COMMUNITY FOUNDATION HONOREES
Ron Schmidt, Judy & Larry Holt, Brigadier General Joe E. Ramirez, Jr.

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Youth Lifestock Show
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MARCH 2018
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Cover Credits: Community Foundation Tribute Luncheon Honorees (L to R) Ron Schmidt, Larry & Judy Holt, Brigadier General Joe E. Ramirez, Jr. Photo by Mark Sykes, CPP.
From the President/CEO

Dear INSITE Readers,

For those of you that don’t know already, Insite Magazine is now a part of Anderton Group dba Integ. Integ is a name created from the words Integrity and Integration of products. Integrity is a big word for me in defining principle and character of a person or company. Although I’m far from perfect, integrity is a good goal to have, especially when you fall off a barstool.

Our motto this year comes from “Cross The Line” by Sam Parker. One side of the line is a greater chance to succeed and more opportunities to make a difference. On the other side of the line is a lesser chance. Which side of the line will you choose? We will be striving to cross the line. If you would like a copy of the book, email me at dranderton@integdoes.com and I will send you a copy.

Our family, and I’m sure many of yours, got to experience the flu in February. You can see a picture of Carter above with a fan in his bed and an ice pack on his forehead. He also had ice packs under each arm. According to him, he was melting and cold at the same time. Case is too cool for the flu so he slept for 36 hours straight and went back to being a stud. Debbie says I am the worst patient ever of which I strongly disagree. My symptoms are much worse than hers. If she ever gets sick, I will gladly cover her up and go get her Red Gatorade. I am worried that when we get old, Debbie will leave me on the porch somewhere with a sign that says, “Free to a loving home or anyone who likes taking care of babies.”

Everyone gets the “flu” in life and that’s when you get to know your true family. I hope you never fall down, but when you do, may you have a family that covers you up and brings you red Gatorade. — David Anderton
In 2002, Sam Sharp was recognized by the Bryan College Station Chamber of Commerce as Citizen of the Year. As he stepped up to the podium, he used the platform to challenge the Bryan College Station community to establish a community foundation. As if presenting the idea wasn’t enough, he generously donated a $10,000 gift to get the program off the ground, and as they say, “The rest is history.”

The Community Foundation of the Brazos Valley celebrates their 15th anniversary this year. Sharp’s gift has grown into more than $8 million and more than 80 different funds that are designated to benefit different nonprofits and other donor advised funds, according to Community Foundation President Patricia Gerling.

“Last year, we celebrated $1 million [in grants back to the community],” Gerling says. “Not only are we building an endowment to benefit important quality of life needs, but we’re making sure those grants are going back to benefit nonprofits and important needs in the community.”

The goal of the Community Foundation is to build and manage charitable endowments to help provide funding for nonprofit organizations, scholarships, local charities, businesses, and community grants. Funds range from the Donor Designated Funds – where the donor can specify which organization or cause receives the endowment – to the Unrestricted Funds – allowing the Community Foundation to identify where the need and interest is greatest. Other funds include the Donor Advised Funds, Scholarship Funds, Field of Interest Funds, and Nonprofit/Agency Funds.

“All of our endowments benefit outside of the foundation,” Gerling assures. “They are not self-serving.”

Another large part of the Community Foundation is the annual Tribute Luncheon, where the Foundation recognizes individuals who have impacted the community through their gifts of time, talent, and resources. The luncheon also helps raise funds to keep the Community Foundation running year-round. This year’s luncheon will be held on Monday, April 23, at the Hilton College Station and Conference Center.

“The purpose of our annual tribute luncheon is … to benefit the administrative operations of our community foundation, because we are out there helping nonprofits build endowments as well as working with companies and individuals who want to establish funds,” says Gerling. “This just helps us with our administrative expenses on an annual basis.”

The first Tribute Luncheon was held in 2005 and honored Ann and Bob Wiatt.
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Just as the Community Foundation has grown, the luncheon has grown, too. The luncheon now honors three individuals. Some years — such as this one — a couple is honored together as one individual.

"Sometimes [the honorees] are very visible people in the community, but we aren't limiting it to that," says Tribute Luncheon Chair Molly Watson. "We are really just looking across the community to those that just care and give. And I think it provides a little diversity, too." She adds that looking beyond some of the more visible givers in the community to the unassuming philanthropists is part of the tribute luncheon, too.

Each year, the honorees are designated by the Community Foundation board of directors. This year’s honorees include Judy and Larry Holt, Ron Schmidt, and Brigadier General Joe E. Ramirez, Jr., each of whom Watson and Gerling speak highly.

"In and of themselves, [the Holts] have committed so much time, both through their financial donations as well as giving up their time and leadership, to see this vision and this dream that Sam had become a reality," says Gerling. Sharing of time and talents is a common thread with all the nominees this year.

"Ron has been involved in so many things," Watson says. "It was an easy choice for Ron, I think, because he has touched so many different nonprofits. ... and they don’t really have a similar thread, you know. It is very diverse."

General Ramirez also contributes his time and talents to the community, but it’s his ambassadorship for education that sets him apart. "I think what you will also see in some of the little threads is that he is very committed to ensuring that children today have the vision and the dream of being a leader and going to college," says Gerling. "Education is very important."

Sponsorships and individual tickets are still available. The ‘Your Legacy’ Presenting Luncheon Sponsor is Mission Ranch, A Caldwell Community. Available sponsorships begin at $350 and go up to $2,500. Individual luncheon reservations are $60. For more information, email Patricia Gerling at president@cfbv.org, call (979) 589-4305, or visit cfbv.org/events/tributeluncheon.

"It’s just so inspirational to hear how much time and how much resources people have given to our community," Watson says. "[The Community Foundation] makes it easy to be able to give."
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Hemostasis-Thrombosis Foundation. Larry has been active in State Bar of Texas affairs serving on both the Advertising Review Board and Continuing Education Board as well as the District 8 Grievance Committee. He has been a Commissioner of the Texas State Library and Archive Commission since 2009, appointed by Governor Rick Perry, and reappointed by Governor Greg Abbott.

Judy, who shares Larry’s commitment to public service, has been a strong advocate for Texas higher education through her work with the Greater Texas Foundation. Judy served as the Foundation’s vice president of operations from 1987 to 2005, and as interim director from 2005-2006. She remains actively engaged as a member of the board of directors and as a consultant.

The Holts’ firm belief in the value of education is reflected in their financial support for students in college. They have personally funded scholarships, including one at Blinn College which benefits students from the Still Creek Boys and Girls Ranch, and have established endowed scholarships at Tyler Junior College, Prairie View A&M University, and the Baylor University School of Law.

Beyond supporting education, Larry and Judy have been actively involved community volunteers, including Habitat for Humanity, the Veterans Park, Hospice, the Arts Council, Voices for Children, and the Prenatal Clinic. Their commitment to helping others and improving the quality of life in our community is outstanding, as is the quiet, yet determined way they have served others.

Always reluctant to be in the spotlight, Judy and Larry Holt represent the best of our community, as they give generously of their time and resources to help make our community, and our state, a better place for all.

Joe E. Ramirez, Jr. ’79
Brigadier General (Ret); Commandant, Texas A&M Corps of Cadets

Brigadier General Joe Ramirez is a leader who values service to country and to community. His commitment to excellence and exceptional service in all things is one of the many reasons General Ramirez is a 2018 Tribute Luncheon honoree.

A native of Houston, Brigadier General Joe Ramirez graduated from Stephen F. Austin High School in 1975. He attended Texas A&M University and joined the Fightin’ Texas Aggie Band in the Corps of Cadets. He received his commission in the U.S. Army Field Artillery from Texas A&M in 1979 as a Distinguished Military Graduate.

During his 31 years of military service, General Ramirez commanded soldiers and served in leadership positions in various joint and operational commands around the world. He commanded B Battery, 1st Battalion, 12th Field Artillery at Fort Sill, OK, B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 41st Field Artillery in Bad Kissingen, Germany; the 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery at Fort Stewart, Georgia; the 1st Cavalry Division Artillery at Fort Hood, Texas; and was the Deputy Division Commander for the 2nd Infantry Division in the Republic of Korea. He was also the Deputy Chief of Staff for United States Central Command during Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. His most recent assignment was as Deputy Director, Strategy, Plans and Policy, United States European Command in Stuttgart, Germany.

General Ramirez holds numerous military awards including the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terror Expeditionary Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, and the Parachutists Badge. However, his greatest contributions are to the nonprofit organizations that he cherishes.

General Ramirez currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors of The United Way of Brazos Valley, The Salvation Army of the Brazos Valley, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Texas, Texas Lone Star Veterans Association, Mission Readiness (Retired Generals/Admirals Advocating for Quality Education & Physical Fitness for our Youth), and the Sam Houston Area Council of the Boy Scouts. He is also on the planning committee for the Texas Weekend of Remembrance scheduled for Memorial Day Weekend in 2018.

General Ramirez has made a difference in the lives of many students in university life, and he continues to make our community a better place to live, work, and thrive with his dedication to impactful nonprofits.

Brigadier General Joe E. Ramirez, Jr. is a true inspiration in public service. He represents the best of our community, giving generously of his time and resources to help make the Brazos Valley a better place for all.
COMING SPRING 2018

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Ron Schmidt moved to Bryan College Station in 1981, and has held many leadership positions with civic, nonprofit, commerce, and educational organizations. More of a behind-the-scenes man, Ron's quiet and effective style is reflected throughout his many contributions in the community in which we live.

After growing up in Waco, Ron Schmidt served in the United States Marine Corps before settling in the Brazos Valley. With a strong vision for Bryan's growth and development, Schmidt served on the Bryan Development Foundation when there was no budget or city staff. He played a key role in helping Blinn identify the acreage that would become the foundation of its current campus on Villa Maria Road in Bryan.

Ron Schmidt was one of the founders of Keep Brazos Beautiful and served for 33-plus years with the Boys & Girls Club. Ron Schmidt has not separated his business, Texas Commercial Waste, from serving the community. The business has provided services for more than 250 homes built by Habitat for Humanity and has partnered with Junction 505 to employ individuals with disabilities and extend them an opportunity to gain self-confidence and a level of independence.

Schmidt's commitment to service to the community also includes current and past board membership for the Better Business Bureau, Bryan Civil Service Commission, Brazos Animal Shelter, Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History, Blinn College Foundation, and Junction 505, among others.

Over the years, Ron Schmidt has been honored with numerous awards for his service — B/CS Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year, B/CS Habitat for Humanity Volunteer award, Boys & Girls Club of the Brazos Valley Man and Youth award, the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas Community Builders Award and the prestigious Jefferson Award in 2011.

Ron Schmidt is a community leader, an ethical business leader, a visionary, and a true public servant. His time, knowledge, and resources impact our community. His devotion to the betterment of our citizens, his continual leadership to community development and nonprofit growth, and his quiet, committed way lead to his recognition. Ron Schmidt's life mission exemplifies continual giving to others and makes our community a better place to live.
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April 25, 1969. The Woman’s Club members worked all year to plan for the first House and Garden Tour, not knowing if it would be the one and only tour or the beginning of a new tradition. Homes were selected, preparations made, and all that awaited the excited ladies was to welcome guests. Four sets of homeowners ushered in the first tour, which became an anticipated event.

That year, the event was called the House and Garden Pilgrimage. The Club President, the late Kitty Prescott, led members through this brave experiment. Just like today, the homes were elegant and distinctive. The visitors had a wonderful time. It was such a success that this year, the Woman’s Club presents their 50th House & Garden Tour.

The Woman’s Club's 50th annual House and Garden Tour will be Wednesday, April 11, from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. The three homes are beautiful, and each reflects the personalities of its homeowners. The theme “Fifty and Fabulous” reflects the 50 years of tradition.

The Home of Bets and Cowboy Davis
724 South Rosemary Circle, Bryan
Photos by Lonnie Goodson

The home of Cletus and Elizabeth Davis (better known as "Cowboy" and "Bets") is known as the "Rosemary Inn." The house was built in 2003 with three bedrooms, three full baths, and two half baths. The architectural style is a traditional sophisticated farm house. The exterior is composed of hardy plank and antique red brick. The Davises wanted their house to look as if it belonged in the historic neighborhood and to keep the integrity of the 1935 Beverly Estates development.

Cowboy and Bets wanted their home to be an inviting place for living, working, and entertaining family and friends — most especially their son and "daughter in-love," and their five sons; as well as their daughter and "son in-love."

Both Bets and Cowboy will tell you that the home has been a true blessing from the start. Each person wrote a favorite scripture with marker somewhere in the house as it was built.
Dreaming of a New Home?

April 28th & 29th • May 5th & 6th

Saturday 10am -5pm
Sunday 12pm – 5pm

We expect more than 40 new construction homes to be entered into the Parade. Detailed information on the homes will be available on www.gbvbuilders.org beginning Thursday, April 26th and published in Brazos Valley Insite Magazine and digital issue as well.
The furnishings are eclectic, melding Texas primitive pine pieces, English antiques, and Oriental rugs with traditional and contemporary furniture. The rooms have high ceilings. There are plate-glass windows in the back of the house. Throughout the house, the walls are painted in one natural color, which serve as a background for colorful art work.

As you approach the home, you'll immediately notice the raised front porch, with gas lights and comfortable white wicker furniture, creating an inviting entrance and great place to have conversations, a glass of wine, and delicious meals.

As you enter the home, you'll see that the foyer is actually an art gallery! Bets, an artist for many years, has her own artwork on display here and throughout the home, as well as art by her father, William Kollikker, a renowned artist, and pieces by a variety of other artists.

The dining table has played a big part in the lives of the Davis’s grandchildren. Bets and Cowboy decided they wanted to find a way to spend special time with their grandsons, while at the same time teaching them proper etiquette and how to cook. They started hosting once-a-month “Chef Night” gatherings. Each month the boys took turns selecting the recipes, planning the menu, and making a shopping list. Saying grace, learning manners, and laughing together were always part of the meals. Bets, Cowboy, and the boys were featured in the January 2006 issue of "Southern Living."

The kitchen features more art work, as well as bar stools hand painted by Bets. The Davises love to cook, and the spacious kitchen has "every appliance known to man!" The large pantry has an extra refrigerator, as well as many storage shelves and drawers. Just outside the kitchen is the wine room.

The glassed-in garden room offers additional space for dining, conversation, and bird watching. The garden room overlooks the backyard and woods, where there is a pathway leading to a “secret” picnic table, built by the Davis's son.

In the master suite, the bedroom overlooks the backyard, with comfy easy chairs perfect for relaxing and reading.

Before going upstairs, you'll want to visit Cowboy's library and study. Photographs from Cowboy's two terms in the Texas Legislature are here, as well as more artwork.

Upstairs, you'll see the “grown-up” guest room, which contains Bets's twin beds from her childhood. The wooden high-backed chair was part of Bets's parents' wedding furniture. On the wall is a childhood painting of Bets, done by her father in 1942.

Across the hall is, according to Bets, the “reason the house was built.” The bunk room (equipped with six beds) was built especially for the grandsons. Now that the boys are just about grown, Bets and Cowboy hope there will also be great grandchildren to enjoy this special room.

The art in the home is extensive and varied. Paintings include realism, abstract, and impressionism. Bets would love to have a few more walls so that she could display more art.

In their yard, the Davises employed the talents and skill of landscape architects Alan King and Jacob Maxwell. The ample parking area and chevron brick sidewalk add to the function and beauty. The flower beds, fountains, and trees are a delight to the senses.

The small cactus garden in the front yard serves as a reminder of El Paso,
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where a Connecticut Yankee girl fell head over heels in love with a man named Cowboy. Everywhere you look, you’ll see how much this couple loves each other, their family, friends, and the life they’ve built together.

The Home of Cheryl and Randy French
4711 Miramont Circle, Bryan
Photos by Lonnie Goodson
The French country exterior of the home of Randy and Cheryl French welcomes you with its beautifully terraced front yard, brick retaining walls featuring outdoor lighting, a Zen circular fountain, gas coach lights, and a circular drive with brick inlaid in a herringbone pattern. The home’s exterior is finished in limestone with a German Smear, brick, and stucco, with a Saxony concrete tile roof. Mr. French, owner of Stylecraft Builders, asked designer Karen McGown Loehr to serve as construction liaison and interior designer for the project, which was completed in November 2017.

The interior of the home features a complementary blend of transitional and contemporary finishes, artwork, furnishings, fabrics, and materials. After living in a Tuscan-style home for the past thirteen years, the Frenches wanted their new home to have a light, clean, more modern feel. The home’s five bedrooms and five and a half baths make it perfect for hosting grandchildren and other overnight guests.

Entering the double iron doors is the formal living and dining areas, the iron staircase, custom-made staircase runner, a triplete abstract artwork, and a unique Juliet balcony. The area is lighted by a bejeweled three-tiered chandelier and matching sconces. One side of the Juliet balcony opens to the formal foyer and the other to the grandkids’ gameroom.

The kitchen features a steam oven, convection oven, warming drawer, and microwave. Two large side-by-side refrigerators, and a Thermador six-burner with grill cooking top, along with a pot filler, complete the list of dream “kitchen helpers.” It was Karen’s mission to design cabinetry which resembled actual furniture. The cabinets are as practical as they are beautiful, featuring unique LED lighting, shelving, and drawers. The designer utilized the space between the kitchen and the living area to create a functional entertaining island.

The living room is decorated in gray, black, yellow, gold, silver, and cream. The Frenches say that among their favorite items in the home are the contemporary pieces in this room.

The dining room table seats eight and features complementary host and hostess chairs. The dining chairs are upholstered in indoor-outdoor fabric to make entertaining the grandkids less stressful. The chandeliers over the dining table were designed by Karen’s former student intern, Aidan Gray.

Sliding barn doors welcome you to the perfect place to enjoy movie night. Six comfortable reclining leather chairs have built-in trays ideal for snacks and drinks. At the end of the hallway is one of the two guestrooms. The bedroom has a great view of the golf course and is done in soft slate, silver, and gold shades.

On the other side of the living room is the spacious master wing. This part of the home has His and Hers master bedrooms, two baths, a study, and a coffee bar. It is a haven for the busy couple, truly a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

The first master bedroom has a cathedral ceiling and window. The closet features lighted rods and a spectacular, curved LED, contemporary chrome chandelier.

The study serves as Randy’s “man-cave.” It has a floor-to-ceiling brick fireplace. The flooring is porcelain tile which looks like distressed wood. The recessed areas on either side of the fireplace are wallpapered and adorned with sophisticated wine racks.

The master wing hallway features a groin ceiling accented with faux painting.
Spring skiing with your family and friends is awesome. Skiing powder in the Rocky Mountains... THERE ARE NO WORDS.

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The custom light fixture was made to coordinate with the pattern of the study’s floor and the grillwork on the entry to the study.

Cheryl French told Loehr she wanted the colors in the second master bedroom to be gray, cream, cobalt blue, and sand, creating a relaxing effect. The bedroom features an arched brick wall, which frames the brick fireplace and arched windows in the sitting area. The second bath in the master wing features a multi-tiered chandelier to match a smaller chandelier in the hallway.

The kid space is mainly upstairs. The game room is a wonderful and welcoming place for the Frenches’ grandkids. It’s a fun place to get away from the grown-ups.

To the left of the game room is the bunk room, also built with the grandchildren in mind. It has four custom-designed bunk beds featuring a staircase and plenty of drawers.

Also upstairs is the second guest room and bath. The colors in the room are aqua, citrine, gray, and cobalt blue.

Back downstairs, you won’t want to miss the outdoor kitchen and living area. The dining area has a concrete and wood table as well as a stone bar and fireplace. The outdoor kitchen is “decked to the nines” with every possible cooking accoutrement.

The outdoor area also has a comfortable seating area. The unique six-foot-tall “fence” is made of glass, allowing family and friends to enjoy the golf course view from the backyard, while making sure the cats cannot get out of the yard.

The heated pool has unique built-in chaise lounges and features a large shelf area/sundeck for younger children. The pool is sleek and simple to match the architecture. The tiles, mosaics, and marble coordinate with the home’s interior colors.

The Frenches wanted a home that would fit their busy lifestyle, but would also be a place where guests, family, and grandkids would feel comfortable and welcome.

**The Home of William “Bill” Peel**
907 Grand Oaks Circle, College Station
Interior Photos by Michael Hunter of Michael Hunter Photography; Exterior Photos by Lonnie Goodson

The home of William “Bill” Peel is part of a 23-unit gated community constructed in 1999. All the houses are brick with a homogenous architectural style strictly maintained by the homeowners’ association. However, on the inside Bill and decorator Joshua Ortiz of Ambrose Furniture Works have turned this into a place that is uniquely his own.

When Bill first purchased the home, he knew many changes needed to be made. The transition to (primarily) the interior was from a traditional suburban house to one reminiscent of a mid-century modern home. Since he has a bachelor of environmental design and a master of architecture, he knew what he liked and how he envisioned his home.

The house was designed to showcase Mr. Peel’s art collection. The eclectic collection is focused on pieces by and of celebrities. It reflects Peel’s interest in pop culture.

The front door is not seen from the street, instead the front of the house is actually on the side of the property. After walking through a gate, you’ll find yourself in a beautiful outdoor living area. The residence is loaded with “surprises” beginning with the massive, custom fabricated metal and glass double entry doors, designed by Josh.

Bill and his design team at Ambrose Furniture Works wanted each space to feel artistically independent with curated items and high-end finishes, yet cohesive with an easy flow.

The centerpiece of the house and focal point when you enter is Peel’s library, a replication of the award-winning library.
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from his high-rise residence in Houston. The library is an eclectic presentation of Mr. Peel’s life, awards, and mementos, interspersed with his book collection.

When Bill bought the house, the powder room was in the living room, but he had it relocated to the library. It fits perfectly beneath the staircase. The walls of the room are done in metallic cork wallpaper, and the metal pattern on the lavatory is the same as that on the front door.

To the right of the entry area is the large kitchen and dining area. The appliance wall is built into a glossy, rich cabinet that spans the length of the kitchen. Josh and Bill selected a raisin undertone to the “melting chocolate” finish.

To the left of the foyer is the living room. The fireplace constructed by Mr. Peel’s son is washed by an LED light fixture with adjustments to reflect the desired mood in the space.

Subtle alabaster dome wall sconces draw the eye into the master suite and up the stairs. In the master bedroom, Bill repurposed his bed from his high rise, but added custom Calvin Klein for Kravet bedding, and mahogany nightstands, all courtesy of Ambrose Furniture Works.

A meditation space off the master bedroom provides a place for reading and reflection. It opens to the garden area, where a large spa allows an intimate setting for relaxation.

The staircase leads to the second floor. The metal stair rails match the pattern on the front door, as do the stairway sconces. At the top of the stairs is the room used by Bill’s five granddaughters. It has four bunk beds and a window seat.

The guest room is a perfect space for visitors to relax. In a corner is Bill’s mother’s favorite reading chair, which has been reupholstered.

Another bold surprise greets guests in the upstairs bath with an amethyst cultured marble tub surround and countertops that are dimly lit by Kelly Wearstler antique burnished sconces installed onto the mirror.

Back downstairs the garden is designed in three zones – cooking/eating, living area, and meditation/spa. It has a gas fire pit and a flat screen television for sporting events and movies. There is a six-person spa and a lazy rock river as well.

Bill calls the home a labor of love, and says it fits him. It is an expression of his many interests. The house is renovated to be a space for family and friends to visit, to enjoy the Aggie experience, and create memories.

More Information about Tour and Luncheon

Tickets to tour all three homes are $15. Tour tickets can be purchased on the day of the event at any of the homes. Tickets may also be purchased in advance from any Club member, by calling the Club Director at (979) 822-5019, or by emailing thewomansclubbcs@verizon.net.

Additionally, a delicious luncheon will be served at The Woman’s Club (1200 Carter Creek Parkway) that day. Luncheon tickets, sold separately, are $15 and may be obtained by contacting Sandra Petty at spetty@suddenlink.net or (979) 229-9945 or by calling The Woman’s Club.

April 4 is the last day to make luncheon reservations. The luncheon is open to members and non-members and will be served continuously from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
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Texas culture at face value can be summarized in three words: tradition, family, and agriculture. The agricultural roots of Texas A&M University located in the heart of the Brazos Valley to the hardworking ranchers and farmers of Burleson and Brazos County show how committed the Brazos Valley is to this tradition of honest work and diligence. The Brazos County Youth Livestock Association is dedicated to passing on a rich part of this culture to future generations of Texans through their Youth Livestock Show.

“The Livestock Show is where kids involved in Brazos County 4-H or the local FFA programs can come and exhibit their projects and compete for awards,” says Barry Bouse, president of the Brazos County Youth Livestock Show. “If the student wins their category, they get to sell their project at the premium auction.”

Children in 4-H can start competing in the Youth Livestock Show as early as third grade and go through grade 12. Students in FFA can start competing from grades nine through 12. Each year, about 300 to 350 exhibitors compete against each other to be able to have their project sold at the premium auction. Projects in the Youth Livestock Show are not only in livestock, but also consumer science and agricultural mechanics.

Agriculture is not only important to Texas, but also the United States as a whole. It is estimated that one out of every five people living in the United States are working in jobs related to agriculture, according to Bouse. Through participating and competing in the Youth Livestock Show, exhibitors can open up new career opportunities and pathways they initially did not have.

“The name [Livestock Show] does not represent everything,” says Bouse. “We also have food and consumer science which covers anything from photography to arts and crafts, horticulture, baked and canned goods, and even woodworking and metalworking projects.”

The 62nd Annual Brazos County Youth Livestock Show will start on Saturday, March 17, with the Queen’s Dance featuring the Bellamy Brothers, according to Bouse. Competitions will run until Friday, March 23, with the premium auction to be held at 6 p.m. on Saturday, March 24.

“Participating in the livestock show is a fulfilling educational experience,” says Bouse. “It teaches the exhibitors respect, responsibility, determination, and the value of hard work. It provides them with the skill set and knowledge for possible career path opportunities.”

Brazos County YLS Events
Saturday, March 17
- Queen’s Dance

Sunday, March 18
- Arrival of Commercial Steers

Tuesday, March 20
- Commercial Steer Premium Sale
- Commercial Steer Breakfast and Awards at the Exposition Complex
- Judging of Consumer Science Division
- Viewing of Consumer Science Entries and Bake Sale
- Consumer Science Awards Presentation

Wednesday, March 21
- Market Rabbit Judging and Awards
- Market Lamb Show
- Market Goat Show

Thursday, March 22
- Judging of Ag Mechanics and Awards
- Ag-you-cation – open to public
- Viewing of Consumer Science Entries and Bake Sale
- Market Swine Show
- Swine Pee Wee Showmanship

Friday, March 23
- Judging of Market Turkeys
- Judging of Market Broilers
- Heifer Show
- Judging of Market Steers

Saturday, March 24
- Premium Sale Orientation
- Premium Auction
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IT TAKES A VILLAGE
Circle X Land & Cattle Co., Ltd

Story and Photos By ANASTASIA MEGDANIS

There is much more that goes into maintaining a successful cattle ranch than meets the eye. Circle X Land & Cattle Co., Ltd is a great example of the dynamic environment of a cattle ranch and the success it can bring when done right.

The large, family run Brangus cattle operation is located in Bryan and has been around since 1993, but the land itself has been owned by one other family since before Texas joined the U.S.

Chris Duewall is the operations manager at Circle X. "Day to day I make sure everything gets done," he says. "I used to work the cattle and such when I was younger, but now in my role as operations manager, I do a lot of riding around in the pickup and inspecting, making sure everybody is doing their job, everything is getting done and in the right way."

During the winter months, the work mostly consists of maintenance and feeding the cattle to make sure the baby calves stay healthy and warm in the cold conditions, explains Duewall. "This is more of a feeding season during the colder months and the grass isn’t really growing but the cows are burning a lot of body fat so we provide them with round bale hay instead," says Carlos Ochoa, a part-time ranch hand.

Each nine-hour work day starts off with a meeting to set the game plan. "Basically, you never know what you’re going to do when you show up," says Ochoa. "Some people have more specific jobs like the mechanics, heavy equipment operators, and supervisors, but for the most part feeding the cattle is first priority."

After that is done for the day, Ochoa and about 22 other ranch hands, who range from full- to part-time, move on to help wherever they can; often that will entail maintenance work. "There’s always a need for fence work," he says. "I started off my time at Circle X with a lot of fencing, hammering down t-posts, stretching wire. You have to actually learn how to do that properly because there are very specific ways that it’s done."

Ochoa describes his experience working at Circle X as eye-opening because of all the moving parts in the Brangus cattle operation. He notes that the ranch hands do not have much interaction with the cattle as the cowboys do. The cowboy side is the one that goes to each pasture and rides the trails and tree lines on their horses to ensure the safety and well-being of the cattle, as well as moving them from pasture to pasture.

One of the most valued and famous workers on the ranch is their cow dog, Lady. She is a six-year-old Border Collie who is known for her superior herding skills. "She is my best employee," jokes Duewall.

Lady helps move the cattle in an efficient manner so the grass does not get over-grazed. Aside from the fact that the grass feeds the cows, its health and abundance of growth is important because one of the things that Circle X sells is Tifton-85 sprigs.

"Tifton-85, a hybrid Bermuda grass, is one of the highest-producing Bermuda grasses available for pasture," says Duewall. "A sprig is just a dug-up root from the pasture. Within 24 hours of digging it up you take it to the new pasture and plant it, so it’s basically a transplant."

One of the things that gets in the way of the growth of the sprigs are wild hogs. They like to overturn the pasture and eat the roots of the grass. This makes the pasture very rough to ride through when checking the pastures and slows the growth of the grass. The ranchers will capture the hogs by luring them to a trap with soured corn and strawberry Jell-O and proceed to sell them.

In addition to retailing the sprigs, Circle X is home to a pecan orchard; it was
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the reason they opened the Circle X Country Store in November 2016. It now stands as the beautiful entrance to the ranch.

Both the sprigs and pecans are important aspects of the business, but the main reason Circle X can call themselves such a successful and large commercial cattle operation is because they are involved in almost all segments of the beef-cattle industry. They offer show heifer prospects for junior exhibitors, superior bulls, and replacement heifers to grow someone’s herd, all of which are purebred. Of the cattle that are up for sale, if they do not go to someone for any of the listed purposes, they are sold to a feed yard.

Circle X knows how to grow quality cattle because after years of success and growth, they have it down to a science.

“There are different breeds of cattle,” says Duewall. “We have all black Brangus because it’s better for this area. We chose them because it’s hardy and well-adapted to the climate here.” When the temperature gets too high for some cattle breeds, Circle X is glad they have the well-adapted breed of Brangus. In the heat of the summer, they hang burlap sacks from the trees that are filled with fly control dust. The cows know to rub against it, and it deters the flies that bite them.

Circle X also exerts control over the breeding and grazing of the cattle. Unlike many ranches who leave their bulls out year-round for an open breeding season, at Circle X they choose to have a fall calving season and only let the bulls out then.

“It’s just timing with mother nature,” says Duewall. “It optimizes the weight gain because the grasses are better in the spring, then the calves are old enough to start utilizing the forage. So, they get some of the best quality grass of the year right when they are getting weaned off their mom.”

Additionally, in order to capitalize on the quality grass, they implement a rotational grazing system to prevent any one pasture from being over grazed.

All of the maintenance and planning that goes on during the colder months is all in preparation for the busy season in the spring. “We will be artificially inseminating the cows, starting weed control in the pastures, fertilizing, digging, selling and planting sprigs, and preparing for show season,” says Duewall.

It takes a village to keep up with the many moving parts of the well-oiled machine that is Circle X Land & Cattle. At the end of the day, the hard work is worth it for Duewall and his family, who intend to keep the ranch in the family for many years to come.

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The Brazos County Youth Livestock Show
March 20-24, 2018
For More Information: BCYLA.net

Queens Dance
Saturday, March 17, 2018
8:00 pm - 12:00 am
Featuring The Bellamy Brothers
(Queen Will Be Crowned 9:00)

Commercial Steer Awards Breakfast
7:00 am Tuesday March 20th

Commercial Steer Sale
12:00 Tuesday March 20th

Premium Auction
6:00 PM Sharp! Saturday, March the 24th
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On a Sunday morning in mid-March, the Tomascik family donned their work boots, grabbed their show sticks, and headed for the barn. As the sun beat down on the family of five, they practiced showing steers for the Robertson County Fair. A black pickup truck rolled into the drive. The Tomascik kids’ aunt and uncle hopped down from the truck and walked into the yard prepared to give second opinions about the show animals. Once advice had been given and hugs exchanged, the family headed into the house for a quick bite of breakfast.

Throughout the spring, this scene can be witnessed all over Robertson County as hundreds of students prepare for the Robertson County Fair. A black pickup truck rolled into the drive. The Tomascik kids’ aunt and uncle hopped down from the truck and walked into the yard prepared to give second opinions about the show animals. Once advice had been given and hugs exchanged, the family headed into the house for a quick bite of breakfast.

For 52 years, the Robertson County Fair has provided a way to celebrate and reward grade-school students for their achievements in agriculture. The Robertson County Fair has grown exponentially since it started in 1965. There were more than 1,000 entries in the 2017 Robertson county fair; but in 1971, the first year entry numbers were recorded, there were only 66 entries.

Ken Elliott, son of one of the fair’s original leaders Fred Elliott, has a unique perspective on the growth and success of the fair.

“It’s an honor to do it, and I think everybody wants to be a part of something successful,” Elliott says. “It doesn’t matter what it is; you want to be on a winning team. If you have a good football team or volleyball team, by the time you get to state the whole town is following you. This is the same way.”

The Robertson County Fair has enjoyed strong leadership since its inception.

“This county fair was actually started because there was a school show in Calvert and a school show in Hearne,” Elliott says. “The members of those two groups talked and said, ‘Let’s just have a countywide fair instead of two school shows.’”

The streets of downtown Hearne hosted the first two Robertson County livestock shows, according Brandi Liere, Franklin ag teacher and treasurer for the fair.

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The large, metal show rings and pens used at the fair today were not on the fairgrounds when Elliott was a participant.

“When I showed there was a yellow ski rope that was the show ring under the trees,” Elliott recalls.

Today, the Robertson County Fairgrounds are one of only three fair facilities in Texas that are owned by the local fair association, according to Elliott. Ownership of the fairgrounds is an achievement many Robertson County natives take pride in, and is a direct result of dedication to a greater cause.

“The note they made to purchase this property and building was personally signed by the directors,” Elliott says. “The note was right at half a million dollars during a time when interest rates were high and these men were struggling in their personal lives anyway.”

Almost all leaders in the Robertson County Fair today talk about Fred Elliott’s leadership skills. While Ken Elliott was quick to say his dad did not single-handedly found or run the fair, Elliott says his dad’s leadership abilities helped get the fair through rough times after the note was signed.

 “[My dad] wore the hat of a leader and was fair,” Elliott says. “When people were at odds, he could talk to both groups and then they could all walk off with their
shirt sleeves rolled up to work together for the same goal. That is a very, very special person that can do that.”

Working together was a must for the men who signed their names on the half-million-dollar loan to purchase the fairgrounds. They all pitched in around the grounds to make it a success. They hand-built the pipe fence that now surrounds the facility, railings on the bleachers, and many of the buildings, Elliott says.

“There were so many people that were instrumental on a very obvious and upfront level, but there were also hundreds of people that you never knew their name; the guys that worked everyday and saw what they needed to do and used their talents,” Elliott says.

The payment on the grounds grew smaller each year thanks to the fundraising efforts of the fair’s leaders. When the note was down to $10,000, an auction was held where local business owners donated items like air compressors, hay bales and oil to the association. It ended up being the last effort they needed to pay for the fair grounds.

“Out of that $10,000 that that auction grossed, I know three men that spent $3,000 apiece,” Elliott says. “The other thousand came from the other people who were there. I think the one thing to take away from that was they believed in it because of the leadership.”

Belief in the leadership of the fair is something today’s association still enjoys. According to Charles Frieda, a fair leader who has held many titles and was a close friend of the late Fred Elliott, some of the qualities exhibited in the fair’s founding leaders have been passed down to the county’s youth.

“Some of the things that continue on are the fellowship and the working together for that common goal,” Frieda says. “So many of the kids continue to be competitive and supportive of each other and you still see the same old characteristics that you’ve always seen in the work ethics.”

Leadership and work ethics are not the only traditions carried on at the fair today. A scholarship program was started in 1984 by the Board of Directors. Originally one scholarship was to be given that year, but the board felt they had two overly qualified candidates. To make a second scholarship, each board member reached into their pocket and pulled out $30 to make a second scholarship.

Today’s directors carry on the tradition of donating to the scholarship fund each year, according to Stacy Ely, a fair board director.

“Now of course we all pay the $30, but there’s also fundraising,” Ely says. “Since 1984, we have given 478 scholarships to the kids of Robertson County for a total of $809,500.”

Each spring after the fair, high school seniors have the opportunity to apply for Robertson County Fair scholarships. Giving scholarships to students to further their education fits the purpose of the fair, according to Tomascik.

“Our whole mission is to develop youth and help them get their future started to come back and continue the cycle to help
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Cowboy Up at the 2018 Robertson County Fair

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Come rain, hail, sleet, or snow the 2018 Robertson County Fair will kick off on March 17 at 6 p.m. with the Queen’s Coronation followed by a dance at the Fireman’s Hall on the Robertson County Fairgrounds. Entry to the coronation and dance are free.

Robertson County Fair fun returns to the fairgrounds on March 22 with the Creative Arts Gala-Fundraiser and Creative Arts Winners and Open House taking place from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Multi-Use Building.

With livestock shows, children’s activities, pig scrambles, art and homemaking exhibits, a carnival, and more, there is something for everyone at the Robertson County Fair. Day passes are $8 per day. Armbands permit access to the Robertson County Fair for the duration of the weekend and are $15. Children in second grade or younger get into the fair for free. For a full schedule of events, visit rcfa.org.

somebody else,” Tomascik says. “Part of youth development is getting that education and that continued education.”

Jeb Hogan, a 2014 Robertson County Fair scholarship recipient, says he gained more than a financial springboard for college while participating in the fair.

“Growing up in the show industry, you’re told to focus on one thing and do it 100 percent,” Hogan says. “Don’t spread yourself too thin. That really helps me in my academics because it keeps me focused.”

Jessica Lutz, Robertson County Fair steer show superintendent, says she has seen first-hand the effects showing livestock has on youth. Life skills were among the benefits of showing Lutz listed.

“They make good decisions about what to eat because they have had to make good decisions about what to feed their steer,” Lutz says. “Raising an animal teaches them how to take care of themselves whenever their parents are no longer raising them.”

As an ag teacher, Liere says it is important for students to get involved in the fair.

“You need to get involved, but involvement in the fair is different from involvement in your school,” Liere says. “It is making a difference in your community.”

Melanie Stellbauer serves as the fair’s secretary, and says she highly values the time she spent with her kids in the barn.

“I love the time we’d spend in the barn together and our conversations that we would not have if we weren’t cleaning the barn or shavings or mixing feed for the next few days,” Stellbauer says. “The time spent in the barn with my children, just us, that’s what I get excited about. I know they do, too.”

Since the fair’s humble beginnings, volunteers have been the driving force of the fair, according to Elliott. Fred Elliott’s background in the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is one of the reasons the Robertson County Fair is run by volunteers.

Several fair leaders say the future of the Robertson County Fair rests in the hands of today’s participants and scholarship recipients.

“We invest in the kids from third grade all the way up,” Elliott says. “All we ask is they go make their mark in the world and come back or give back.”

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Growing good kids — that is the purpose behind the Junior Master Gardener program. Lisa Whittlesey, program coordinator for the International Junior Master Gardener program says gardening is about growing plants, and the Junior Master Gardener program uses that concept to grow kids. Their mission is to ignite passions for learning, success, and service in children.

The Junior Master Gardener program is a hands-on gardening education program, according to Whittlesey. It consists of seven different curricula, which schools and children's organizations can use to develop an appreciation for the environment. The group can choose which curriculum to use based on interest, grade, and age of the children. Each curriculum has three components: lessons, career exploration, and a community service project. Students also have the opportunity to be certified in the curriculum.

Inspiration for the program came to Whittlesey after working with a horticulture program for the Federal Prison Camp for female inmates in Bryan. “I taught about things like gardening and landscaping and saw a change in the students,” says Whittlesey. “They had a desire to make the space around them more beautiful. It was less stressful than what they were used to. Then the women wanted to learn more about gardening with their children [for when they visited them in the prison]. At that time, there was not a curriculum for children in gardening.”

Since the Junior Master Gardener program has been put in place, Whittlesey says she has noticed that gardening brought out the softer side to the students who often showed a hard exterior. “Children and adults do not have an opportunity to know where their food comes from,” says Whittlesey. “When children have to be responsible for planting and tending a garden, they realize that the things they do impact other things in the world. It helps them respect the environment and [teaches them that] they have a responsibility to take care of things — it teaches them where their food comes from.”

There has also been research conducted on how the Junior Master Gardener program benefits children, particularly the “Learn, Grow, Eat & Go” curriculum. “We have had a number of research projects to look at the impact of the program on children,” says Whittlesey. “We have seen academic improvement in children who have gone through the program, along with many other things.”

In research done in conjunction by Texas A&M University and the University of Texas School of Public Health, it was found that there was a significant reduction in child BMI through participating in the curriculum. A few of the other findings showed that students also increased preference and consumption to vegetables, and had more knowledge in plant science and nutrition.

The Junior Master Gardener program is an example of an extension program that is part of “Healthy Texas,” an initiative launched by the Texas A&M chancellor John Sharp, according to Whittlesey. “Healthy Texas” has the goal to create a healthier population in Texas through community programming. However, the implementation of the Junior Master Gardener program is not limited to Texas. “The first curriculum was created in 1999 and since that time it has spread to all 50 states … and 12 countries,” says Whittlesey. “It is offered in English, Spanish, and Korean.”

Some of the countries include Canada, Dominican Republic, South Korea, Haiti, Guatemala, and China. “When you plant a seed in a child’s heart, that’s a seed that nurtures and grows forever,” says Whittlesey. “The Junior Master Gardener Program gives people the tools to be able to plant those seeds in children and those communities. For me, there is no greater calling.”

To learn more about the Junior Master Gardener Program and how to join, visit jmgkids.us or call (979) 845-8565.
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Alfredo Costilla-Reyes, Texas A&M University doctorate candidate, was approached by a surprised mother who said something that’s stuck with him since. It was his “Aha!” moment when he realized he could do something with agriculture and electrical engineering. All because the mother said she hadn’t known that if her kids grew vegetables, they’d eat them too. “I intersected the two very big worlds and that’s how BitGrange was born,” he says.

Born in Toluca, State of Mexico, Mexico, Costilla-Reyes was in contact with agriculture his entire life. Raised on a farm (in Tejupilco de Hidalgo, Mexico) like his parents and grandparents, he remembers the early mornings and hot afternoons well when he’d milk the cows and check the crops, plants, and vegetables. While he was still very young, his family moved to Toluca, a larger city and capital of his home state, where they attempted to keep in touch with their farming roots by using a small piece of land in their backyard to plant things.

“The best memories I have is me and my brothers pulling some carrots from the ground,” Costilla-Reyes says. “It was amazing because you see all this orange coming from the soil and you couldn’t see anything before.”

After graduating from National Autonomous University of the State of Mexico, the biggest university in the state, with a degree in electrical engineering, Costilla-Reyes started a company in consumer electronics. He then participated in Mexico’s “Concurso del Universitario Emprendedor” and won the first prize: a trip paid in full to Texas A&M for a summer research project. This helped kick start Costilla-Reyes’ journey in the U.S.

Once in Bryan College Station, Costilla-Reyes made sure to keep agriculture close to his heart. He started volunteering at Kemp Elementary School in Bryan through the Texas A&M Howdy Farm organization, and he replicated what his parents did with him as a child. They placed small beds of soil in front of the school, prepared the land, and taught the children how to grow food. Something simple, right? Costilla-Reyes recalls telling the kids they would begin by growing radish and lettuce and getting questionable looks that read, “What is a radish?” or “What is a lettuce?” “I’m pretty sure [they] have eaten [lettuce] before at McDonald’s but that hit me like a train,” Costilla-Reyes says. “New generations are not being exposed to where their food comes from. They just see a package in front of them and start eating whatever you put in front of them.”

That realization prompted Costilla-Reyes to work towards something that would help continue to educate children and encourage them to learn about the global food sustainability issues. Thus, the agriculture-educational app was introduced along with the device that allows for plant breeding.

Introduced as BitGrange with the byline, “Lettuce change the world,” the gadget revolutionized urban farming. Dr. Kim E. Dooley, associate dean for Academic Operations for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, saw the innovation take off. Dr. Dooley comments on the uniqueness of the gadget — the way the system connects to your phone and how the farmer is able to check on the health of their plant. The device is also customizable to fit the water, light, and nutrient requirements of different plants.

“It was a kind of a ‘feeding the world’ situation in urban agriculture because you didn’t have to have land to grow food,” Dr. Dooley says. On top of food security, she recalls how Costilla-Reyes and his team want to emphasize youth development.

BitGrange was engineered to allow anyone to grow food indoors, without having to deal with the everyday problematic variables farmers come across. The gadget uses hydroponics, the process of growing plants with nutrients sans soil, so the amateur farmer only needs to provide water and nutrients, and monitor the plant with the BitGrange app. Thanks to the network of software and sensors that allow objects to collect and
exchange data (known as the Internet of Things used in devices like thermostats, cars, and lights), the sensors and LED light on the device mimic sunlight, which makes for a very successful plant cycle. “What makes BitGrange so amazing is that it is a gamified version of what I was doing with the kids [at Kemp Elementary School],” Costilla-Reyes says.

Aside from wanting future generations to know where their food is coming from, Costilla-Reyes also stresses another issue current farmers are facing: age. He says the average age of a farmer in the U.S. is about 60 years old, and it only increases. What then? With no new generations replacing these farmers, Costilla-Reyes predicts we will run out of farmers (aka food producers) in the future. Additionally, these farmers do not want their kids to continue in their profession because there is so much instability in farming, such as weather, weeds, and worrisome pests. Costilla-Reyes also predicts that by the time he dies, more than three quarters of our generation will live in bigger cities, abandoning the farms.

“This is what BitGrange is all about. I believe that we (we as in everybody), starting with millennials, we are a new generation of farmers that needs a new generation of tools to do agriculture,” Costilla-Reyes says. “This new generation that seems to be so separated from the farm, they are looking for an excuse to be connected again. But not with the same tools. Why would you be doing the same mistakes as before? ... We want to know what goes into what we eat. And we provide that with this device.”

Dr. Dooley also adds that children will learn responsibility similar to the way they learn to take care of pets with electronic simulations of pets. “[BitGrange] is the same concept, except that child would really be growing something they could eat,” she says, which adds to the concept of food security and the organics of food.

Costilla-Reyes often pinches himself, still in disbelief of the progress his company has achieved. After failing miserably dozens of times, he calls this sudden splurge of success the “tip of the iceberg.” From an embarrassing Tupperware prototype at Kemp Elementary to a company noticed by many, Costilla-Reyes keeps three things close to his heart daily. The first is to have faith in oneself, the second is to work really hard, and the third is to never give up.

“What makes me jump out of bed every single morning is thinking that, by providing this tool to millions of families out there, one day I want to see the largest farm on the planet that doesn’t own a single square inch of land,” Costilla-Reyes says.

After all the awards and recognition, Costilla-Reyes steps back to reveal that his parents should be the ones credited, saying he is just the result of their work and encouragement. He also thanks all of the people who were willing to take the risk on his “crazy idea.” The doctorate candidate has high hopes for BitGrange and the future of farming. Why? “Agriculture is ripe for innovation.”

For more information on the company and device, visit bitgrange.com.
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Solar energy was once thought as the distant future. Due to not only the environmental but also economic benefits, solar energy is becoming more common in larger cities like Austin and Houston. Solar energy has more recently spread its roots into the Brazos Valley.

The concept of solar energy is relatively new and can benefit homeowners and businesses in more ways than one.

"The [solar energy] system supplements the power to the house," says Adam Burke, president of Texas Green Energy, the only locally based solar panel installation company. "You get the power from the grid and the solar panels. When you are making more solar energy than you can use, the excess flows back into the utility grid and then the utility company will buy it."

The price of installing solar panels can range depending on the demands of the business or household. Often people are hesitant to install solar panels due to the high initial cost.

"A 5 [kilowatt] system runs around $14,000 — that is a tier one, premium brand solar panel," says Joe Palmer, general manager of Texas Green Energy. "It has greater efficiency and performance. On average under the 5 kW system, the utility bill will be reduced by 50 percent."

Solar panels in the long-run can help individuals save more money than what they put in.

"Solar panels come with a 25-year warranty and usually last for 35 years," says Burke. "Solar panels offset the initial environmental impact relatively quickly and they go on to produce free energy for the next 35 years. The first eight years, you break even. Then the next eight years, you make it back again. It pays for itself three times over during its warranty. People initially look at the cost of the system and tend to be hesitant because it is still relatively new — not everyone is doing it. Yet they will go on and buy a truck or car for around $30,000 without thinking too much about it."

Due to inflation, the amount of money saved can even increase.

"You can save more money as time goes on due to the cost of energy increasing," says Palmer. "Solar [energy] allows you to hedge against increased energy costs."

In addition to the money saved through producing your own solar energy, many do not know the government has created incentives for households and businesses to go solar.

"Both residential and commercial qualify for 30 percent tax credit off of the system cost," says Burke. "For businesses, [even more] can be deducted from the system. Presently, because of the most recent tax bill signed into law, a business can deduct 100 percent of the cost for the system in the first year. I think that the bigger reason it is not more prevalent in this area is because people are not aware of these incentives and they don't realize how impressive the investment is."

Another plus to installing solar panels is that solar equipment is exempt from property tax, according to Burke. The system becomes a part of your home and is covered by homeowners insurance.

The cost of going solar may seem expensive, but it's a smart choice. Not only are you helping to reduce your environmental footprint, but in the long-run, you're saving money.

"Having a solar energy system on your building is an excellent investment," says Burke. "It reduces your electric bill and reduces your impact on the environment." 
MONEY MATTERS

Why Financial Planning is Important

By ANASTASIA MEGDANIS

No matter who you are, where you are from, or what you believe, one thing is for certain, the time to start saving and financially planning was yesterday.

Brien Smith, CFP®, certified financial planner and owner/founder of Traditions Wealth Advisors in College Station took the time to explain why financial planning is so important and how anyone can start to take action in a positive direction.

"Savings is at an all-time low while at the same time, the only fall back for people that don’t save for retirement is social security, and that is also at an all-time low and is predicted to go bankrupt in 10 to 20 years,” says Smith.

Smith explains that there are not enough people contributing to social security as there are receiving its benefits. "The numbers used to be 17 or 18 contributors to social security for every one retiree; now it's only about two contributors per retiree so the math is not working out at all," he says.

Smith emphasizes that it is never too early to start saving. "It seems like, unfortunately, the people that need our help most at the firm don’t come to us, and the people that need our help least have already started saving and are already doing a lot of the right things," he says. “They come to us to confirm that what they are already doing is the right thing.”

If you start saving as early as possible, you will relieve your future self of stress down the line, because the extra time allows for smaller monthly or yearly savings needed. The younger generation, especially college students who will be entering the job market soon, are advised to start thinking about plans to start saving. Even without a full-time income yet, there are positive steps students can take towards a stable financial future and it starts while they are in school.

Even if you think it is too late or that social security will be enough down the line, there is no harm in being prepared. By saving, you are helping yourself and those around you in a very significant way. It may not seem necessary to some or they may choose to allocate their funds elsewhere, but the best investment someone can make is in themselves. There are many uncertainties in life, but your ability to sustain it should not be one of them.

Three habits you should get into according to Smith

• Try not to get into debt: This is easier said than done, but try your best. Studies show that when people use their credit card, they overspend by 20 percent more than if they weren’t to use it.
• Live within your means: Don’t go into debt in order to try and maintain a certain lifestyle.
• If you have to get a credit card, try to get one with a low interest rate and a low maximum: If you have a low maximum, it will prevent you from burying yourself too deep in debt and keep your credit score up.
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Investing in the stock market provides you with an opportunity to put your money to work, seeking to earn an impressive return. Historically, the Standard and Poor’s 500 Index has returned close to 10 percent on an average annual basis, according to an article by Paul A. Merriman on MarketWatch. Of course, past performance is no guarantee of future results. But most investors fail to take full advantage of this opportunity. In fact, they often earn considerably less than the average market return.

A 2015 report from DALBAR Inc. showed that the average investor underperformed the S&P 500 by 3.6 percent. In 2016, the gap widened: The S&P 500 returned about 12 percent, while the average investor saw only about a five percent return, according to a CNBC article by Tom Anderson.

Why does this happen? There are three big mistakes investors tend to make — over and over again.

Mistake #1: Trying to time the market. It's impossible to predict when you should sell ahead of a downturn or start buying before a resurgence. When investors try to time the market, they often miss the mark, buying high or selling low — or both. In the process, they negatively affect their potential return.

People who think they know the market is about to drop (or make a comeback) may be kidding themselves. No one knows for certain what will happen next. What is predictable is that the market will experience periodic volatility.

So instead of trying to time the market, you can plan for volatility by engaging in a long-term investment strategy and using dollar-cost averaging — purchasing a certain amount of an investment on a set schedule. That way, you'll be purchasing more stock when the price is low, less when the price is high.

Of course, a program of systematic investing does not guarantee a profit or protect against losses in declining markets. An investor should consider his or her ability to continue making purchases during periods of declining prices, when the value of their investment may be falling.

Mistake #2: Reacting emotionally. Warren Buffett, one of the most successful investors ever, famously advised against letting emotions sway investment decisions when he said, "Be fearful when others are greedy and greedy when others are fearful."

It's easy to feel confident and excited about investing when markets go up. It's also natural to experience panic when markets drop and you start seeing losses in your portfolio.

Giving in to these emotions leads most investors to sell low (when the market goes down, and people are worried about "losing" money) and buy high (when the market goes up, and securities are more expensive).

Mistake #3: Believing you know more than the market. Most economists and financial experts believe the stock market is efficient. This means the prices of securities in the market reflect their actual value.

Some investors act on hunches and predictions about what the market (or specific securities within it) will do next. Remember that professional investors and fund managers have access to an incredible amount of information they use to make investment decisions, and this information is not readily available to the average investor.

The bottom line. You can avoid these three common mistakes by contributing consistently to your investment accounts each month (regardless of what the market is doing), assuming that you can afford to do so, working with a financial professional who can keep you calm and thinking rationally when you want to react emotionally, and sticking to your overall financial plan and investment strategy — instead of trying to guess the next hot stock.
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High school is a unique time for students. They gain a new level of independence, but are still under the guidance and care of family, mentors, and educators. As a sophomore in high school, Emma Tatge gained an even greater amount of independence and enhanced her understanding of the world by embarking on a life-changing journey. She left her family, friends, first language, and home behind for a year to live in Japan.

Tatge applied to participate in the Rotary Youth Exchange, a school-year-long study abroad program for students 15 to 19 years old. She could have gone to just about any country in the world, but chose Japan because she knew it would be a challenge. “Where I went, they didn’t really speak English,” Tatge says. “It was a small town, so I had to figure their language out. It was really hard, but I did figure it out and it was super rewarding. It ended up being the best year I’ve ever had!”

Students who participate in the Rotary Youth Exchange typically live with three different host families during their time abroad. This exposes the students to multiple views of the culture in the country they visit. Tatge had a unique host family experience. She lived with five different families for varying amounts of time.

“Host families, some of them are hit or miss, but sometimes you meet them and they just feel like your family,” Tatge says. “That was really awesome to experience. I never thought that I would feel like I could belong in a family that wasn’t my own, but I did. That happened with three of my families.”

The Rotary Youth Exchange is a personal, diplomatic, people-to-people program and is officially sanctioned by the U.S. State Department, according to Charles Gilliland, Rotary Youth Exchange local coordinator.

“There are a couple of things about the Rotary Youth Exchange that are unique,” Gilliland says. “It essentially gives students an opportunity to experience a culture and country. It’s a real opportunity for them to get to know about a country and for the host family to get to know about their customs and country. In the process, lifelong friendships are often created.”

In addition to creating lifelong relationships with host families, students also build lifelong friendships with other students from around the globe, according to Tatge. This is made possible by the Rotary Youth Exchange program’s practice of placing students visiting the same part of a country into Rotary districts. The students in Emma’s district in Japan were from America, Canada, Germany, and Brazil.

“We were all nervous and didn’t know what we were doing, so we all became good friends really fast,” Tatge says. “It’s really easy to bond over a shared experience like that. While I was in Japan, I also learned about Brazil and Germany and Canada. These friendships are really strong. I still talk to them.”

Along with the creation of lasting relationships, Tatge says she faced several challenges. As Tatge already said, learning the language proved to be difficult, but other challenges included adjusting to cultural differences that shape family values, being a novelty as the only American in her school, and getting over homesickness. Yet even with all the struggles Tatge faced during her time in Japan, she was not ready to come home when the time came to say goodbye.
“Coming home, it felt like I had never even left for Japan,” Tatge says. “It felt like that experience was just a dream because it is so far and so different. Once I was home though, I was really happy to be home. I missed my family a lot.”

It is not uncommon for Rotary Youth Exchange students to experience an adjustment period when they return home, Gilliland says. He attributes this to the fact that they have been more independent than a typical high school student during their time away, and their family expects to get back the same student they sent abroad. Even so, Gilliland says what the student learns while abroad, they tend to bring back to their families.

“It expands their world view,” Gilliland says. “It changes a lot of attitudes. They begin to realize that the stereotypes they had at home are not accurate. From that perspective, I believe this is a very effective tool of diplomacy to improve international relations.”

Joan Quintana, Bryan Rotary Club vice president, is Emma Tatge’s mom. She says sending your kids on a study abroad experience like the Rotary Youth Exchange is the best gift you can give your children.

“In Emma, I feel like she grew so much in confidence, in poise, in her understanding of what she was capable of,” Quintana says. “She chose to go to Japan because she wanted to do something that was hard, and it was hard. ... She valued family so much more when she came home than she did when she left. Teenagers sometimes don’t have a real solid grounding in that, but she sure did when she got home.”

Brazos Valley families have two opportunities to get involved with the Rotary Youth Exchange program. They can send their kids abroad through the Rotary Youth Exchange program or host a student from another country. Gilliland says the Rotary Club is always looking for host families. He reminds people that you never know who you’ll end up hosting. “You just might host an Academy Award Winner like Matthew McConaughey, who participated in the Rotary Youth Exchange,” he says.

Quintana says challenges shape us by building character, and the Rotary Youth Exchange program provides the opportunity to grow exponentially.

“The Rotary Youth Exchange program is absolutely life changing for every young person who participates,” Quintana says. “They gain confidence. They gain perspective in terms of learning about what they value as an individual. The nature of the program pushes young people out of their comfort zone.”

For more information about the Rotary Youth Exchange, including how to apply for the program, visit rotary.org. Brazos Valley families interested in hosting a Rotary Youth Exchange Student should contact Gilliland at c-gilliland@tamu.edu.
When someone mentions the “Mona Lisa,” “The Vitruvian Man,” or “The Last Supper” masterpiece, there is one name that immediately comes to mind. The Italian engineer, artist, innovator, and scientist Leonardo da Vinci has left a lasting legacy, which is now coming to the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. The “Leonardo da Vinci: Machines in Motion” exhibit is on display until Jan. 6, 2019.

This exhibit includes more than 30 machines that have been constructed from da Vinci’s drawings in the Codex Atlanticus, a 12-volume compilation of his drawings and coded writings, and the Madrid Codices. Thanks to a team of dedicated Renaissance scientists and craftsmen from Florence, Italy, each machine included in the exhibit has been “faithfully constructed from Leonardo’s notebooks,” according to the Bush Library and Museum website. The machines in the exhibit have been assorted into four different sections: Fire, Water, Earth, and Air.

Curated by Susie Cox, this interactive, hands-on exhibit will feature machines like the helicopter, glider, armored tank, printing press, bicycle, parachute, oil press, machine gun, and more. Besides the exhibit being family friendly and educational, David Anaya, director of marketing and communications for the Bush Library and Museum, says this exhibit will give people something different to come learn about at the museum.

Anaya says he anticipates this exhibit will spark local and outsider interest because of the name recognition da Vinci brings. His inventions, innovations, and interests will not only educate, but inspire future engineers, according to Anaya. Getting to touch and set these machines in motion gives visitors a unique experience where they get to see da Vinci’s principles and theories in motion.

“For people being able to get their hands on some of these machines, to be able to get up close to them, will give them not only an appreciation for what this person meant to society [in that time] in general, but will also get to put the why to his name,” Anaya says.

This exhibit allows visitors to dive beyond da Vinci’s art works and into his ‘encrypted’ (right to left handwritten) notes. Visitors can see how these inventions continue to have roles in society today like the bicycle, helicopter, and pillar lifts — all still in use and useful around the world. Owned by Evergreen Exhibitions, “Leonardo da Vinci: Machines in Motion” has been on display in Mexico City, Mexico; Columbia, South Carolina; Las Vegas, Nevada; Hartford, Connecticut; Edinburg, Texas; Buffalo, New York; and more. Past reviews rave over the full-scale replicas of da Vinci’s machines, receiving crowds that vary substantially in age with all left in wonder and in awe.

Besides da Vinci’s famous paintings and drawings, he is also notable in science, mathematics, engineering, geology, and more. There is a direct correlation between the Engineering department at Texas A&M University and this new exhibit, Anaya says. The agricultural and engineering emphasis the university holds leads Anaya to expect the da Vinci exhibit will draw a big STEM student crowd. Last year’s ranching exhibit drew about 160,000 visitors to the Bush Library and Museum.

Anaya mentions that the success of these exhibits is due to the temporary nature of the displays, which gives the Bryan College Station community a chance to see something or someone in a different light.

“These temporary exhibits give an insight to people in the community about stuff other than just the president,” Anaya says.

Now on display, “Leonardo da Vinci: Machines in Motion” will be at the Bush Library and Museum until Jan. 6, 2019. Texas A&M and Blinn College students get in for free. General admission tickets are $9 and can be purchased at the front desk. Admission includes free personal photography and an audio wand that includes an audio tour. For more information, visit bush41.org or call (979) 691-4057.
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The program made possible in part through Hotel Tax Revenue funded from the City of College Station and the City of Bryan through The Arts Council.

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Six years ago, when the idea for the Brazos Valley Symphony Orchestra’s Premiere Market fundraising event first came to fruition, the members realized that they had something quite special on their hands. With the help of their fearless leader at the time, Lou Ellen Ruesink, and her faith in the market, the first one went off without a hitch. It has since grown into the anticipated event known today.

This year, the fundraiser will take place on April 6 and 7 at the Brazos County Expo. All the proceeds made from the $5 admission fee go towards the cultural and educational programs of BVSO.

“I want people to realize that whether you want to spend $5 or $500 there will be something there for you,” says Mary Koeninger, BVSO’s executive director. “It is so convenient because you can go leisurely out to the expo and shop these unique vendors that travel all around with their product; except now you have the convenience of it being so close to home.”

Shoppers will be able to experience some of the favorite vendors from the past, as well as new and exciting additions, all of which are unique and of great quality, according to BVSO.

In addition to the various vendors featured, the “Muffins, Mimosas, and More” and the “Bacon & Bloody Marys” special shopping events make a return this year.

The fundraiser just so happens to come right in time for Mother’s Day, graduations, Father’s Day, and even summer weddings. Even if the “girl’s day” festivities do not appeal to you or you do not have a specific occasion in mind, the market will still have plenty of vendors to interest everyone.

Koeninger emphasizes that the intention behind the fundraiser was for BVSO to give community members a unique and fun excuse to get together and support the arts while also having a great time. “The reason we do it is that it allows us to ensure that we have the resources to sustain our educational program and our concerts,” she says.

The 2018 Premiere Market will be open on Friday, April 6, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Saturday, April 7, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information about the market or to contact BVSO, visit premieremarket.org or bvso.org.

The market features a variety of vendors all shoppers will love.

Schedule of Events
VIP Shopping: Muffins, Mimosas & More
April 6 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
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$5 Admission

Shop in Style: Bacon & Bloody Marys
April 7 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
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Day 2 Everybody Shops Again
April 7 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
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FRIENDS OF BLUEBONNET OPRY
An Inexpensive Night for All Ages
By KASSANDRA REYES

It is a lively atmosphere, with warm smiles, warm food, and warm people. On stage, guitar strings strum, feet tap, fiddle strings flutter, drums beat, piano keys resonate, and voices sing throughout a night of fun. Coins clink inside donation jars and people munch on food, heads bopping to the country music resounding throughout the ballroom.

Held on the third Thursday of every month, the Friends of Bluebonnet Opry gather a lineup of country artists to play for an evening in Brenham. The 14-year-old nonprofit organization hosts these concert-like evenings, open to the public, to raise funds for Hospice Brazos Valley, Brenham branch.

Formed in 1998 by Allison Crowson, the monthly shows were held at Brenham Fireman’s Training Center until Allison became an assistant principal at Brenham High School. Eunice Drews, the current president of the Friends of Bluebonnet Opry, aided the Opry from the beginning, watching the organization grow into a nonprofit run by dedicated individuals.

After Allison stepped down, Bill Harris ran the show until his passing, who was followed by Raymond and Erma Walker until Erma’s health prompted them to retire. After this, Eunicie and Henry Drews took charge of the nonprofit organization in 2007 with a board made up of 17 volunteer members. She and her team work hard to make their monthly shows fun and attention-grabbing, mostly from their musical lineup, which the house band leader, Harris Kubos Sr., takes care of.

“One person just really can’t run the show,” Eunice says.

The opry is currently held at the Silver Wings ballroom in Brenham and doors open at 5:30 p.m. The entrance fee is $5 and the music begins at 7:30 p.m. with a 20-minute intermission and ends at 10 p.m. Throughout the night, guests can sit back and enjoy the music, dance, and grab food at the snack bar. On average, the opry will have about 300 attendees. The Friends of Bluebonnet Opry also has door prizes during their monthly events donated by restaurants, merchants, or the opry regulars. Door prizes include things like gift certificates, jewelry, food baskets, plants, and crafts like Christmas wreaths from charitable individuals.

The March opry consists of Laurie Richardson from Livingston, Cody Rhodes from Cypress, Allison Crowson from Brenham, and the Opry House Band. In the past, Kubos has been able to book Tony Booth, Darrell McCall, Jake Hooker, Stephen Pride, David Church, and popular local artist David Lewis. Eunice encourages people to come out for a night of good entertainment and food consisting of hamburgers, hotdogs, homemade cakes and pies, and other snacks.

The Friends of Bluebonnet Opry is able to give $500 to $1,000 every three months to the local Hospice Brazos Valley, Brenham branch. “If we can give more, we do,” Eunice says.

At one point, the Friends of Bluebonnet Opry was making good numbers and donated as much as $6,000 one year. As of today, the nonprofit has donated more than $40,000 to hospice, which is a kindness some board members relate to directly.

It’s personal for Eunice because she had to use hospice for her husband who passed away three years ago in June. “I started with the opry 20 years ago; I’ve missed five opries in 20 years,” she shares.

Due to its growing size and requests from regulars, the opry plans special months. In May and October, the opry has polka shows because of the heavy Czech demographics in Brenham. Eunice says the polka shows average 400 people, which is a pretty full house. In September and in November, the opry has tribute performances like the Tony Booth show.

From the positive feedback, Eunice aims to expand the age group and reach out to the younger crowd.

Eunice hopes the opry can grow a lot more in the next year, seeing a room of 400 people each night. Until then, the Friends of Bluebonnet Opry will continue to promote their monthly show as inexpensive and a nice night out. For more information, visit friendsofbluebonnetopry.com or call (979) 451-0816.
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