioral Health; Gayla works for Kevin White's Edward D. Jones financial adviser office. They share their four-bedroom, two-bathroom house with two dogs: Tripp, a Yorkiepoo, and Lily, who was rescued from a box of puppies.

The Lindsays have lived in the house, built in 1992, for 15 years.

Gayla, who has an interior design degree from Oklahoma Christian University, said the house is in an ongoing state of change.



Hanging seats offer a swinging way to relax.

John and Gayla Lindsay enjoy their home with their dogs, Lily and Tripp.



The shower shares a platform with the bathtub in the master bath.



Artifacts and art line the tops of kitchen cabinets.



"There's always those next things you want to remodel," she said.

The Lindsays remodeled their kitchen 10 years ago. John painted the cream-colored cabinets one Thanksgiving break. Above the cabinets are vintage magazine ads and a Tom's Peanuts cookie jar.

"That was my grandmother's," Gayla said. "She owned a country store outside of Sulphur, and that is the only thing we have left of hers."

The granite counter surrounding the sink was extended into the breakfast nook, providing a semicircular bar so visitors can chat with the hosts.

"We wanted it so you'd have good conversation," said Gayla. "You wouldn't have to look down the line."

Visitors can choose favorite beverages from a wine cabinet and coffee bar.

Gayla made a monogrammed wood stove cover at Creative Soul.

"I find items with that vintage look and have them put together," she said.



A pineapple shaped mirror affirms the Hawaiian touch to one bedroom.

Bedrooms carry different themes.

They also are cost-conscious. A new refrigerator came from Wall's Discount.

The utility room features colorful cloth boxes collected when Gayla taught drama at Sadler Arts Academy. Tripp and Lily have a dining spot in the utility room.

The master bedroom is painted in a light gray, with hints of blue. A throw pillow says, "And so together, they built a live they loved." The master bath features a shower and tub on a raised tile floor.



The Lindsay pups like to hang out in the master bedroom.



A third bedroom features a wall-sized mountain mural.

"I like stepping into the shower from the bathtub," Gayla said.

A mirror features adjustable LED lights, which are activated from the glass. A defroster keeps fog off the mirror.

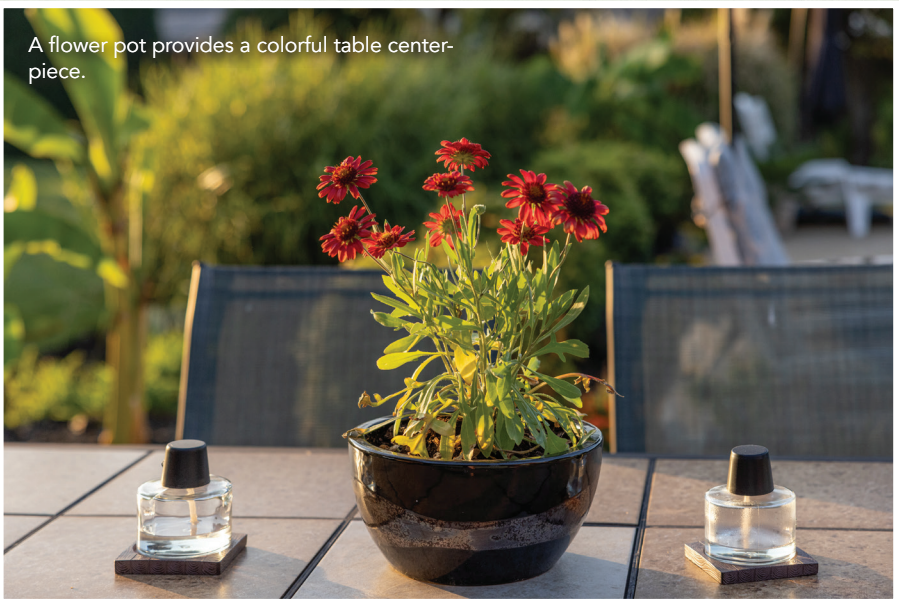
The Lindsays found wall decorations from a variety of sources, including Hobby Lobby, Wayfair, Amazon and TJ Maxx.

Willow Tree figurines spotted around the living

The well-kept front lawn adds to a welcoming entrance.



A flower pot provides a colorful table centerpiece.



A living room offers all sorts of ways to relax.





A vanity is surrounded by artworks and hats.

area represent the Lindsays and their children. Morgan is a news director in Las Vegas; Miranda is hair stylist, and Mallory does theatrical lighting in Tulsa.

One bedroom has been turned into a theatrical memory room.

'It represents six years of John and me doing theater together,' Gayla said.

A black wall shows photos of MLT shows in which they performed. They include "Grease," "Beauty and the Beast," "Elf" and "Mama Mia." There is also a photo of their daughter, Mallory,



The Lindsays devote one room to their love of theater.

from MLT's "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown."

Another wall displays awards the Lindsays have won over the years. Gayla puts on makeup at a small vanity, with a mirror surrounded by theatrical dressing room lights.

Mallory's old room features a photo mural of a mountain scene because she loved the mountains. There also is a beach-themed room with shells the family got from the beach.

The backyard features all sorts of places to sit, chat and eat. Swinging hammock chairs from Amazon hang from a pergola, and Adirondack-style

The kitchen counter extends into a place to sit and gather.




chairs surround a fire pit. A tall table at one corner of the yard has been repainted a couple of times. John said he got it when he acted in a play in Arizona.

"It's from 'Oliver,'" he said. "I built it and they gave it to us."

John said the swimming pool sold them on the house, and landscaping around the yard was 15 years in the making. The yard features a redbud tree and banana plants. Flowerpots adorn a maple tree that fell in a storm.

"Because the sun is out all day long, I had to find some drought-tolerant plants and shrubs that could take the heat," John said, adding a friend gave him a white and purple Rose of Sharon when his dad died.

John said he mowed yards as a youth and still enjoys the work.

"That's my therapy," Lindsay said. "There's a lot of satisfaction to have everything neat and in order, watch everything grow from season to season." 



People can kick their shoes off and enjoy some television in the living room.



A sign in the dining area stresses the importance of family.

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## BEYOND THE LISTING: 3423 RIVER BEND ROAD



**ADDRESS:** 3423 River Bend Rd  
**ASKING PRICE:** \$679,900  
**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 4,140  
**LOT SIZE:** 1.01 acres  
**BEDROOMS:** Four upstairs, one downstairs  
**BATHROOMS:** Three full, one half  
**BUILT:** 2002  
**HEATING AND COOLING:** Central air and heat, two years old  
**APPLIANCES:** Double oven, dishwasher  
**FLOOR:** Oak, marble tile, carpet  
**SCHOOL DISTRICT:** Muskogee Public Schools  
**INFORMATION:** Betty Blackwell, ReMax. 918-441-3375

By Ronn Rowland

When a guest enters the Roses' house at 3423 River Bend Road, the first thing spotted is a scene similar to "Gone With the Wind."

A curved staircase leading to the second-floor bedrooms is one of the features that attracted Steve and Debra Rose, retired pastors from First Assembly, to the home.

"It's a beautiful staircase," Steve Rose said. "A cancer doctor owned it before us and he didn't spare any expense. What I like about the house is the elaborate woodworking."

The floors on the first level are oak, and Debra Rose believes the runs and risers on the staircase are also oak.

The master bedroom, with an ensuite bathroom, is downstairs, along with the kitchen and dining area, living room and an office. Also on the first floor is a steel-reinforced safe room.

"It's kind of unusual, the office," Steve said. "It was a gift to us. I wrote many a sermon on the desk in that office."

The second floor has four bedrooms and two bathrooms, one of which is a Jack and Jill bathroom. A reading area connects three of the bedrooms.

"This house is too big for us now," Steve said. "This is a grand house for a family. We have three kids and a bunch of grandkids, and there's no



Steve and Debra Rose sit in front of their baby grand piano in their home on River Bend Road.



Steve Rose said the office where he has written many sermons for his ministry was a "gift" from the previous owner of the home.



The Roses spend many hours with family in the entertainment room, which faces the back of the house.

greater feeling than Christmas and having the whole family in this place."

Betty Blackwell with ReMax and Associates said the house has many special features.

"The kitchen features rich stained cabinets, a center island with a stovetop and granite countertops," Blackwell said. "The breakfast nook adjoins the kitchen. One of the nicest features of the main bedroom is the large decorative window. The main ensuite bath features a whirlpool tub, a full-size shower, a large granite vanity with dual sinks, plus a makeup vanity."

When the Roses took possession of the house 12 years ago, their first priority was to change some of the interior aesthetics.

"We came in and painted it," Steve said. "There was nothing here but white walls. We spent a lot of money having it painted professionally; Debra's responsible for that."



The master bathroom ensuite looks more like a spa and is as spacious as some of the bedrooms in the Roses' home.

Another thing the Roses like about the house is the spaciousness.

"The ceiling in the living room is a barrel ceiling," Debra said. "In the office is a flat ceiling. The bedroom has a big round dome."

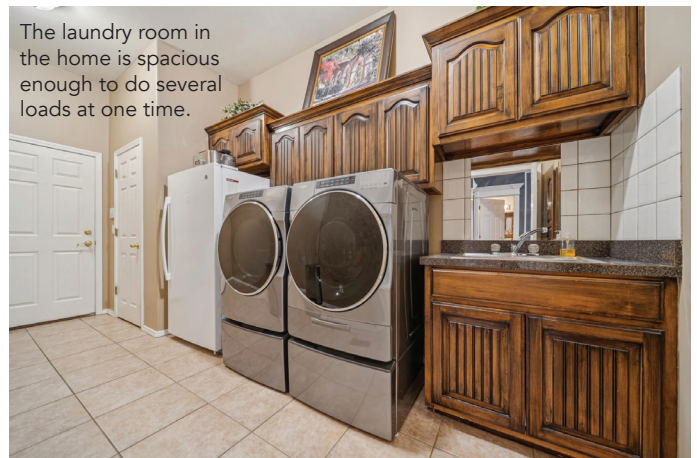
The Roses also find the lawn appealing.

"It's terraced all the way up," Steve said. "There are drains all over the year."

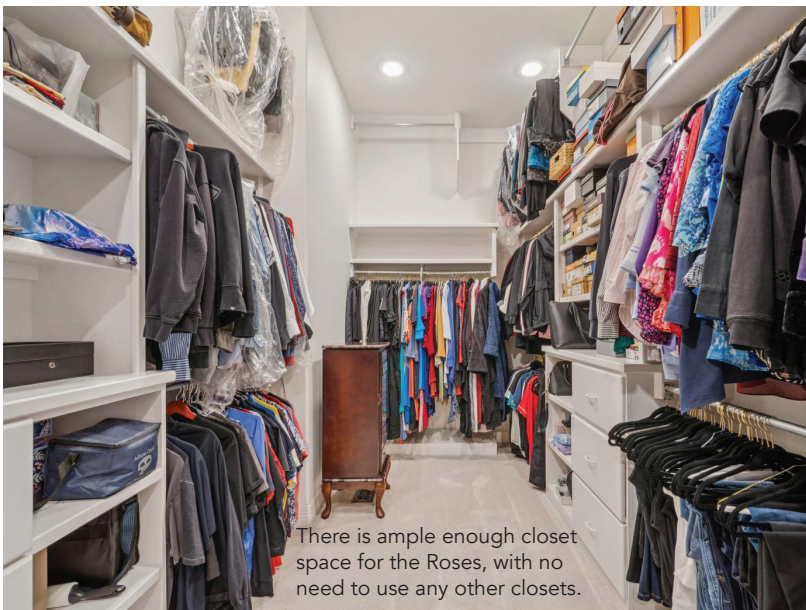
The garage, with room for three cars, is in the back of the house.

"No one can tell if you're home or not," Debra said. "We walk in the laundry room, and our bedroom's right here, and the office. We like that because we're all right here."

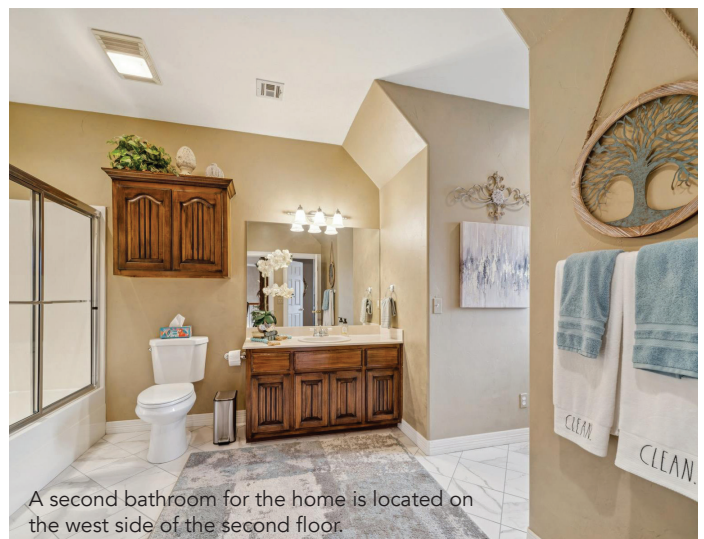
When looking onto the backyard, it's difficult to determine



The laundry room in the home is spacious enough to do several loads at one time.



There is ample enough closet space for the Roses, with no need to use any other closets.



A second bathroom for the home is located on the west side of the second floor.



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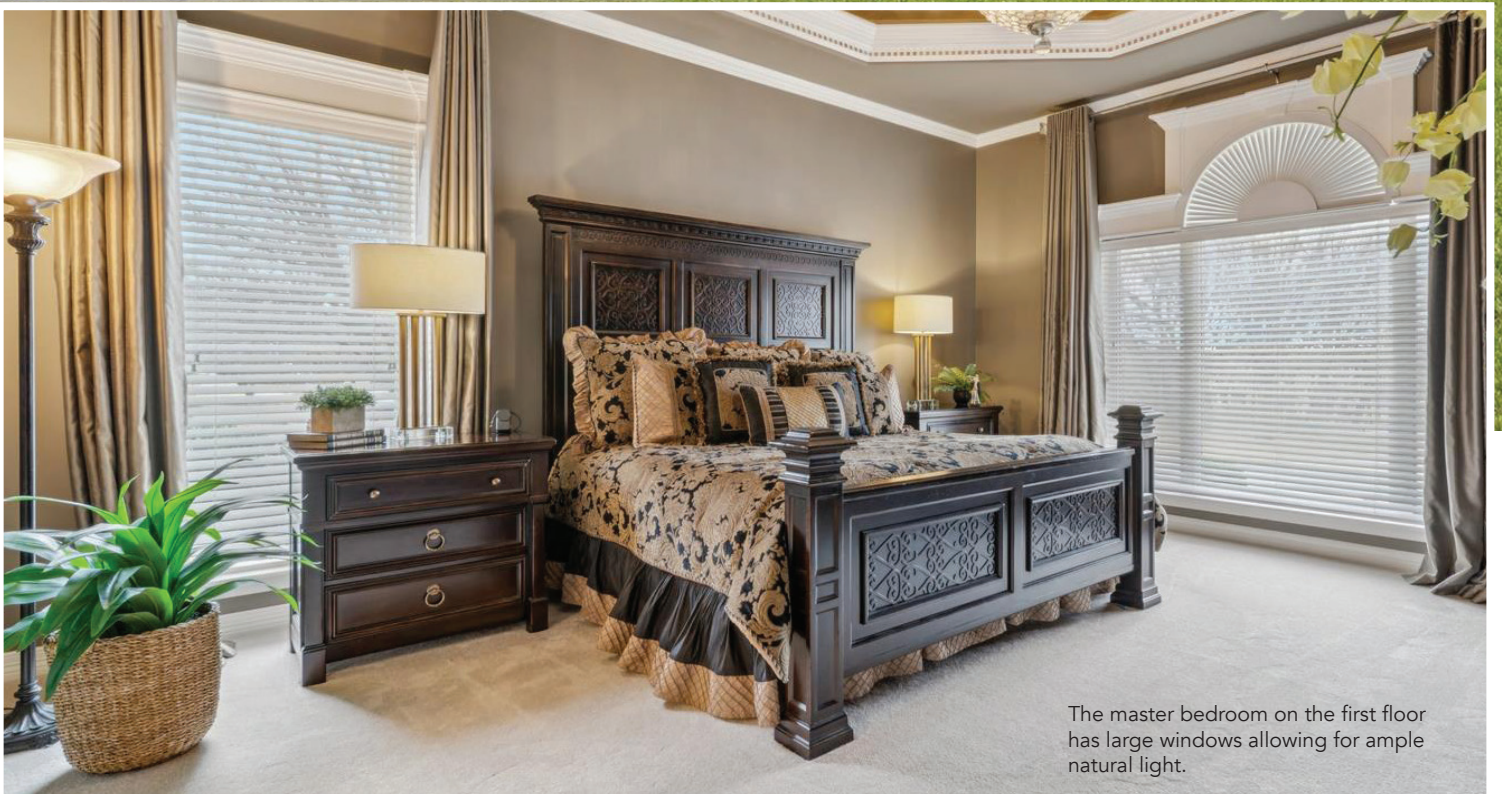
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The back facade to the home shows the entrance to the three-car garage and the patio.



The master bedroom on the first floor has large windows allowing for ample natural light.



An aerial view of the home shows the size of the yard, allowing for plenty of outdoor entertaining.



The living room, just to the left of the entrance, has room for a sofa, love seat and a baby grand piano.



The first thing a guest notices upon entry to the Roses' home is the winding staircase beckoning Scarlett O'Hara or Carol Burnett to come down the steps.

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where the Roses' property ends and the neighbor's begins.

"We didn't do anything to deserve this," Steve said. "We just bought and sold."

Debra tells the story of how they came upon the house.

"We were just driving one day, looking at houses," she said. "I told [Steve], 'I love that house,' just from the outside. Steve said we could never afford that."

Eventually the price dropped into the range they found acceptable.

"One of our real estate friends said, 'You don't want that house,' and I trusted her judgment," Debra said. "A few months later, she's listed the house and asked

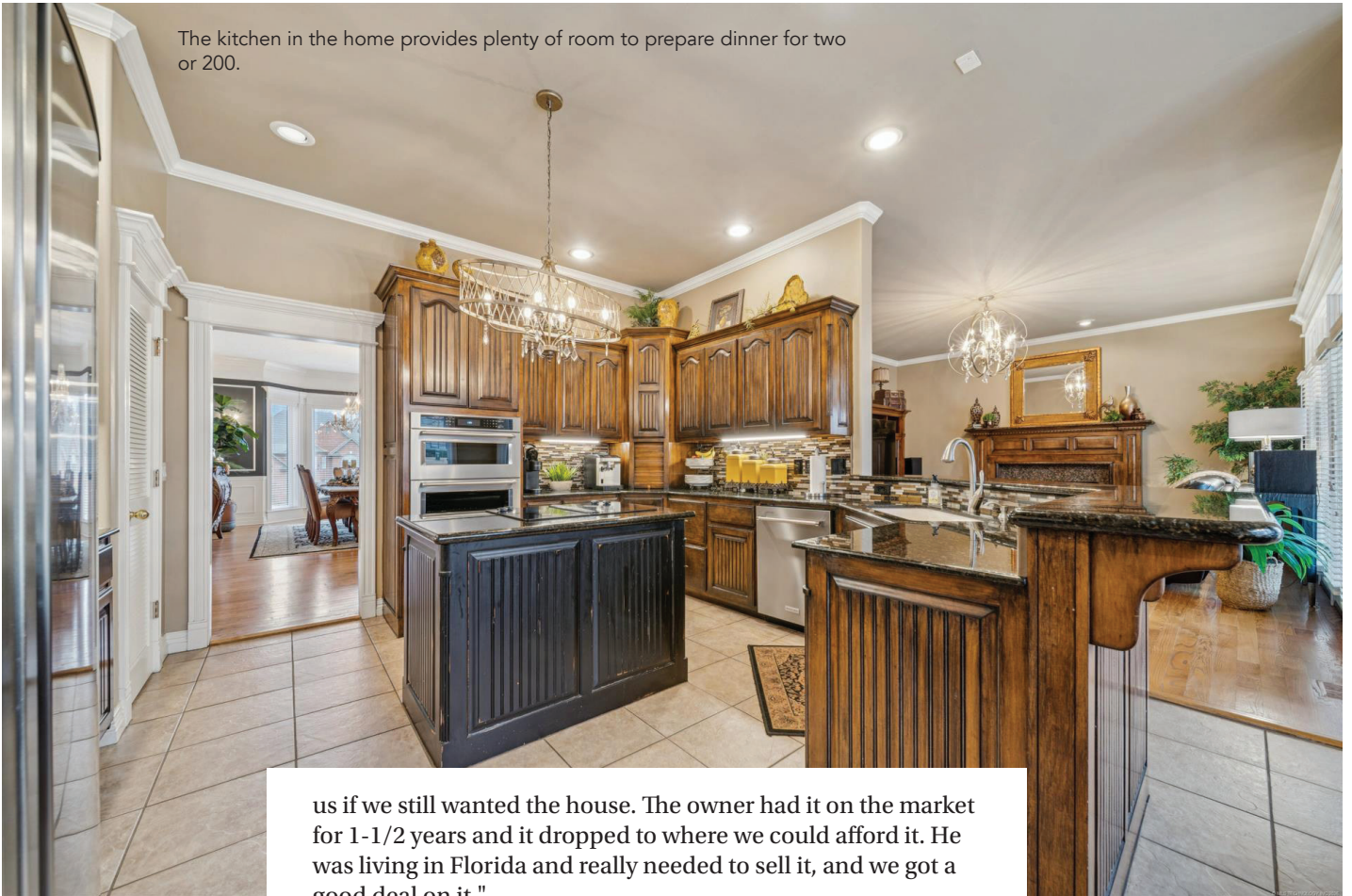
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The kitchen in the home provides plenty of room to prepare dinner for two or 200.

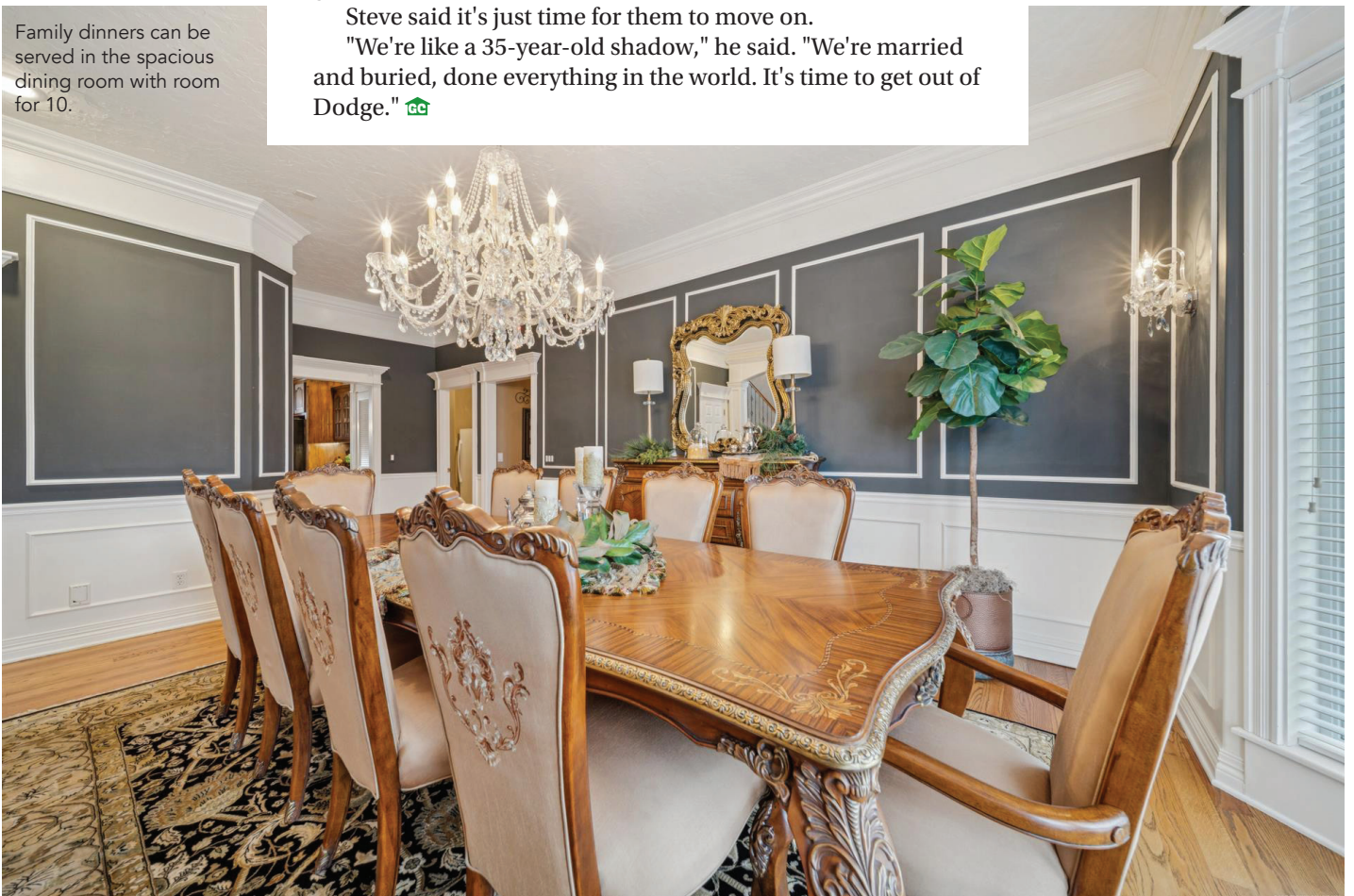


us if we still wanted the house. The owner had it on the market for 1-1/2 years and it dropped to where we could afford it. He was living in Florida and really needed to sell it, and we got a good deal on it."

Steve said it's just time for them to move on.

"We're like a 35-year-old shadow," he said. "We're married and buried, done everything in the world. It's time to get out of Dodge." 🏠

Family dinners can be served in the spacious dining room with room for 10.



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# *Dominique Embry puts cooking gene to good use*

By Melony Carey

The cooking gene, as renowned Chef Michael Twitty would say, runs deep in Dominique Embry's veins.

Her grandmother, Cassandra Gaines, former manager of the Muskogee Civic Center and the Roxy Theater, founded the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Soul Food Cook-Off that attracted hundreds of important personalities and chefs from around the country. Gaines had also produced a line of culinary products under the brand

Momma Cs Soul Food in a Jar, which was sold at Homeland stores across the region.

Sadly, Gaines passed away in 2016, but she left a legacy not only in her family, but throughout the state. In 2018, Embry and her mother, Aanje Wilkerson, launched Momma Cs Soul Food Kitchen in memory of her grandmother in the historic Smiths Drug Store, at the corner of Broadway and Ninth Street. When the restaurant outgrew



A plate of catfish fried in house-seasoned flour, paired with sautéed cabbage, sweet potatoes, green beans, macaroni and cheese, and hush puppies brings back memories of home.

Seasoned green beans, just like mom made.



An easy chocolate brownie baked in a heart-shaped cupcake tin makes a good Valentine's Day dessert.



that space, it moved to the former Pizza Hut location at 501 W. Shawnee.

Embry, who has a 5-month-old son, is an amazing, but subtle bundle of energy, handling her schedule as owner and manager of the restaurant with unfazed aplomb. In addition to being a mother and employer, she is also president of Main Street Muskogee, the organization responsible for BooNanza and the Downtown Muskogee Christmas Parade.

"Muskogee is my home and I want what is best for it. I attended the National Main Street Conference in Philadelphia and saw that everyone across the country has a common mission to revitalize historic downtowns," Embry said. "We have one of the most historic downtowns in the state and I want to help with that mission here."

Embry also considers Momma Cs Soul Food Kitchen a home for the many patrons who dine there daily.

"Everyone is family there, and we enjoy the relationships we have with people," she said. "The people are the most important thing."

A testament to this is the restaurant's offering free community dinners weekly through





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Embry with her son, 5-month-old Christopher Lamar Mims, Jr.



A family legacy of cooking includes Dominique's grandmother, Cassandra Gaines, and her mother, Aanje Wilkerson, shown here with Dominique (center).



Embry grates smoked cheddar and pepperjack cheese on the mac 'n' cheese while still warm.



the end of 2025 to offset cutbacks to EBT and food stamps.

Implicit in Embrys cooking is the seasoning. A favorite meal she remembers from childhood is her mother's slow-cooker roast, served with mashed potatoes and fried cabbage seasoned with garlic, onion powder, salt and pepper. Those seasonings and others carry over into almost every savory dish she prepares.

As to the importance of seasoning and flavors, Embry recalls patrons who have cried at the first taste of some of the soul food dishes, because they are reminded of their own mothers' cooking, which they haven't tasted in years.

This tells me we are doing something right, Embry said.

On the traditional menu at Momma Cs Soul Food Kitchen are fried pork chops, collard greens, fried catfish and chicken, and other delicious home-style dishes. Some of the new offerings on the menu are vegan bites, black bean burgers, and a catfish sandwich. The "soulrito" is a popular item fashioned after a burrito and stuffed with

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mac n' cheese, collard greens and chicken.

Along with Embry's calm demeanor is an intense faith in the power of prayer and belief. On the counter of the restaurant is a sign that says, Jesus paid it all.

Food is medicine for the soul, Embry said. It, along with prayer, can heal a variety of things both physical and spiritual.

Here to our good blessing she shares some of the recipes she prepares at home and at the restaurant. 



The go-to recipe for macaroni and cheese can be found in "Momma C's Soul Food Cookbook."

A decorative border at the top of the recipe card featuring stylized illustrations of various vegetables: a red chili pepper, a red tomato, a carrot, a yellow onion, a green bell pepper, and a bunch of green onions, all set against a light beige background with small orange dots.

## Cassandra's Macaroni and Cheese

2 cups macaroni  
2 tablespoons butter or margarine  
2-3 tablespoons flour  
Milk (2-1/2 to 3 cups)  
2-3 cups grated cheese  
1/4 cup diced bell pepper  
Dash of salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare macaroni according to package directions. Drain and keep warm. In large saucepan, bring milk, flour, salt and pepper to a boil. Cook, stirring occasionally until thickened, about 3-4 minutes. Stir in cheese in batches until it is melted and the sauce is smooth. Stir in the macaroni. Transfer the mixture to a shallow 1-quart baking dish. Bake 35-40 minutes or until golden; cool slightly before serving. Serves 6. (Note: Embry used delicious smoked cheddar and some pepperjack grated on top after the dish came out of the oven. Recipe sourced from Momma C's Soul Food Cookbook, circa 2013.)

A decorative border at the top of the recipe card featuring stylized illustrations of various vegetables: a red chili pepper, a red tomato, a carrot, a yellow onion, a green bell pepper, and a bunch of green onions, all set against a light beige background with small orange dots.

## Fried Cabbage

1 head of cabbage, roughly chopped  
Butter  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
1 small yellow onion, diced  
Granulated garlic  
Onion Powder  
Salt  
Black pepper

Sauté minced garlic and onion in butter until onion is wilted. Add cabbage and seasonings to taste. Continue frying on medium heat until cabbage is tender, about 7-10 minutes. Serve warm.

A decorative border at the top of the recipe card featuring stylized illustrations of various vegetables: a red chili pepper, a red tomato, a carrot, a yellow onion, a green bell pepper, and a bunch of green onions, all set against a light beige background with small orange dots.

## Easy Stuffed Brownies

1 box brownie mix  
Salted caramel cookie dough

Preheat oven to recommended temperature on the box. Mix brownies according to package instructions. Crumble cookie dough to your liking and blend into the brownie mix. Place in prepared pan or fill cupcake molds in the shape of hearts to make Valentine's Day special. Bake for recommended time on the box. Other flavors of cookie dough could be used.



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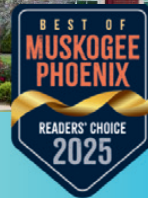
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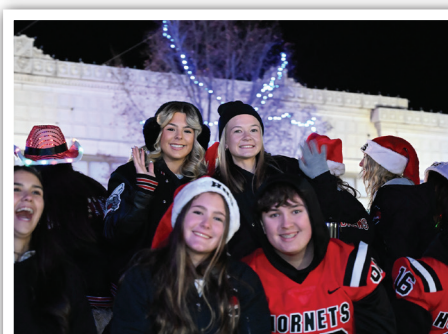
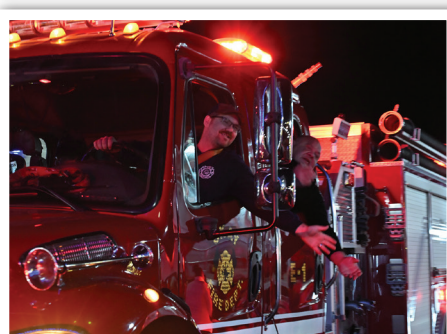
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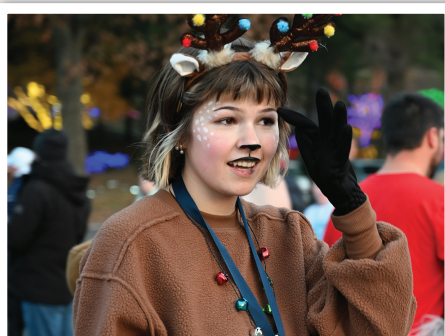
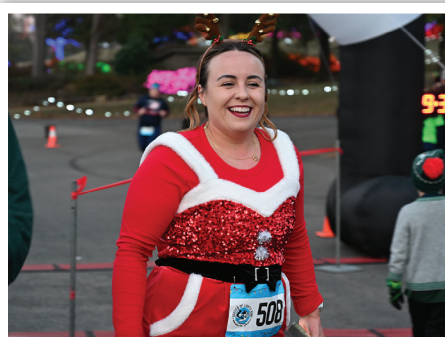
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