

Bell County Museum teaches children about Christmas traditions around the world

By Michele Weisman
The Belton Journal

Kayte Ricketts, education coordinator for the Bell County Museum, organized a free children's event called Holiday Fest.

It was held upstairs on Saturday, Dec. 13, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Children, through crafts, experienced how winter holidays and Christmas are celebrated around the world.

Families brought their children to create crafts and a holiday memory. Five activities were prepared for the kids to rotate through. At each table, there was an adult to guide the craft and a printed definition of who celebrates the occasion and why.

The first table was reindeer chow, a snack for reindeer. Oats and rainbow frosting sprinkles were mixed in small paper sacks. They were food and magic for Santa's reindeer.

The second table was for the Epiphany, celebrated on Jan. 6 in Hispanic cultures, the Philippines, and Spain. Teaching that the three



BELTON JOURNAL/Michele Weismann
Hudson Wiley, Canid Wiley, Bennett Wiley and Jeff Wiley work on crafts during holiday fest.

wise men brought gifts to Jesus when he was a baby, they made the Three Kings' crowns. Full paper size cut out crowns, Crayola pens, glue, and plastic gems were used to decorate them.

Next, the St. Nicholas Day table was prepared with photocopies of shoes to decorate, fold, and fill with candy. Germany, Poland, and

the Netherlands celebrate this bishop on Dec. 6, because he placed gifts in people's shoes.

The final craft was making a Christmas ornament to celebrate the birth of Christ. The children had a felt star, wreath, or snowflake to decorate with craft pom-poms.

To complete the global adventure, jingle

bells and play dough were available to build the tallest jingle structure possible, called the jingle bell maker challenge.

"I like my annual Holiday Fest," Ricketts said of teaching different cultures to the children who come to the museum.

Go to www.bellcountymuseum.org for more museum events.



BELTON JOURNAL/Michele Weismann
Ruby's Teahouse is just one of the stops on the annual Jingle Bell Stroll, which continues Friday and Saturday, Dec. 19 and 20, in downtown Belton.

Jingle Bell Stroll continues this weekend

By Michele Weisman
The Belton Journal

The annual Jingle Bell Stroll in downtown Belton is two weekends when the community can sip, shop, and stroll while collecting stamps from participating storefronts for the chance to win a prize.

The stroll began last weekend and continues Friday, Dec. 19 and ends on Saturday, Dec. 20 at 7 p.m. Completed stamp cards, turned in for a \$100 gift certificate, is sponsored by the Downtown Belton Business Alliance and Discover Downtown Belton.

A QR code leading to the event's online flyer brings the shoppers to a candy cane-lined street map.

Every shop is listed and its location mapped with a yellow bell. Store hours vary.

Once the stamps are collected from each participating store, the completed game cards are to be turned in at My Giving Tree by 7 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 20.

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Courtesy Photo
Christopher R. Torres-Cordero joined the ranks of the Belton Police Department upon graduating as one of 26 cadets from the Central Texas College Police Academy on Friday. He was celebrated by his family, friends, as well as fellow officers and Belton Chief of Police Larry Berg.

Belton gains new police officer

By Lynette Sowell
The Belton Journal

Last Friday morning, the Central Texas College Police Academy held a graduation ceremony for the Class of 2025 Charlie Class.

Among the cadets was Christopher R. Torres-Cordero, who also joined the ranks of the Belton Police Department. He was celebrated by his family, friends, as well as fellow officers and Belton Chief of Police Larry Berg.

Torres-Cordero completed the 720-hour course, which put him and the other cadets through an extensive training regimen to include defensive tactics, firearms and police vehicle operation, and they learn about topics such as victims' rights, Texas Penal Code, Texas Traffic Code, Texas Family Code, criminal investigation, stress management, problem solving and more. This prepared the cadets for the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement

licensing exam.

Dr. Michelle Carter, Chancellor, presented them each with the Chancellor's challenge coin.

"On the one side, I am acknowledging your accomplishment in completing the program and your courageous decision to pursue an honorable career in law enforcement. Engraved on the other side of the coin are character traits that I value both personally and professionally. I charge you to continue exemplifying these character traits throughout your career," she said. "Number one, integrity. Doing what's right, even when no one is looking, remaining

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Smith brothers retire after 74 years in grocery business



BELTON JOURNAL/Michele Weismann
Cecil Smith and his brother, Joe, are retiring after 74 years in the grocery business. The new owners will take up operations of the store on Dec. 19.

By Michele Weisman
The Belton Journal

Smith brothers Joe and Cecil are retiring after working in their family-owned Belton business of 74 years.

Smith Brothers Drive-In Grocery's last date of operation will be Thursday, Dec. 18, with a retirement party with family, employees, and customers. Owning three storefronts at one time, their current location at 921 E. 6th Street, is a convenience store with a gas station, car wash, and laundromat.

Their parents, Joe and Lula Smith, opened more than a grocery store in 1951;

they opened the doors to a family business that would become foundational for Belton, Texas, and their sons.

Joe, then twelve, and Cecil, nine, worked in the store when they got home from school and never left the business.

Cecil said, "Joe and I just immediately had a job."

"Cecil and I went through the ropes," Joe said. He recalled delivering groceries "all over town in the pickup" when he was 14.

The Smith brothers' dad changed the name of the first store from *Joe Smith's*

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LBHS senior cuts lunch debt by half

Special to the Journal

Lake Belton High School senior Taylor Rogers turned a simple idea into meaningful impact this fall, raising \$1,627 in door-to-door donations to help pay off student lunch debt on his campus.

His efforts erased approximately 54 percent of outstanding balances, lightening the load for dozens of Bronco families ahead of the holiday season.

Rogers, a lifelong Belton ISD student, selected this project as part of a community service requirement for a foreign exchange scholarship program. His inspiration sparked after watching a video of someone doing similar work in another community.

“I thought it was a great cause and something people would want to rally behind,” Taylor said. “There was anxiety at first knocking on strangers’ doors, but once I got past the first house, it felt easier. I really went into it wanting to improve my communication and leadership skills, and I was more excited for the opportunity than worried about what people might think.”

What surprised him most was the overwhelming community response.

“There were multiple people I

didn’t know who were willing to donate \$100 toward helping kids they’d never met,” Taylor shared. “It was inspirational. People can be a lot more generous than we give them credit for.”

Through the experience, he said he grew a deeper appreciation for the community.

“I definitely learned that our community is ready and willing to support each other. It really is a family for a lot of people, and we show up when someone needs it.”

Taylor credits his peers from the exchange program for encouraging him throughout the project, noting that sharing progress updates and feedback with them helped him stay motivated.

Lake Belton High School Principal Steele Hantgin said Taylor’s project reflects the heart of the campus community.

“Taylor exemplifies what it means to lead with initiative and compassion,” Hantgin said. “He identified a need, stepped outside his comfort zone, and took action that directly supports his classmates. His drive, generosity and humility make him a remarkable representative of Lake Belton High School and we couldn’t be more proud.”

With graduation on the horizon,



Courtesy Photo

Lake Belton High School senior Taylor Rogers presents a check to the district in the amount of \$1,627 after taking door-to-door donations to help pay off student lunch debt on his campus.

Taylor is already looking ahead. He hopes to pursue a career as a nuclear engineer, focusing on renewable and sustainable energy solutions, an interest shaped in part by his study-abroad experience in Costa Rica.

“I’m definitely excited for the future,” he said. “And I’m thankful I got such a great community to grow up with and learn from.”

Belton to direct \$28,000 in Child Safety Fees to BISD cross-guard programs

By David Stone
The Belton Journal

Bell County Tax Assessor-Collector Shay Luedeke presented Belton with \$28,012.39 in Child Safety Fee money collected during Fiscal 2025.

According to Luedeke, this year’s allocations mark a slight increase in funds collected and distributed to Bell County cities.

“These funds are generated by a \$1.50 fee collected on 333,600 eligible vehicles registered in the county during Fiscal 2025,” he said. “That total represents an increase of 25,517 registrations from 2024.”

“The grand total for Child Safety Fees is \$500,400, which is \$38,275.50 — or 8.28 percent — more than last year,” Luedeke added. “The county is permitted to retain 10 percent of the fees for administration. The remaining funds are distributed in accordance with the Texas Transportation Code.”

Child Safety Fee Allocations are distributed to Bell County municipalities based on population reported in the 2020 Census.

By Texas law, funds from Child Safety Fees must be used for Crossing Guard Programs, if a municipality has such a program. However, if a city does not have such a program, School Districts may use the funds to support programs that enhance child safety, health, or nutrition, including child abuse prevention and intervention, and drug and alcohol abuse prevention.

Funds can also be allocated for programs designed to enhance public safety and security, according to Luedeke.

Luedeke is presenting the funds during the various City

Council meetings, starting in Killeen and ending in Salado and Temple.

Below is a breakdown of this year’s allocations by city:

Bartlett — \$810.65
Belton — \$28,012.39
Harker Heights — \$40,217.15
Holland — \$1,306.04
Killeen — \$185,998.68
Little River-Academy — \$2,431.94
Morgan’s Point Resort — \$5,629.50
Nolanville — \$7,205.76
Rogers — \$1,351.08
Salado — \$2,927.34
Temple — \$99,709.70
Troy — \$2,882.30
Unincorporated Bell County — \$71,877.47

While some other area cities have decided to use these funds for other allowed purposes, Belton has chosen to honor the legislative intent of these fees and direct them to crossing-guard programs to ensure the safety of Belton ISD students, Luedeke said.

Also at last week’s council meeting, the Council approved reappointments to the Library Board of Directors and the Belton Economic Development Corporation Board.

Janice Pustka’s three-year term on the Library Board expired at the end of November, and she had expressed a desire to serve another term.

Brandon Bozon and Marion Grayson were reappointed to the EDC Board of Directors. Their three-year terms also expired in November.

BPD - From Page A1

strong in your moral and ethical convictions. Number two, excellence. Perform your duties at the highest level. Be diligent, never cut corners. And number three, service. As a public servant, I encourage you to always serve with dignity, honor and respect for yourself and others. May God bless you, give you wisdom throughout your career, protect you as you protect others and safely return you to your families and loved ones after every shift.”

The Top Gear Award for driving went to Jarrett Wilson of the Coleman Police Department, and the Top Gun Award went to James McConnell of the Jarrell Police Department.

The Honor Graduate, with the highest average, went to Nestor Marin, of the Harker Heights Police Department.

The class of cadets selected a class president in Justin Jaccaud, who joined the ranks of the Copperas Cove Police Department along with two others on Friday.

“To my classmates, what a team we’ve become. 26 strangers turned to a family, a dysfunctional one at times, but nonetheless a family. We pushed each other, we held each other accountable, and we lifted each other up. And most of all, when one of one of us struggled, the rest of us refused to let them fail,” Jaccaud told his fellow cadets.

“Today is not the finish line. It’s the starting point. The learning doesn’t stop here. The training doesn’t stop here. The responsibility only goes from here. As we move into field training with our agencies, we will face moments that test our judgment, our courage and our character, but we’re ready, because this academy prepares not just to do the job, but to honor the badge out there. We are the calm in the chaos. We are the steady voice in crisis. We are the line that stands between fear and safety and every call, every contact, every decision, is an opportunity to make someone’s darkest moments a little brighter.”

From our family
to yours...

Merry Christmas
& Happy New Year





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OBITUARIES



Green
Novalene Green
December 7, 1926 – December 14, 2025

Novalene (Caffey) Green, age 99, of Temple, passed away on Sunday, December 14, 2025 in Scott & White Hospital ICU.

She was born at home on December 7, 1926 in the little community of Tracy, Milam County, Texas. She was the firstborn of Lenza Eugene Caffey and Virginia Ruth (Duncan) Caffey. Her brothers and sister were Lenza Eugene Caffey Jr., Clement Dalton Caffey, William Wayne Caffey, Anita Ruth (Caffey) Davis, and Clyde Barkley Caffey. To this close knit family she was affectionately known as “Sister”!

Visitation will be held on Friday, December 19, 2025 from 5:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M. at Scanio-Harper Funeral Home, 3110 Airport Rd, Temple, Texas 76504. Funeral services will take place on Saturday, December 20, 2025 at 1:00 P.M. at Oak Park United Methodist Church, 5505 South 31st, Temple, TX 76502, Rev. Jonathan Mellette officiating, with burial at Greathouse Cemetery in Temple.

Novalene grew up on

a farm in Milam County between the communities of Sharp and Tracy. She graduated from Sharp High School in 1944. She was very compassionate, caring, and nurturing by nature, which led her to the field of nursing. Her Daddy thought she should pursue an administrative career. However, when she told him she felt a calling to take care of God’s people; he understood and changed his mind in support of her decision to be a nurse. She attended the Scott & White School of Nursing, graduated as a Registered Nurse and began a 37-year nursing career. Her first job in nursing was at Santa Fe Memorial Hospital where she enjoyed taking excellent care of the Santa Fe railroaders. She advanced through a variety of nursing positions and became the Director of Nursing. She held this position until the merger of Santa Fe and Scott & White Hospitals. Following the merger, her care focus shifted to Social Services Administration. She retired from her nursing career in 1992. She was an active volunteer in church, hospital, and community organizations. She was also a founding member of Oak Park UMC. She may have retired, but she never stopped being a compassionate nurse. She was sought after by family and friends for advice on their health concerns. Her response would always be “I won’t tell you what to do, but if it were me, this is what I would do.”

On August 20, 1952, she married Fred T. Green in a very early morning ceremony in Temple. Their honey-

moon was to Cuba, Central, and South America; a trip Daddy had won by selling more tickets than any other Pioneer agent. This was the trip of lifetime for them both. In 1953, Bradford Bruce was born and Brady Len followed in 1955. In 1957, Fred and Novalene became the owner/operators of the Buckhorn Poultry Ranch just south of Belton. It was here that they raised their two sons and ran the Ranch for almost 40 years.

Family and family gatherings were important to Mom. She loved Fred and the boys very much and took great pride in all her family and their accomplishments. She was an active supporter of all of Brad and Brady’s activities throughout their lives. She was an avid sports fan, specifically football, baseball, and basketball.

Mom was one of God’s Angels sent to be among us to show us how to live life and live it abundantly. She insisted the boys be polite, respectful, and kind. She was truly the Matriarch of both the Caffey and Green Families and held the respect of all who crossed her path. Mom was the most positive person you’d ever meet – never a negative thought – she’d always find something good in every situation or circumstance. She would greet everyone with a warm smile and an encouraging word. She had a heart bigger than life.

Novalene is survived by sons Brad Green and wife Betsy of Houston and Brady Green and wife Maria of Fair Oaks Ranch, a granddaughter

Virginia Flippin and husband Robbie and great-grandsons Landry, Carter, and Reece of The Woodlands, a grandson Jason Green and wife Julissa of Cypress and many extended family members. She was preceded in death by her husband, Fred, parents, Lenza and Ruth and brothers Lenza Jr. and Wayne.

Novalene’s family thanks CareAge HomeCare Team, Scott & White Hospital and Clinic Staffs for Mom’s great care; as well as the Morada residents and staff for their love and friendship towards Mom.

In lieu of flowers, memorials to the Oak Park United Methodist Church or to the donor’s charity of choice would be appreciated.



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Smith - From Page A1

Grocery to Joe Smith and Son's Grocery in 1965. When Joe and Cecil married, their wives helped at the stores too. Joe Smith's wife, Linda, and Cecil's wife, Peggy, rotated help at the stores.

Peggy said, "We're the last of the old-timey grocery stores. And we've been proud of that."

In 1985, the Smith family campaigned

for a "beer election," Joe said. "They passed the beer election by 17 votes to vote Belton wet."

In October 1985, they filed for and received a beer and wine license in Belton.

Joe, retiring at age 86, and Cecil, retiring at age 83, sold the family business. The new owners start operations on Friday, Dec. 19, 2025.

Stroll - From Page A1

Participating locations include Easy Life Boutique, Nic & Ned's Scoop Shop, My Giving Tree Gift Shop, iMERAKi, Level 3 & Drinks Near Me, Arusha Coffee & Ruby Tearoom, Candy's Beauty Lounge, Lindy Lu's on the Square, Creekside Cigar Lounge, and The Porch.

Some storefronts offer special discounts, raffles, and gifts with purchase. Closing times vary, as with Drinks Near Me that closes at midnight on Friday and Saturday.

Dee Dunbar was out for the first night of Jingle Bell Stroll. Wearing a new candy cane headband from iMERAKi, she took part in the extras the stores were offering for the event.

Dunbar said, "I needed a break and it's my day off."

Candy Abreu of Candy's Beauty Lounge said, "I love the downtown community... everybody's together to explore downtown."

Belinda Manzella, owner of Lindy Lu's on the Square, said, "Glad to be a part of Belton. Look at the courthouse and lights. It feels like we live in a Hallmark movie."

Ruby Tearoom, inside of Arusha Coffee, held a Candlelit Christmas Tea on the first night of the stroll. Customers drank tea and dined in candlelight.

The Jingle Bell Stroll continues Friday, Dec. 19 and Saturday, Dec. 20 for another chance to complete a stamp card, or start a new one.

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LIFESTYLES

THE BELTON JOURNAL

Local holiday shopping season is ‘wonderful’

By David Stone
The Belton Journal

The National Retail Federation says U.S. holiday sales will surpass \$1 trillion for the first time, projecting growth of 4.2 percent over 2024.

Here in Belton, retailers are doing their part to boost local sales.

“This year’s holiday shopping season has been wonderful and full of energy,” said Jessica Shelton, co-owner of iMERAKi, located in downtown Belton.

“Downtown Belton has seen a steady flow of locals and visitors looking for meaningful, unique gifts, and we’ve truly felt that excitement inside our store,” she said. “People are shopping earlier, supporting small businesses more intentionally, and really embracing the community feel of downtown.”

“Every weekend has been busy, joyful and full of families making memories together.”

Shelton said this year’s holiday shopping season started right after Halloween, and it has grown steadily in recent weeks.

“Many of our customers begin early because they know our items are one-of-a-kind, handmade or small-batch, so once something is gone, it’s gone,” she added. “We put out our Christmas collections early to give shoppers time to plan, decorate and shop stress-free.”

“At iMERAKi, we focus on creating a warm, welcoming, and memorable shopping experience,” she said. “Some of the things we do include curating unique, handmade and small-business products you won’t find anywhere else; create festive in-store displays and holiday decorations to create a cozy atmosphere; and offer gifts for all ages, from boutique clothing and accessories to art, plants, fragrances and seasonal items.”

“Our goal is to make iMERAKi a place where holiday shopping feels fun, personal and inspiring,” Shelton continued.

“iMERAKi is family owned and family operated — we do not hire additional workers during the holiday season,” she said. “We simply work harder, faster and together to make sure every customer feels welcomed and taken care of. It’s a busy season, but we truly love what we do and enjoy being hands-on with every part of the shopping experience.”

Shelton said the store targets local customers and visitors who love supporting small businesses and enjoy discovering products with personality and charm.

“We serve a wide range of families, gift-shoppers, UMHB students, event-goers and people looking for something different,” she said. “Anyone who appreciates creativity, community and boutique-style shopping will feel right at home here.”



Courtesy Photo

Holiday shopping is in full swing, and Belton shoppers and businesses are reaping the benefits.

Business has been a “whirlwind” so far this shopping season at downtown Belton’s Popcorn Friday.

“We’ve been busy trying to stay caught up with orders, bringing in new products and making sure we give customers the best experience,” said Andrea Rogue. “We have stayed busy, and we couldn’t be more blessed.”

“I would say Christmas shopping at our store started on Thanksgiving weekend, and after that it’s been non-stop for our team,” Rogue said. “We’ve even had to call in backup.”

To get customers into the store, Rogue and company have been posting constantly on social media.

“We have a blackboard outside the store with a fun theme, and we have a huge window display that we change according to the season,” she said. “We have some college students that come back during breaks to help us out.”

“We try to get people of all ages into our store, and we enjoy that they experience the nostalgia of a decked-out holiday window display,” Rogue added. “We host tea parties with Ruby Tea Room (another downtown business), and once a month we have a themed tea party that is to die for.”

“Popcorn Friday makes sure that there’s a little something for everyone,” she said. “If you are not a popcorn fan, we also have ice cream, pastries, coffee, fudge and a lot more. The options are limitless with the flavors we carry.”

Kim Earthman, owner of The Porch Boutique, 795 E Central in Belton, says business has been fair so far this

shopping season. She has been busy trying to bring in more customers.

“We are having some awesome sales to get women into the store,” Earthman said. “We’ve also done several sip-and-shops, Pink Friday and we took part in Small Business Saturday.”

The boutique, which targets mostly female shoppers, started seeing holiday shoppers as early as September.

“I do a lot of marketing on social media, and I promote local events,” she said. “I’ve done several specials to bring people in — for a week I had 25-percent-off items and some fall specials. I really did it up on Small Business Saturday.”

The Belton Area Chamber of Commerce encourages local residents to shop in town this holiday season and to support locally-owned businesses.

“Small businesses are the heart and soul of a community,” said Chamber President and CEO Randy Pittenger. “Locally-owned businesses are frequently asked to support booster clubs, youth sports, non-profit groups and more.”

“These businesses provide jobs, sales taxes and contribute to our quality of life,” he said. “As the chamber, we believe we need to take on the challenge of supporting our small businesses so the community can thrive.”

“Spending money at home not only keeps the businesses you spend with afloat, there is a huge trickle-down effect,” he said. “That \$25 gift card you bought down the street supports the entire community.”

Former student returns as a school nurse

Special to the Journal



Courtesy Photo

Registered Nurse Andrea Stonebrook takes a student’s temperature. A former Belton ISD student herself, Stonebrook returned to her roots and is now a nurse for the district.

leadership role and be an example to our students.”

Stonebrook’s path to nursing began in Belton ISD classrooms. As a junior in the district’s health shadowing program, taught by longtime educator Vicki Templin, she discovered a passion she did not know she had.

“Before that program, nursing was not on my radar. I did not really know much about it,” she said. “But that experience opened my eyes to what nursing truly is and how much of a ministry it can be. It changed everything for me.”

She later enrolled in Belton ISD’s licensed vocational nursing program during her senior year, which she describes as another pivotal moment.

“Belton ISD influenced me greatly through those programs,” she said. “They set me up for where I am today.”

Her passion for pediatrics grew through clinical experiences in high school and nursing


For Registered Nurse Andrea Stonebrook, stepping back into Belton ISD is nothing short of a dream realized. Once a student walking the halls of Lake Belton Middle School and Belton High School, Stonebrook has returned to the district in a new role: serving as a school nurse and caring for the very students who now stand where she once stood.

“It is very exciting to be returning to Belton ISD as a school nurse,” Stonebrook said. “It is a privilege to serve the community that supported me as a student. I feel such a strong connection here. It helps me build rapport with my kiddos and their families because I have lived this experience too.”

She added that the shift from student to professional is deeply meaningful.

“You go from being poured into to being the one pouring into others. I appreciate the opportunity to step into that

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See **NURSE**
Page A7

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What do snowmen call their kids?

-Chill-dren

What did the elf use when he sprained his ankle?

-A candy cane

What kind of currency do they spend in the North Pole?

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What do you call a reindeer with bad manners?

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Life on This Side of Heaven



John C. Perry

I recently listened to Erika Kirk's Thanksgiving tribute to her late husband, Charlie. In it, she used a phrase that has stayed with me: "On this side of heaven." As Christians, our ultimate hope is heaven when our earthly days are done. But what about the life we're living until that glorious day? What about your life on this side of heaven?

For much of my life, I was driven by work, earning enough to provide for my family and create a comfortable life. While that pursuit was important, it often became my primary focus. In the process, I overlooked some of life's greatest treasures: time with family, deeper involvement in my faith, and the simple joys of slowing down to notice God's gifts, flowers in bloom, new places to explore, laughter shared with friends.

Now, in my senior years, I see more clearly that God gave us life not just to labor, but to live fully. Work has its place, but so do family, friendships, service, and joy. These are blessings to be cherished. I've tried to embrace that truth by serving in my church and speaking with others, even strangers, about the saving

grace of Jesus Christ.

For over a decade, I've volunteered at the Body of Christ Community Clinic, where I've witnessed firsthand how serving others fills your own heart in unexpected ways. My wife and I travel when we can, savoring the adventures God allows us, and we've taken a leap of faith with a beach condo in Florida, where we hope to spend time together in gratitude and joy, splitting out time between Florida and Texas. Through it all, our goal remains the same: to honor God and to live life to the fullest.

I urge you to make time to help others. Find a not-for-profit to volunteer with, there are many in Central Texas that could use your hands and heart. I've discovered that when you

serve, you often receive more blessing than those you're helping. Jesus Himself said He came "not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). There is a unique joy in following His example, a joy that fills your spirit in ways money or success never could.

And don't be afraid to share the Good News of Christ. Start with family, then friends, and when you feel ready, even strangers. Jesus calls us to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20). Sharing your faith doesn't require a pulpit, it can be as simple as a conversation, a prayer, or a word of encouragement. You never know how God might use your witness to change a life.

Where are you in your journey? Perhaps you're weighed down by work, health struggles, or simply try-

ing to get by. My encouragement is this: do the best you can, always seek to do what is right, immerse yourself in Scripture, and place your hope in Christ Jesus. Life's challenges won't vanish, but you can rest assured that God is always with you, loving, guiding, and sustaining you.

Don't spend all your days with your nose to the grindstone, as I once did. Instead, live, love, and pursue joy. That is what God desires for you. Make the most of your time on this side of heaven.

John C. Perry is the Lay Leader with New Life Methodist Church. They meet every Sunday at 9 a.m. (Bible Study) and 10 a.m. (Worship Service) in the Salado Middle School at 1169 Williams Rd.



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Flu spikes may be waiting for Christmas gatherings

By David Stone
The Belton Journal

Fewer people across the nation are getting flu shots this year, and experts at the Centers for Disease & Prevention worry that could lead to a big breakout after family holiday gatherings.

Dr. Cheryl Warren, a physician at Baylor Scott & White Clinic in Salado, agrees with the CDC’s concern.

“The rate of vaccines — all vaccines — has decreased this year,” Warren said. “With fewer people getting flu shots, we could see spikes after families gather over the holidays. A lot of people are flying to their holiday get-togethers — a lot of people in small areas such as airplanes could fuel the spikes.”

While influenza has been reported in many areas of Texas, Dr. Warren said the Belton area has been spared so far.

“We haven’t seen many flu cases at the Salado clinic, but we’ve been trying to get people to take the shot,” she

said. “We are focused on educating our patients and getting them vaccinated. It’s definitely not too late to get the shot — it takes a couple weeks to be affected by the flu, so get a shot now and you will be protected over Christmas.”

While the flu has been scarce here in Central Texas, other respiratory issues have kept Warren and other doctors busy.

“You could say that the common cold is exceptionally common this year,” she said. “And, although cedar fever has been a little slow to surface so far, ragweed and grasses have been rough on allergy sufferers. Allergies can cause flu-like symptoms.”

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by specific influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs, leading to symptoms like fever, cough, sore throat and fatigue, and it can live on hard surfaces such as doorknobs and shopping cart handles.

“It can stay on these surfaces, spreading to shoppers,” Warren continued. “A

lot of people that are close together can help spread the disease. There’s also a theory that because there is less sunlight during the winter, vitamin D levels drop and people are less protected.”

The CDC recommends yearly flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older, calling it the best defense against

the flu, preventing millions of illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths annually.

Flu shots reduce severity if you do get sick, and they are available at doctors’ offices, pharmacies, clinics, and health departments across Bell County.

See **FLU**
Page A8

Belton ends the year with sales tax revenue down 1.4% compared to 2024

By Lynette Sowell
The Belton Journal

The office of acting State Comptroller Kelly Hancock’s office released its monthly sales tax revenue report last week for December and the City of Belton will round out the year with a little more than \$9.6 million in sales tax revenue.

This month, Belton will receive \$771,748.57 in sales tax disbursements, down 8.11 percent compared to last December.

Statewide disbursements to Texas cities are up 7 percent more than December 2024.

The December sales tax report is for sales made in October 2025.

The City of Temple is receiving \$3,154,246.80, down 0.40 percent compared to December 2024.

Morgan’s Point Resort will receive \$35,861.25, up 7.18 percent compared to last December.

Troy will receive \$100,099.96, up 5.92 percent compared to December 2024.

Over in Nolanville, sales tax revenue is down 35.8 percent compared to last December, with Nolanville to receive \$122,428.75. Holland’s revenue check is \$18,932.86, up 47.92 percent compared to December 2024.

Salado sees a slight decrease of 0.1percent this month, and will receive \$78,559.81.

Harker Heights likewise sees a slim decrease of 0.95 percent for December 2025, and will receive \$889,818.58.

The City of Killeen’s sales tax revenue is up 2.04 percent at \$2,886,637.93, overall up 1.56 percent for 2025.

December 2025 sales tax payments to area cities		
Belton	\$771,748.57	down 8.11%
Harker Heights	\$889,818.58	down 0.95%
Holland	\$18,932.86	up 47.92%
Killeen	\$2,886,637.93	up 2.04%
Morgan’s Point Resort	\$35,861.25	up 7.18%
Nolanville	\$122,428.75	down 35.8%
Salado	\$78,559.81	down 0.1%
Temple	\$3,154,246.80	down 0.40%
Troy	\$100,099.96	up 5.92%
Percentages reflect a monthly increase or decrease compared to December 2024		

Nurse - From Page A4

school, making her return to Belton ISD feel both natural and deeply personal.

“I love having that one-on-one connection with my kiddos every day,” she said. “In a hospital, it is often in and out. Here, I get to walk alongside them, support them and their families, and truly connect.”

Director of PK–12 Career Readiness Denise Ayres said Stonebrook’s story demonstrates the purpose behind Belton ISD’s health science pathway.

“Andrea is exactly why these programs matter,” Ayres said. “She represents what happens when students are given real experiences, real mentors and real opportunities to discover their purpose. Her return to Belton ISD as a nurse is a powerful reminder that we are preparing students for life, not just graduation.”

Superintendent Dr. Malinda Golden echoed that pride.

“Seeing Andrea come full circle is incredibly inspiring,” Dr. Golden said. “She is an empowering example of how our educators plant seeds that grow into meaningful careers and service. Our students can look at her and see what is possible. We are so proud to welcome her home.”

Stonebrook also believes strongly in the district’s commitment to grow its own healthcare professionals.

“When you return to Belton to serve, it builds stronger community con-

nections,” she said. “I understand the culture and the values of this district because I lived them. That helps me serve better and gives families a sense of continuity of care.”

She hopes her story inspires students to see their own potential paths. “There are meaningful career opportunities right here at home,” she said. “I love getting to talk to students about that and be an example. Investing in people who are personally committed to Belton ISD strengthens the entire district.”

Her advice for students entering the health science pathway is heartfelt. “Keep an open mind,” she said. “Healthcare is always changing. Have a willingness to learn, stay confident in your abilities and lead with compassion, integrity and empathy. It will be challenging, but stay strong and continue on.”

When asked to summarize her journey in one sentence, Stonebrook shared, “Transitioning from hospital nursing to becoming a school nurse has allowed me the honor of caring for and being an example to the next generation in the community where my own nursing journey began.”

Belton ISD is proud to celebrate Stonebrook’s return and the powerful impact of its health science programs, which continue to prepare students for meaningful careers and service in their own community.



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Flu- From Page A7

While older vaccines targeted three viruses, newer ones cover four, according to information provided by the CDC.

Like Dr. Warren, the CDC is concerned about declining flu vaccination rates, especially among children and minority groups, leading to increased severe illness, hospitalizations and deaths.

Recent data showing lower coverage than prior years and a rise in vaccine hesitancy because of side-effect concerns, mistrust and lack of perceived need. To combat this, the CDC launched campaigns such as “Wild to Mild” to highlight benefits, but it faces challenges with misinformation and addressing disparities, emphasizing that yearly flu shots are crucial for preventing severe outcomes and reducing overall health burden.

The 2025 National Survey on Respiratory Diseases, conducted in November, explored vaccination uptake, public perceptions, barriers to vaccination and trusted sources of information.

Of those responding to the survey, 45 percent said they have received at least one respiratory vaccine since September. About 34 percent said they have had flu shots, and 25 percent said they have had COVID-19 vaccines since September of this year.

Pneumococcal (8 percent) and RSV (6 percent) vaccines had lower uptake.

When asked to select one option, 44 percent of US adults cited healthcare professionals and 13 percent cited the CDC as the most trusted sources for vaccine information.

Top barriers to vaccination include concerns about side effects, lack of recommendations from healthcare professionals, doubts about efficacy, and concern about getting sick from the vaccine.

Among adults who have not received a flu vaccine this respiratory season, 16 percent expressed safety concerns about vaccine side effects, while 13 percent said they “never get sick.”

Similar patterns emerged for COVID-19, with 20 percent citing worries about side effects and 12 percent saying no healthcare professional has recommended vaccination.

For both flu and COVID-19, 12 percent of unvaccinated adults stated that vaccines do not work very well and 12 percent are concerned about getting sick from vaccines. With so many mixed messages on vaccines this season, a notable percentage of US adults are reporting confusion on guidance around respiratory vaccinations, according to the CDC.

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Sniffin ends coaching career with Belton Tigers

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

Brett Sniffin's career is complete. For more than three decades, the veteran head coach dedicated himself to football, guiding multiple teams to prominence on the field, including Belton. After six successful seasons with the Tigers, though, Sniffin is stepping away from the sport. Sniffin announced his retirement Monday, concluding a run like nothing Belton fans have ever experienced. In 2020, Sniffin inherited a 3-7 squad, and in his first campaign, the program was forced to navigate its way through the coronavirus pandemic, and the result was another three-win season. Then, everything changed. During the next five years, Sniffin

guided the Tigers to the playoffs every season, becoming the only head coach in school history to accomplish the feat. With a 6-5 record, Belton made its first playoff appearance under Sniffin, and the Tigers followed the showing by winning a combined 19 games and celebrating consecutive district championships in the ensuing two years. It was Belton's first league title since 1974. The Tigers encountered adversity in 2024, losing seven games to start the season before earning two critical victories to close the campaign and extend the playoff streak. In his final season, Sniffin led Belton to a 5-6 record, bringing his overall record to 35-31 with the team. For his career, Sniffin won 110 games with only 53 defeats, qualified for the playoffs in all but one season and hoisted seven

district championships. The son of a football coach, Sniffin followed in his father's footsteps, beginning his career in 1992, and two years later, he was part of Iowa's Hudson High School's state championship team, serving as the program's defensive coordinator. At Fort Bend Ridge Point, where he spent the first eight of his 14 years as a head coach, Sniffin led the team to the 2015 state semifinals. He was 75-22 as the Panthers' first head coach with two undefeated regular seasons. While the decision will undoubtedly alter the Tigers' trajectory, whoever takes over will be set up for success thanks to Sniffin. Belton averaged 30.5 points last season, topping the 40-point plateau three times, and multiple key components from the unit are set to return. Atop the list is standout receiver

Gavin Ross, who rewrote the school's record book as a junior, when he caught 110 passes for 1,478 yards and 13 touchdowns. It was the seventh most receptions in Class 5A, Division II history. Additionally, dual-threat quarterback Will Shepard, who passed for 1,792 yards and 15 touchdowns and rushed for 631 yards and 10 touchdowns, and running back Javid Planz (87-449, 5TDs) will be seniors. Offensive linemen Beckett Butler, Jaxon Simmons and Ben Gutierrez, who are juniors, and sophomores Frederick Makubi and Cason Morton are also poised to continue contributing. Defensively, sophomore linebackers Alex Carpenter and Oakley Torres and junior defensive back Azian Wilkinson combined for 181 total tackles, four sacks, four fumble recoveries, three interceptions and three caused fumbles.

No. 7 Lady Broncos continue to roll collecting second tourney championship

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

The streak continues. For more than a month, the Lady Broncos have been competing, traveling across the state to play some of the best teams possible, and so far, nobody can keep pace. Class 5A No. 7 Lake Belton extended its perfect start to the season Tuesday, winning its 18th straight game after collecting a second tournament championship. Over the weekend, the Lady Broncos took part in the Mineral Wells tournament, posting four victories en route to the title. In the opener against Nolan Catholic, Lake Belton received 12-point, seven-rebound showings from both Aniya Taylor, a junior point guard, and sophomore teammate Alexa King in a 51-31 win. Olivia Dann, a freshman small forward, finished with nine points and nine rebounds. The following day, the Lady Broncos put together another one-sided performance, beating Eagle Mountain by 44 points, 75-31 as King connected for a game-high 23 points, while Taylor (16 points, 10 rebounds), Dann (12 points) and sophomore guard Erica Taylor (10 points) contributed double-digit offense. That afternoon against Lubbock Trinity Christian, Alexa King guided Lake Belton to a 67-35 win, scoring 17 points, and she was complemented by a 14-point outing from junior shooting guard Gemma Pierce. Dann also

scored 11 points, and Aniya Taylor had 10 points. With the trio of victories, the Lady Broncos advanced to the tournament's championship against the host Lady Rams, and once again, it was not competitive. Lake Belton limited Mineral Wells to just one first-quarter point as it created a 15-point cushion and never eased up, claiming the title with a 61-31 win. Aniya Taylor finished with 14 points and was crowned the event's most valuable player. Additionally, Ariella Polley, a senior swingman, and sophomore shooting guard Layla King scored 13 points and 11 points, respectively, and each was placed on the all-tournament team. On the heels of the outing, the Lady Broncos returned home Tuesday and dominated visiting Taylor 49-17. The contest marked Senior Night for the program, which celebrated center Amara Sanchez and Polley. Although Lake Belton has constructed a strong start, the goal is to find success during the District 16-5A schedule and in the playoffs, and the Lady Broncos will not have to wait long for the opportunity. Lake Belton hosts Madisonville on Friday with tipoff set for 4:30 p.m. before taking some time off for the Christmas holiday. Then, the Lady Broncos return to action Dec. 29, opening play at the three-day Killeen ISD tournament and follow with a trip to Salado on Jan. 2. League play starts one week later as Lake Belton plays at Belton. Last season, the Lady Broncos placed third in the district's final standings with a 5-5 record.

Broncos looking to extend win streak in game with Smithville

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

The Broncos play their final game before breaking for Christmas on Friday, hosting Smithville at 3 p.m. With a victory, Lake Belton would take a three-game winning streak into the holiday after beating Georgetown Gateway on the road Tuesday evening. In the fourth quarter, the Broncos limited the Gators to just four points while senior shooting guard Dezmin Ravizee connected on a trio of 3-pointers in the period to propel Lake Belton to a 49-41 win. The Broncos led 12-9 following the first period and stretched the advantage to six points, 26-20, by halftime. A nine-point third quarter for Lake Belton, however, aided Gateway, and the Gators rallied to claim a 37-35 cushion, but it was quickly deflated. Ravizee was responsible for all but one field goal in the final quarter as he finished with a game-high 17 points. All 12 of his second-half points came on 3-pointers. He was complemented by Ameer Williams, a sophomore guard, and senior Christian Onchweri, who posted 11 and eight points, respectively. Additionally, junior guard Michael Lockett had five points. The performance came on the heels of an up-and-down trip to the Robinson tournament. The Broncos emerged from the event with a 2-2 record after alternating wins and losses throughout their

stay. Lake Belton (13-3) fell to Mexia 66-57 in the opener before bouncing back to defeat Marble Falls by eight points, 39-31. The Broncos followed with a 55-48 loss to Tomball Concordia and 58-36 victory against Hillsboro. During the four-game span, Lockett averaged 14 points and six rebounds, while junior teammate Jackson Striegler, a center, averaged eight points and five rebounds. Adding to Lake Belton's offensive balance, Ravizee and Williams also averaged eight points apiece. Following the contest against Smithville, the Broncos are idle until opening play at the two-day China Spring tournament Dec. 29. Lake Belton then plays at home versus the homeschool Austin Royals (Jan. 2) and China Spring (Jan. 6) and travels to Gatesville (Jan. 9) before embarking on its District 16-5A schedule. The Broncos begin the 10-game slate by hosting Waco on Jan. 16. Lake Belton has not made the playoffs since 2022, when it was a Class 4A program and fell to eventual regional finalist Austin LBJ 68-47 in the opening round. In the seasons since, the Broncos have not finished better than sixth in the standings. Like last season, No. 14 Killeen Ellison and No. 25 Belton are poised to remain among the league's elite, leaving Lake Belton to battle with Killeen Chaparral, Waco University and Waco for the other two playoff berths.

Tigers have strong showing in Pflugerville ISD tourney

By Aries Ramos
The Belton Journal

The Belton Tigers boys basketball team continued its strong early season run with a successful showing at the PFISD Tournament, followed by a convincing home victory over Manor on Dec. 16. Belton entered the PFISD Tournament facing a competitive field and responded with a 4-1 overall record. The Tigers opened tournament play with a solid win over Rockwall, setting the tone. That momentum carried into a dominant performance against Pflugerville

Connally, where Belton pulled away early and never looked back. The Tigers followed with another decisive victory over El Paso Eastlake, using pressure and scoring depth to create separation. One of the most competitive matchups of the tournament came against Dallas South Oak Cliff. In that contest, Belton relied on execution in the closing minutes to secure a nine point win. Throughout the tournament, Ty Johnson provided steady leadership and earned All-Tournament recognition. Noah Childers and Jay'dn

Loggins were reliable scoring options, while also facilitating offense and creating opportunities for others. Luke Munden spacing the floor and capitalizing on scoring chances when defenses collapsed. Belton's ability to draw production from multiple players made the Tigers difficult to match up against over the course of the weekend. Belton closed tournament play with a loss to St. Michael's, but the result did little to overshadow the overall performance. Daniel Briscoe and Abran Knight gave the Tigers a physical presence inside,


controlling rebounds and battling in the paint. Gavin Ross brought energy and defensive disruption, while Keishawn Coles provided valuable minutes off the bench. The Tigers left the tournament with confidence and an improved overall record of 13-2. Belton carried that momentum into its Dec. 16 matchup against Manor. The Tigers jumped out to a 20-10 lead after the first quarter, setting the pace early. Belton extended its advantage before halftime, putting together a 25 point second quarter to take a 45-23 lead into the break.

After halftime, Belton maintained control, closing the third quarter on a 16-6 run to widen the gap. The Tigers' defensive effort limited Manor's opportunities while allowing Belton to dictate tempo. Belton went on to secure a 75-49 victory, with Childers leading all scorers with 18 points. Belton will look to continue its strong play when it faces Temple on Dec. 19. As district play approaches, the Tigers will aim to maintain defensive focus, ball movement, and balanced scoring while building on an already impressive start to the season.



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Sports Briefs

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

Tigers underclassmen swimmers Micah Rodriguez, Brayden Ludwig and Luke Brunsting delivered impressive outings at last weekend’s Killeen ISD meet.

The trio helped Belton place ninth in the final standings with nine points.

Rodriguez, a sophomore, was third in the 200-yard freestyle with a time of 2 minutes, 9.14 seconds, and he was seventh (59.12) in the 100 freestyle.

Brunsting was eighth (2:47.01) in the 200 individual medley and 19th (1:05.92) in 100 freestyle, while Ludwig was 10th (6:47.22) in the 500 freestyle and 32nd (29.93) in the 50 freestyle. Both are freshmen.

Waco Midway emerged with the team title, producing 142 points. Lake Belton was seventh (12).

Belton returns to action Jan. 5, when it hosts a competition against Lake Belton and New Tech.

WRESTLING

The Tigers and Lady Tigers return to action Saturday at Leander Vista Ridge.

The event is one of three remaining on Belton’s regular-season schedule.

Lake Belton will also be in attendance at Vista Ridge after traveling to Burleson last week.

The Lady Broncos were 1-2-1 at the meet as Anna Huffman, Kamryn Vaden and Lorelei Scallorn earned individual victories, while the Broncos were 2-2 thanks in part to wins from Joey Casmus, Carl Huffman, Jesse Whitmire and Kameron Adams

LAKE BELTON SOFTBALL

The Lady Broncos will be holding an informative meeting regarding tryouts for the upcoming season Dec. 18 at 5:30 p.m.

Coaches will be on hand to share information with players and parents regarding guidelines for how the

tryout process will work later in January.

The meeting is for all potential players of any grade.

For more information, contact Lady Broncos head coach Kelsie McEachern at Kelsie.McEachern@BISD.net.

BELTON SOFTBALL

The Lady Tigers will conduct tryouts for the upcoming season on Jan. 9 from 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. and on Jan. 10 from 9 a.m. to noon.

Participants must be academically eligible, have a current physical on file with the school and have submitted all other necessary paperwork.

Final cuts will be made Jan. 10, and practice begins Jan. 12, when there will be a mandatory parent meeting at 6 p.m.

For any questions, contact Belton head coach Morgan Birkel at Morgan.Birkel@BISD.net.



**Take control:
Why budgeting
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restrictive**

Scot Hrbacek, CFP® Financial Advisor

Budgeting doesn’t have to feel restrictive. In fact, it can be empowering. A budget simply helps you understand your money flow and align it with what matters most.

You might need a budget if you’re starting out in life, spending more than you earn or working toward a big goal like buying a home or retiring. Major life changes — marriage, a new baby, job or retirement — are also great times to reassess.

Start small: track your income and expenses for 30 minutes a week. Pair it with something enjoyable to make it easier.

Use apps or spreadsheets to simplify the process.

There’s no one-size-fits-all approach. Whether you prefer detailed categories or broad ones, find what works for you.

Review regularly and adjust as life changes.

The goal isn’t perfection — it’s progress. A good budget frees you to spend wisely on what matters the most and save with confidence.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor.

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Lady Tigers complete program sweep at Pflugerville Connally

By Aries Ramos
The Belton Journal

The Belton Tigers girls basketball team has opened the preseason with encouraging results, beginning with a solid road victory at Pflugerville Connally before following up with a strong showing at the Jarrell Invitational.

Belton completed a program sweep at Pflugerville Connally with a 47–32 varsity win, controlling the game through team-focused offense and consistent communication on defense. The Tigers established control early and maintained it throughout the night.

The Tigers found success inside, led by Emma Harvey, who finished with 15 points and collected double digit rebounds. Harvey’s performance helped Belton control the boards and establish a steady offensive rhythm. Balanced scoring and defensive play allowed the Tigers to build separation as the game progressed.

Defensively, Belton limited Connally’s scoring opportunities by forcing contested shots and limiting second chance points. The Tigers’ attention to detail on the defensive end reflected the team’s continued growth during the preseason.

Following the road win, Belton competed at the Jarrell Invitational, where the Tigers finished with a 3–2 record and earned third-place honors. Belton went 2–1 in pool play, placing second in its pool after a loss to Academy Little River. The tournament provided several competitive matchups as the Tigers continued to develop early season chemistry.

One of the tournament’s key games came against La Grange, where Belton secured a three-point win after a strong fourth-quarter effort. The Tigers scored 22 points in the final period to turn a close contest in their favor. Emma Flory converted a critical and one play during the late stretch, while Isabella Warner knocked down a three pointer in the closing moments to help seal the win.

Warner was a consistent offensive presence throughout the tournament and earned All-Tournament recognition. Defensively, Aubrey Edwards and Ke’Ara Shanks provided pressure and energy that helped limit opponents, while Flory supplied steady leadership on both ends of the floor.

As the preseason continues, Belton will aim to build consistency while preparing for district play, with an emphasis on defensive effort, rebounding, and balanced contributions across the lineup.



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Belton Lake: Stillhouse:

FAIR. Water stained; 76 degrees; 0.26 feet above pool. White bass fishing is good and getting stronger with each passing cold front as the water cools through the 70s. Fish are gathering in large schools and using bottom features in 32-42 feet of water most of the morning and in the late afternoons after feeding briefly in shallow water right around sunrise. The MAL Lure, original or heavy, and with either a white tail or chartreuse tail is a good lure to have on the rods right now. Once a school of fish is found on sonar use your trolling motor to stay on top of them, then drop the lure to bottom and crank it up fast enough to ensure the blade starts spinning and stays spinning. Observe fish reaction using live imaging sonar or 2D sonar. Once the fish settle down and no longer chase, move on and look for the next school. No bird activity, and very limited topwater activity typically with cloud cover just after sunrise. Report by Bob Maindelle, Holding the Line Guide Service. Unseasonably warm conditions have bass holding in a summer pattern. The most consistent bite is coming from nomadic schools chasing shad, best located with forward-facing sonar. Weightless soft plastic jerkbaits and mid-strolling presentations are producing steady action. A few scattered fish can still be caught around submerged vegetation and shoreline cover, but those bites have been less consistent.

FAIR. Water stained; 70 degrees; 0.59 feet above pool. We are at peak fall fishing conditions now for white bass and hybrid striped bass. The fishing is excellent and will likely stay this way until the water temperature a below 60 de-grees in a few weeks. The only thing that could make this better is the arrival of our migratory, fish-eating birds like gulls and terns. A few are present, but so far have been unhelpful locating fish. Sonar remains the staple for finding fish in 30-35 feet around sunrise and sunset, then 35-52 feet the rest of the day. The MAL Dense worked vertically by cranking it upward through the lower third of the water column assisted by viewing this on Garmin LiveScope is my go-to tactic. Report by Bob Maindelle, Holding the Line Guide Service. Fall conditions have bass scattered, making it difficult to find big groups or consistent patterns. Large schools of nomadic bass are roaming the main lake chasing shad. Bass fishing is fair utilizing forward-facing sonar and mid-strolling small minnow-style soft plastics. For bigger bites, fish a football jig along steeper rocky shorelines. Report by Ander Meine, Bassquatch Fishing.

Fishing REPORT

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EDITORIAL

Santa Claus

Pleasant Ramblings • Mark Magnan

We are well past Thanksgiving and into December so we are into the official Holiday season. Even the weather is helping a bit, those cold mornings are about as much as we are going to get here in Texas.

When I was young, I looked forward to Christmas like most kids. It seemed like it took more than a year to get back to Christmastime for us kids. We started back to school and it seemed like we just couldn't wait until we could get back to the Holidays again. Those first few days back to school we either had something we could show or we spent a few days bragging about what was under the tree on Christmas morning.

Every couple of years we might get a new bicycle or something big like that. Video games were not even on the horizon for me, it was something that required me to get out of the house.

I think the progression in bicycles was one of the biggest series of similar gifts that I had. I remember the basic, but it was a nice, bike. Then a little fancier version of that style. Finally I got my first "ten speed" or "English racer" bicycle. That was something to be proud of, of course other kids in the neighborhood got something comparable, but that was fine. It wasn't a competition in who had the best or most expensive bike, just having a newer bike so we could all ride together was what was important. The best thing about getting a "ten speed" bike was that I could ride the long trip to my friend's house and not be completely tired by the time I got there, so we could take off again. Those single speed bikes were a lot of work!

One of the things I remember about the holidays, well a series of things, was the shopping. Now my father only went shopping

when we needed something. I always looked forward to the beginning of school because I got everything new, from socks to shirts to school supplies. It was a completely new beginning. Of course, all of my clothes from the previous year were either getting worn out or were getting too small.

Around Christmastime we often went shopping for just no reason. I think it was my father's way of getting me out and enjoying the season. We had a couple of nice stores that we visited during the year, so the Holiday season was the same. One of those stores had garnered the nickname of "Needless Markup" by a competitor some time back, although I remember it as a place we went when my father needed a new work suit or something for Sunday church services. I didn't realize how expensive that store really was until later in life. During

the holidays it was decorated well and seemed to embrace the spirit of the season. One of the other stores was similar in selections, and both were multi levels, which was always fun because riding the escalators was an interesting experience, okay, for a kid that was exciting.

Around Christmas they had Santa and his big chair along with a few other things to make it a lot more official looking. Unlike a famous Christmas movie, there was no slide for when you were done listing your wishes for Christmas morning. I don't really remember long lines, although my father might disagree. It was explained to me early on that these were just Santa helpers, so that explained my observation that the beards were not likely real, since they were ill-fitting. When you were done you got a candy cane, and sometimes you might get a mesh stocking filled with an assortment

of goodies that you could open well before Christmas.

The well known company that my father worked for also had a Christmas party for the families. The kids got another of those big mesh stockings filled with toys and candy. One time I remember bringing one home that was as tall as I was, it was a supersized stocking, perhaps I was the prize winner for the evening.

As I grew up and realized how commercialized the Christmas Holiday had become, the more I relied on those early memories to help me through the season. For a child you know that you will get something special on Christmas morning. The toy companies try to guilt the parents into something more. If the kids come away with a memory that lasts longer than a toy, that is something that will last a lifetime.

The power of kindness

Coffee Talk • Renae Brumbaugh Green

I remember it clearly. It was several years ago, and my day couldn't get much worse. I was late for work, forgot my lunch, and my computer crashed. That meant I lost a bunch of my saved work. On my way home, all I wanted was to get a burger and fries from the drive-thru, but somebody cut me off in line. Without thinking, I leaned on my horn before taking my place behind the other driver. When I got to the window, the cashier told me there was no charge. The driver in front of me—the one I'd honked at—had paid for my meal. I was stunned and a little ashamed. But mostly, I was grateful. A stranger's kindness made my day better. After that, I let three people cut in front of me in traffic. When I got home, I wheeled my elderly neighbor's trash to the curb. By the time I went to bed, I felt pretty good about my day.

According to PositivePsychology.com, a random act of kindness is "giving your best self to others without requests or promise of return on investment. It's simply doing some-

thing nice for someone else, without them asking and without you doing it for anything in return." Unlike emotions such as happiness or excitement, kindness is a behavior that can be learned. It's simply doing something to lift another person up without expectation of payback. It helps the other person, but here's the cool thing: studies show it helps the doer as well.

When we do something kind for another person, we step into the best version of ourselves for that moment. And more often than not, we find we like that version, and we want to stay in that place. Being kind helps us be who we want to be, which has a positive impact on our overall wellbeing. Kindness produces serotonin, the feel-good hormone, and has many benefits to the giver as well as the receiver. Research shows that people who make kindness a habit (such as through random acts, generous donations, and volunteering) are happier, have lower rates of depres-

sion, have fewer aches and pains, and have better overall health.

Kindness is contagious. When one person acts, it has a ripple effect—like in my example above. Each act of kindness spurs on more kindness. We may never know the far-reaching effects of our brief, positive actions.

It may be easier for some to behave with kindness... there may be a sort of "kindness gene" that affects our temperament. But kindness is also a learned skill. Anyone, of any age, race, or background can learn to be kind. Simply think of what you can do to make someone else's day a little brighter. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Reach out to someone you haven't contacted in a while. Tell them how much they mean to you and that you care about them.

Send a thank you note or email to a colleague or acquaintance.

Help maintain an elderly or disabled neighbor's yard.

Tell the restaurant manager something positive about your server.

Leave a positive review for a local business.

Praise someone publicly for a job well done.

Hold the door for someone whose hands are full.

Let someone else have the good parking space.

Send a bouquet of flowers to a local hospital to be given to someone (anyone) who needs a boost.

Smile at someone and wish them a good day.

Kindness is a power source, available within each of us. It makes others' lives better. It makes our own lives better. And its effects are beyond measure.

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
Ephesians 4:32


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1777: The Continental Army goes into winter quarters at Valley Forge.

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1941: Adolf Hitler appoints himself as head of the Oberkommando des Heeres.

Local Activities & Events

Newcomers Club Activities

DECEMBER

12/17: Popcorn Bridge, Fun Lunch
12/18: Meet & Greet,
Nonfiction Book Club
12/19: Trailblazers Walking Group
12/22: Monday Canasta
12/27: Jimmy's Egg
12/31: Crochet & Knit

**"To join or for more information, please call:
Mary Pringle (760)265-5035 or email at: pringlem@msn.com.
Visit the website: www.bellcountynewcomers.com."**

Bell Area Parkinson's Support group (BAPS-North) meets at CT-COG, 2180 N. Main St, Belton on the 2nd and 4th Fridays from 2:30-4:00 PM every month. All are welcome, and there is no membership cost. The Bell Area Parkinson's Support group (BAPS-West) meets at St. Andrews United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, 206 W Fowler Ave, Killeen on the 1st and 3rd Fridays from 2:30-4:00 PM every month. For more information contact Gayle Shull at GayleInBelton@gmail.com or (254) 718-4197.

Marine Corp League will meet the third Tuesday of each month at VFW 3859. Dinner is served at 6:30 p.m. and meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m. 201 VFW Dr, Harker heights, Tx 76548. Email commandant@mc11249tx.com for more information.

Aspen Hospice and Palliative Care Volunteers Needed Listed here are many ways you can help make a difference for our hospice patients. You can provide companionship, listen to music, read, reminisce, play games, cards, checkers, paint nails, apply makeup, curl hair or take them on walks. Please visit aspenhealthcare.net or call 512-856-5668 for more information.

Young's Daughters Funeral Home Dementia/Alzheimer's Caregiver Support Group occurs weekly on Fridays from 6-7 p.m. This group allows your loved ones to join. Loved ones will be doing activities while the group of caregivers are joining together to better understand and learn tips and tricks for daily life. Young's Daughters Funeral and Bereavement Center is located at 4235 East Hwy 190 in Temple.

Bell County Historical Commission holds their meetings on the fourth Monday of every month at 6 p.m. in the historical Bell County Court House, 101 E. Central Ave in Belton. Join us in our vision of preserving and promoting Bell County's rich historical heritage for current and future generations. We are dedicated to initiating and conducting programs that preserve and celebrate the county's historic cultural resources in alignment with state laws governing historical preservation in Texas. Our community resources consist of a research room, book repository, cemetery information, historical markers and monument records. Our services include information on historic preservation, educational programming, history community outreach and partnerships. We welcome you to join other history minded folks and get involved by serving on one of our committees that consist of preservation, cemetery, markers and education. To volunteer or for more information please visit historicalcommission@bellcounty.texas.gov, call 254-933-5917 or visit the office located in the historic Bell County Courthouse, 101 E. Central Ave., RM 117.

Pistons on the Creek will meet every third Friday from 5:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. Come down to Nolan Creek and show off your rides. From classic to modern, muscle, rat rod, exotic, all automotive enthusiasts are welcome. Support our awesome downtown businesses and restaurants surrounded by live music, food, drinks and a great atmosphere.

Bell Fine Arts Visitors welcome Wednesday's from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 306 E 5th Ave in Belton. Majong games are available every Monday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Come join the fun and meet new folks. For more information text Jeanne at 409-313-0611.

Local chapter of the Crochet Guild of America meets from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Wednesdays at the Lena Armstrong Public Library, 301 E. First St., in Belton. The group is open to anyone interested in crochet. All skill levels are welcome. For information email Betty Reichert at bettyreichert@yahoo.com or Kathy Bement at katshookandneedle@gmail.com. Anyone interested in joining the local chapter of the Crochet Guild of America will also need to join the National Crochet Guild of America. Visit www.crochet.org for details.

Bell County Texas Democratic Women holds their monthly meeting on the third Saturday of each month at 10 a.m. in the Belton AgriLife Center, 1605 N Main in Belton. Join us to hear from local and state candidates and about important issues and events. This is open to the public.

Leadership Belton is an excellent source for learning leadership skills. This 10-month program focuses on three key elements: community awareness training, leadership training, and team building. Do you have someone ready to take the next step to become a leader? If so, Leadership Belton is here to make that difference. For more information on how to participate, contact the chamber at 254-939-3551 or e-mail at info@beltonchamber.com.

Engage & Empower with BISD Belton ISD believes the learning experiences of our students are enhanced through the engagement of our community. We invite parents and community members to get involved in our schools. Register as a volunteer with our new volunteer and partnership system at the following link: https://beltonisd.ezcommunicator.net/edu/beltonisd/login_form.aspx?app=0.

Temple-Belton Ladies Lion Club Meeting Second and Fourth Monday of every month at 6:30 pm at the Belton V.F.W., 2311 S. Pearl St., Belton.

Travel Club The December meeting of the Central Texas Travel Club will be Thursday the 18th beginning at 11:30. The meeting is at Johnnys Steaks and Barbeque in Salado, and is open to anyone interested in travel and meeting others. We will be discussing upcoming trips including the Majestic Theater in San Antonio, Castrovilla, Kerrville, River Cruise in Portugal and others. For more information contact us at centraltexastravelclub@outlook.com

Community Information

TAKE ME HOME PROGRAM The Belton Police Department is adopting the Take Me Home Program, aimed at helping individuals who need special assistance to return safely home after getting lost. The program is a database with photos and personal information to help police officers find someone who is lost or wandered away from home. Take Me Home is designed for individuals who may need additional aid including those with Dementia, Autism or specific mental health needs. It's free to register someone and the data is kept confidential to first responders. You can sign up a loved one here: www.beltontexas.gov/takemehome. Read more about the program here: https://www.beltontexas.gov/news_detail_T11_R1166.php.

Dial 988 for Mental Health Emergencies To help those contemplating suicide, press option 1 for assistance with military/veteran population.

Text-to-911 for speech/ hearing impaired, those unable to call or speak due to home invasion, abduction or domestic violence or physically incapable. Providing location, city name and nature of the emergency in the first message is imperative. For further education on this service, don't hesitate to call 254-933-5500.

Citizens Helping in Police Service (CHIPS)

are extra eyes and ears while in areas where large groups may gather. Contact the Belton Police Dept. to join.

Belton Citizens Police Academy meets Thursday nights to enhance police and community partnerships. Apply online to be a part of this exciting program.

Slam the Scam Throughout the year, we give you the tools to recognize scams and stop scammers from stealing your money and personal information. Share the information with your loved ones & Slam the Scam! Visit ssa.gov/scam for tips.

Dementia/Alzheimers Support Group- Young's Daughters Funeral Home & Bereavement Center, 4235 E. US HWY 190 in Temple. Fridays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Join us for activities while caregivers discuss and help each other during this difficult time. Call Sabrina at 254-401-1302



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LEGALS

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that original Letters of Independent Administration for the Estate of NELSON JUNIOR WILLIAMS, aka NELSON J. WILLIAMS, JR., Deceased, were issued on December 10, 2025, in Cause No. 25CPB00542, pending in the County Court at Law No. 1 of Bell County, Texas, to: JABARA M. WILLIAMS. All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them to the undersigned within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
ESTATE OF NELSON JUNIOR WILLIAMS, c/o: JABARA M. WILLIAMS ,1214 Johnny Lane ,San Angelo, Texas 76905
DATED the 11th day of December 2025.
KAREN M. VILLANUEVA, State Bar No.: 24102608, Telephone: (254) 771-1855, Facsimile: (254) 771-2082, E-mail: karen@templelawoffice.com

NOTICE TO ALL PERSONS HAVING CLAIMS AGAINST THE ESTATE OF JERRY LEON KILPATRICK, DECEASED

NOTICE is hereby given that original Letters of Testamentary were issued on December, 10. 2025 in a proceeding styled Estate of Jerry Leon Kilpatrick. Deceased, in Cause Number 25CPB00551. pending in the County Court At Law #1 of Bell County. Texas.
Claims may be presented in care of the attorney for the Independent Executrix, addressed as follows: Jennifer Lynne Fitzpatrick Independent Executrix of the Estate of Jerry Leon Kilpatrick. Deceased, c/o Burk Roberts, Roberts & Roberts, L.L.P., 2501 East Elms Rd.. Ste. A, Killeen. Texas 76542-3023
All persons having claims against this estate, which is currently being administered, are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Signed on December 11, 2025.
Roberts &Roberts, L.L.P.. Attorneys for Jennifer Lynne Fitzpatrick
By: Burk Roberts
12.18

THE STATE OF TEXAS
CITATION BY PUBLICATION – CIVIL
CAUSE NO. 25DCV353883

To LEON WALLS
Greetings:
You are hereby commanded to appear by filing a written answer to the plaintiff’s original petition at or before 10 o’clock AM of the first Monday after the expiration of 42 days from the date of issuance of this Citation, the same being Monday, at or before 10 o’clock AM, before the Honorable 146th Judicial District Court, Bell County, Texas to be held at the Bell County District Courts Building in Belton, Texas. Said PLAINTIFF’S ORIGINAL PETITION was filed in said court on May 16, 2025.
The file number of said suit being No. 25DCV353883. The names of the parties in said suit are:
LAKEVIEW LOAN SERVICING, LLC VS. LEON WALLS,

Notice of
Annual Member Meeting for
Dog Ridge Water Supply Corporation

The **Annual Member Meeting** for the Dog Ridge Water Supply Corporation will be held at 7480 FM 2410, Belton, TX 76513. The meeting will start at 6:00p.m. on ***Monday, March 9, 2026***. The purpose of the meeting will be to update the members on the business affairs of the Corporation and to conduct a director election unless the election is declared unopposed by a resolution of the board of directors.

The Corporation will mail to each member **one** official ballot once receiving the members application by ***Monday, January 19, 2026***, regardless of the number of memberships they hold. Corporation will review applications and the petition signatures upon receipt. Corporation will notify candidates of any defects that need to be cured. Only the original official ballot mailed to the member or provided at the annual members meeting will be valid. If a member has lost their ballot, a replacement ballot will be issued to the member. The member must contact the Corporation at 254-939-6533 or by email at **dogridgewsc@yahoo.com** to obtain an official replacement ballot.

Reproduced or copied ballots will not be accepted.

On the day of the election, members will check in with the **Independent Election Auditor** who will verify whether the member’s official ballot has been received. If the member has not previously submitted a ballot, the member will be provided with a new official ballot. If the member has sent in their ballot but the Corporation has not received the ballot, the member will be provided with a new official ballot of a different color other than the one mailed to them. Members will receive one ballot no matter how many memberships they hold. The member’s name on the ballot must match their application for service name.

LEGALS

JR,DELOISE WALLS,SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT,DOES 1 THROUGH 10 ,DOES BUSINESS ENTITIES 1 THROUGH 10, INCLUSIVE
The nature of said suit being substantially as follows, to wit:
JUDICIAL FORECLOSURE LEON WALLS AS POTENTIAL PARTY OF INTEREST
This was issued at the request of attorney: NICOLAS MATAYRON MALCOLM, CISNEROS 2112 BUSINESS CENTER DRIVE IRVINE CA 92612.
NOTICE TO DEFENDANT: You have been sued. You may employ an attorney. If you or your attorney do not file a written answer with the clerk who issued this citation by 10:00 AM on Monday next following the expiration of forty two days after you were served this citation and petition, a default judgment may be taken against you. In addition to filing a written answer with the clerk, you may be required to make initial disclosures to the other parties of this suit. These disclosures generally must be made no later than 30 days after you file your answer with the clerk. Find out more at TexasLawHelp.org.
Issued and given under my hand and seal of said Court at office in Belton, Texas, on December 10, 2025.
Joanna Staton District Clerk Bell County, Texas, 1201 Huey Road, P.O. Box 909, Belton, Texas 76513
By: Misty Cortez , Deputy Clerk
12.18,12.25, 01.01,01.08-pd

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that original Letters Testamentary for the Estate of SUSAN E. BONHAM, Deceased, were issued on December 10, 2025, in Cause No. 25CPB00719, pending in the County Court at Law No. 1 of Bell County, Texas, to: WILLIAM ROGERS.
All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them to the undersigned within the time and in the manner prescribed by law. ESTATE OF SUSAN E. BONHAM c/o: WILLIAM ROGERS, 1079 Spring Terrace Loop, Temple, Texas 76502
DATED December 15, 2025.
KAREN M. VILLANUEVA, State Bar No.: 24102608, Telephone: (254) 771-1855, Facsimile: (254) 771-2082, E-mail: karen@templelawoffice.com
12.18

THE STATE OF TEXAS
CITATION BY PUBLICATION
CASE NUMBER 25CPB00653

To: OTHER LIVING RELATIVES OF BILLIE DAWN GILLELAND AYAYI FUBARA ENELI, Applicant, on December 11, 2025, filed an application for appointment of temporary and permanent guardian of the person and estate in a proceeding styled:, BILLIE DAWN GILLELAND AN INCAPACITIATED PERSON, and bearing the number 25CPB00653 in the County Court of Bell County, Texas.
The court will hear the aforesaid Application after the expiration of ten days, exclusive of the day of publication, from the date this citation is published which will be December 18, 2025, in the County Court at Law #1 Courtroom, at the Bell County Justice Complex, 1201 Huey Road, in Belton, Texas.
All people interested in the aforesaid state are commanded to appear at or before the time set for said hearing by filing a written contest or answering to said application should they desire to oppose or contest it.
Said written contest or answer shall be filed in the office of Shelley Coston, County Clerk, Bell County, Texas, PO Box 480, Belton, Texas 76513.
The name and address of the attorney for applicants is: Ma at Heritage Law, PLLC, 415 E. FM 2410 # 2383, Harker heights, Texas 76548
The officer serving this Citation shall, in compliance with the Law, serve it by publication once in a newspaper of the general circulation in this, the County in which the decedent last resided as required by Section 202.052 of the Texas Estate Code, for not less than ten days before the return day hereof, exclusive of the day of publication, and the date of publication said newspaper bears shall be the day of publication.
Issued and given under my hand and seal of said Court at office on December 16, 2025.
Shelley Coston County Clerk of Bell County, Texas PO Box 480 1201 Huey Road Belton, TX 76513
By: Anna M. Morse Deputy 12.18

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EDITORIAL

Satisfaction not guaranteed

My Front Porch • Lynette Sowell

Traci, a friend of mine who lives in another state, lamented about a less-than-satisfactory shopping experience she had with a business in her area. She was shopping for some tap shoes for a business she’s affiliated with, a local dance studio. She was looking for a supply of tap shoes in a variety of kids’ sizes—a potentially big order.

“I went to a dance store today and asked if they had reinforced toe, single screw tap shoes (ranging in price from \$70-\$90 usually). The lady told me that if I didn’t have the product number she would have to look through the catalogue and so there was ‘just no way she could help me.’

Of course, there are about 60 tap dancers at our studio who will all need these shoes, more than once, as their little feet grow. 60 tappers at, say, \$80 a pair, needing, say three pairs of these shoes before they reach adult size.

The lady not willing to find out if she had, or could order, the shoes for me just lost her business a potential \$14,000 over the next few years. That does not include the ‘blacks’ the girls would buy while there, the hair nets, convertible tights, or ballet shoes it would be convenient to get

while there either.

It’s probably a good idea, if you are a little tiny independently owned specialty shop, to be helpful to local people whose kids are in advanced dance classes.”

Traci subsequently took her business home online to her computer and bought plenty of tap shoes—with free shipping from Amazon!

But then her dilemma—shared in her online post—was, should she let the store owner know how much money that employee’s reluctance to help had just cost them in business? She’s a proponent of small business and knew if she was this woman’s manager, she’d want to know. As is the case on Facebook, much discussion and input followed. She decided to email the store owner and share her disappointment. A day later, Traci shared an update with everyone.

“The dance store replied to my email. They found the shoes (the same ones I had just bought on Amazon) and said they’d order them for me, but justified their employee and said that based on the justification—other moms just

want cheap shoes—she was sorry I felt like the lady had been dismissive. Well, whatever. I have free shipping with Amazon Prime.”

Why am I sharing this story? It’s a prime example of how shopping small and local won’t work if customer service breaks down. Maybe my friend should have told the employee right at the start that she was planning to make a BIG order of shoes.

But should she have needed to share a employee that in order to get good customer service? Of course not. Every customer deserves good service, regardless of how much they spend—even if they order “cheap shoes.”

When customer service breaks down, so a business follows. Business owners sticking their heads in the sand and not listening to customers, assuming “the employee is always right”, can end up losing money. For the most part, I think our small, local businesses around here do a good job. But sometimes, satisfaction is not guaranteed. Business owners, treat your customers equally and well. You never know who might walk in the door.

The Toy Land Plan

Shop the Insanity • Darren Blair

With any luck, this column will reach everyone before Christmas. That’s because I’d like to talk about something you may consider doing immediately after Christmas has come and gone.

In the lead-up to Christmas itself, you more than likely saw that a number of your local businesses were hosting donation bins for toys, winter coats, and other items that would be donated to families in need. Given the crush of holiday shopping, it may have seemed like a bit much to ask for everyone to find that extra bit in the budget to purchase something for donation. Thus, even if the desire to help exists and the business in question is offering some incentive (like how one local theater where I live gives free bags of popcorn with donations), that donation might still not happen.

Well, that’s what I’d like to discuss.

You see, the after-Christmas sales that most stores have the minute it becomes December 26th aren’t some fluke. In the world of business, there’s a term called “opportunity costs” that is used to describe the positive and negative consequences of various choices a person or organization can make. That is, if choice “A” is decided upon, it may prevent choice “B” from being enacted as well.

In the run-up to Christmas, most retailers are going to stuff their shelves, storage areas, and warehouses with merchandise knowing full well that the average consumer is primed to buy, buy, buy. The hope is that consumers do just this – buy product after product - and that all of the excess stock brought in for Christmas will be purchased by the time Christmas itself comes around. Not only are retailers hoping for a financial windfall from these sales, they’re also looking to get rid of

everything.

Think about the leftover Thanksgiving turkey in your refrigerator. You paid a lot for that turkey, and you don’t want to waste the meat. But there’s only so much you can stomach before you’re sick of it, and it’s eventually going to go bad after a while anyway. That’s how retailers look at overstock seasonal merchandise: once the season or holiday is over, it needs to get gone so that they can bring in the next season’s products. Hence the post-seasonal clearance sales: retailers who are conducting these sales have decided that the prospect of getting full retail price for the item is *not* worth the item sitting around any longer and preventing the retailer from bringing in other merchandise. (Note: it’s the same principal as with movie tie-in product.)

Therefore, all of the clearance sales we see after the 25th. And what are some of the

things most likely to go on clearance after the 25th? Among them are things like toys and winter clothing, which are the things these charities are seeking.

Hence my point: if you shop smart, you can literally begin preparing for next Christmas – including next Christmas’ charity donation bins – as soon as this Christmas is over. I myself have been following such a plan for a few years now, to the point that quite a few individuals around town are used to seeing me bringing in large quantities of product to donate. In fact, I have two plastic storage tubs I filled up of things to donate as I type this.

All it takes is a little planning, a little timing, and a little strategizing. Do this, and you can make a big difference for someone in need. Never underestimate what the simplest of things can mean to someone who doesn’t have a lot.

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Craft an entire day around tree shopping

Though retailers may begin playing holiday tunes shortly after Halloween, for many people, no date on the calendar marks the beginning of the holiday season better than the day they pick up their Christmas tree.

There are many different ways to acquire a Christmas tree. Some people prefer artificial Christmas trees that can be stored and taken out each year. Others make a yearly expedition to a tree lot or a Christmas tree farm to find the perfect fir or spruce. Historians believe a man named W.V. McGallard planted 25,000 Norway spruce seedlings at his Mercer County, New Jersey farm in 1901, essentially establishing the first commercial Christmas tree farm. By 1908, customers could visit the farm and choose trees for \$1 each. McGallard helped create an entirely new industry that now accounts for 350 million trees being grown and sold in the United States every year.

Selecting a Christmas tree may not take more than an hour or two, but there are ways for families and other tree shoppers to maximize their time spent looking for a tree.

- Bring refreshments. Couple Christmas tree shopping with picnicking if the weather is amenable. Pack some foldable chairs into the vehicle (sitting on the ground on a blanket may be too cold) and bring along thermoses of coffee or hot cocoa. Snacks like granola bars, Christmas cookies or other filling treats can keep everyone satisfied and energized while they shop for a tree.

- Pair tree shopping with a trip to see lighting displays. Find the tree lot or tree farm and then scope out potentially scenic spots to view holiday lighting

displays nearby. Neighborhood Facebook or other social media groups often tout homes that put up eye-catching displays. Ask around for addresses and plan your own tours.

- Plan a night out. Everyone may be tired and hungry after a long day of Christmas tree hunting. Plus, it's typically a good idea to wait some time for boughs to open before decorating. Use this opportunity to dine out and return home ready to decorate. Make it a regular occurrence that Christmas tree shopping is followed by a family meal at a favorite restaurant.

- Watch a classic film. Many different holiday movies are broadcast this time of year and each enhances the Christmas spirit. While putting up the tree, play a favorite film in the background. What better way to enjoy decorating your own tree than by watching Charlie Brown adorn his meager evergreen at the same time?

Make a day of selecting and putting up the Christmas tree each year. Doing so can enhance the holidays and make for an entertaining way to spend time together as a couple or family.



NEW WORD

YULE

an archaic word for "Christmas"

Welcome to Belton, Texas.