O Come All Y’All Faithful
Check out one Dentonite’s huge collection of nativities

plus

North Texas Fair & Rodeo
Pops Carter still influences yearly Blues Festival

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Denton’s making moves, and now’s the time to be part of this growing city. Start here and find out what Li’l d has for you.

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Denton: where original meets independent

Denton. Original. Independent. Mull it over for a minute. Look at the image; think about the words. What does it mean? What is it saying?

This is our brand. It conveys in a single image the essence of this place: Denton, Texas. Understanding our brand is the first step to understanding our vibe. And tuning to our vibe is the key to unlocking your own uniquely-customized, Denton-centric adventure.

The word original is a broad application. It’s more a description of spirit than physical attribute, though the spirit is manifested in the physical fabric of our city. The creative energy fueled by our universities, arts community, music industry, small business community, the North Texas Horse Country – it drives originality. Another example of our originality is our vibrant downtown. It’s the real thing, no faux about it. We hold fast to our history while progressively moving ahead. We hold originality in high regard.

Independent is more of the same spirit and springs from the same attributes as original. Consider our burgeoning music scene, for instance. Denton is known around the world for the music movement that’s been organically evolving here for many years. Interestingly, though, there is not a specific “Denton sound” that anyone can identify in a word. That is the result of original and independent. The sound is a combination of individual sounds where writers, musicians, poets and venues have their own messages, rhythms, tunes and atmospheres. Listeners get the entire breadth, as varied or not as they choose. And again, in the surrounding horse country, we have the most diverse equine population and disciplines in one area than anywhere else on Planet Earth. That’s independent, and it results in a lively, energetic culture.

The weathered appearance of the brand is quite intentional. Think about your favorite pair of jeans. They’re likely a bit worn-looking, because they are your favorite. They fit you perfectly, comfortably. And they wouldn’t fit anyone else in just the same way. Our brand says that’s how Denton fits too.

Denton is a place where people come to pursue their passions, and we’ve shared their dreams and journeys for more than 150 years. You’ll see it in our year-round festivals, museums, galleries and shops. You’ll taste it in the delectable art of local chefs and unique dining. You’ll feel it in our vibe.

Welcome to Denton. Now get ready for something different, an experience no other has had before, because this one is yours: Original. Independent.

Kim Phillips
Vice President
Denton Convention and Visitors Bureau
Are You #dentoning?

Join the dentoning craze by using the #dentoning hashtag on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. We’ll publish our favorites in the next issue of Denton Live and you’ll win a cool #dentoning t-shirt.

We love our Li’l d, and so does Instagram user @mrcb4, who captured the art on the floor of VietBites, 702 S Elm.

A popular place for picture-taking is the Li’l d sign in front of Oak St. Drafthouse. Dentonites and visitors of all ages strike a pose to create the “i” in Li’l, including this little tyke of Instagram user @mrs.cashion.

Instagram user @elena.goldsmith captured this view of the Denton sign, which was painted by goers of the Oaktopia music festival in September 2015. The sign was then displayed on the wall of the Evers Building, visible from the LSA Burger rooftop.
A fascinating mix of southern and psychedelic rock, with melodic traces of folk and Americana. Like throwing some Marshall Tucker Band, Black Crowes and Great White into a melting pot. This record is bare and primal, yet not over produced in the slightest. If you are in the mood for driving rhythm with a rebel edge, then this is you.

This is really impressive. Clear influence from Zappa and Steely Dan, but not copycat. Great mix of instrumental virtuosity and vocal gymnastics. Quite a snappy arrangement and seriously well done. These guys will have a Grammy in a few years, so come check them out in Denton before they get too famous.

Buffalo Ruckus - The Buffalo Ruckus

Remain - The World Beyond

A powerful rock band with strong vocals that are uniquely synchronized with the instrumentals. The thin tenor seems to float above, creating a very distinct sound. If you are into bands like the Spin Doctors or Ugly Kid Joe, you should definitely check these guys out.

Gravity Feed - Slow To Think

Acoustic, folk Rock, Americana and alternative rock are all terms that describe this lively band. Lead vocalist Ellie Meyer leads the band with a moving acoustic flow that is gracefully paired with some sweet-sounding guitar, soothing bass and pleasing drums. Highly recommended.

Autumn's Amber

DentonRadio.com is an online, 24/7 radio station devoted to Denton’s one-of-a-kind sound, playing music by Denton musicians - and nothing else.
Our group was summoned by Kwest to find Anakin Skywalker in one of the downtown mini malls. We were greeted by hundreds of boxes and objects randomly piled up in one big room. Jeff Gordon sat on top of a game of Battleship. Lance Alworth’s old San Diego Chargers jersey hung nearby. With so much packed into the small space we didn’t know where to look. Especially when we realized that we were in the wrong mini mall. Entering the right store, there he was – a $3,000 life-size statue of the young Anakin, one of only 500 statues made. I’m not a big Star Wars fan, but it was so cool to stand next to such a rare and pricey find. Kwest was satisfied, and we were really having a good time.

Kwest is a mobile app that is a way to explore your city — in Denton users search around the Square, engaging in games, answering questions about your surroundings, taking photographs to share and more. There are a few thousand users of the app right now, and the positive online reviews and support Kwest has received gives co-founder Omeed Shams and his team a rosy outlook on the future. “Our goal is to keep building the platform and keep building these types of games and interactions with users. We don’t want it to be the same experience multiple times,” Shams said.

The different mini games are a unique way to look around while engaging in the hunt. The games include 60-second lightning rounds — consisting of anywhere from six to eight questions — riddles and puzzles, GPS clues and augmented reality visions for different places and signs around town.

“Denton is fun, it’s quirky, it fits in really well with the brand of Kwest.”
- Omeed Shams
Kwest co-founder

We began our Kwest on the south side of the Courthouse lawn with a two-minute lightning round. The first question had us running around the Courthouse lawn looking for the answer. After we found it, another question came up immediately. Next was Mad World Records and a search for – well, no sense giving any more away. But since I’d never been there before, I had a good time looking around at all the records. Kwest asked us to take a picture with a record of our choosing before we left. Soon a selfie of me with a Disney music record was posted on social media.

That lightning round was particularly challenging, given the sheer size of the painting.

“Denton is fun, it’s quirky, it fits in really well with the brand of Kwest,” Shams said. “The Square is where everyone comes around to explore. Our goal is to build about half a dozen Kwests around the Square.”

Kwest encouraged us to ask questions of the employees in the places we visited in order to complete its games. It was enlightening to interact with the people who work in the different shops and find out more about the unique places on the Square.

Currently, the Kwest app is free to download, but based on content, individual Kwests may be differently priced. Kwest users can receive freebies as well, such as an ice cream cone at Beth Marie’s. In its next evolution, Kwests will have the capability to link phones, enabling cooperative and competitive play. Soon, an entire group can watch the game unfold on their individual devices.

“The value proposition is you’re experiencing a place in a fun way,” Omeed said. “You will be able to earn discounts, and you get a higher value.”

We crossed the finish line in just 45 minutes. Time flew by on our great, fun adventure.

Since that day, I have returned multiple times to the Square to look around and see more of the places that we visited on our Kwest. Just for fun.
ESSENTIAL DENTON VISITS

Check off on your #DentonBucketList:
North Texas Horse Country

“What’s on your Denton bucket list?” I live in Denton and love this city, yet there are many dentoning experiences I have yet to experience. So I started thinking what ought to be at the top of my Denton bucket list when I recalled hearing about the hundreds of beautiful horse ranches, famous trainers and champion riders surrounding Denton. Seeing these for myself would be first on my list.

On an early Saturday morning in downtown Denton, we boarded a luxury motor coach after a huge Texas welcome from a real cowboy. “Welcome to the North Texas Horse Country,” he drawled and tipped his hat. That cowboy turned out to be our tour guide. He surprised even the locals on the excursion when he told us there are more than 350 working horse ranches in Denton County, and Texas has more horses that any other state in the nation!

After a short jaunt into the lush and rolling countryside, our first tour stop was at Valor Farm. This is one of the only thoroughbred racing farms in the area, boasting two Kentuck Derby winners! We also saw an Appaloosa farm, Manor House, and visited the McCutcheon reining ranch, which gave us an inside look at different therapies for horses. We were incredibly lucky to get to see a baby foal born the night before, just a few hours old! She was adorable, struggling to find her wobbly legs.

Oak Meadow Ranch hosted our lunch. They served us right from the back of a 1896 John Deere chuck wagon. Delicious brisket, all the fixins and peach cobbler filled our tummies, meeting my personal great experience qualifier: Did it taste good? It did, and the whole day was perfect. Check! I’m scratching off number one on my Denton Bucket List. Now…on to number two. I’m on a roll now!

Tour Denton with your taste buds: Try the coffee and pastries at Jupiter House

There’s so many great places to satisfy your hunger and thirst in Denton. I decided to follow in the Denton Convention and Visitors Bureau footsteps and do one of their #DentonFoodTours at a local favorite: Jupiter House Coffee.

Located in the heart of the square smack in between Denton’s two universities, this coffee house offers tasty pastries and exotic coffee while providing a tranquil atmosphere that really captures the funky vibe of downtown. Voted best coffee house in 2016 and best local hangout in 2010 by the Denton Record-Chronicle, Jupiter House Coffee is populated by college students taking advantage of free Wi-Fi and local Dentonites soaking up the groovy atmosphere. The vivid and colorful paintings appear to be dripping off the wall, and the earthy music and modish décor all ensure that Jupiter House remains forever chill.

Jupiter House remains a well-known staple in Denton because of its delicious coffee and pastries, which includes the biggest and best cinnamon roll in Texas, according to local patrons.

The menu board is chock full of different drink options and combinations of coffee, as well as fresh fruit and smoothie choices. I grabbed one of those renowned cinnamon rolls, and added a Jupiter’s Nectar coffee with extra hazelnut to wash it down.

- Joey Stephens
Retro dark glass jugs line the wooden shelves in the middle of the shop. Dusty Springfield’s soulful ballad “Son of the Preacher Man” plays to customers as they drink their fill. Springfield’s sultry voice lays down like a soft blanket on those inside The Bearded Monk. The glass jugs wait, each imprinted with a different design than its neighbor, ready to serve their purpose. The only thing missing is a nice fill of some cold draft beer.

Growlers are easy, accessible and simple, but there’s more to growlers than just being to-go beer containers. It’s nice to have your own personal flagon to enjoy your favorite brew later with friends or back home alone on your couch. Beer’s best friend has become your trusty growler.

Ben Esely is the owner of The Bearded Monk, and his love for beer has expanded to owning 12 growlers. “You think of that old Appalachian jug band where somebody has a washboard and somebody has a banjo,” Esely said. “Yeah, these are the jugs. These are the moonshine jugs you think of.”

A growler is nothing more than a jug with an easy grip handle. These reusable bottles are perfect for any draft beer. Especially in Denton. Residents here can enjoy using growlers anytime and anywhere — the city has open container laws — so people can drink in public, whether sitting on the square for a picnic or walking down Hickory Street.

So, why is it called a growler? According to one folktale, early growlers had lids that opened and closed, but did not seal. When the lid was re-opened, carbon dioxide was released from the bottle, making a growling sound.

It seems nonsensical to purchase a special container just for beer. But growlers are special for many reasons. Besides being personal take-home vessels, growlers can be filled with special and limited beer not found in package stores. And though it’s true that anything that holds drinks can be considered a growler, they hold a certain appeal in the Denton craft beer world. Growlers are just cool.

For Doug Smith, Audacity Brew House owner and brew master, it’s a good way to be responsible and stay in the house for the night.

“A lot of people go through different phases in life. You have phases where you like to go out to the bars. Then you get to be old like me and you’re like, ‘I want to go home,’” he laughed.

Regular craft beer drinkers can choose from growlers of different sizes that range from a half-pint to a full gallon. By filling a 32-ounce growler once a week, a person could save around 370 bottles of beer.

Besides size, growler users can choose from three different materials: ceramic, stainless steel, and glass. Amber or clear glass are the most popular options. To keep beer cold longer, stainless is the way to go — perfect for long picnics outside on hot days. And ceramic jugs are another favorite for users like Chris Sallas.

Leaning over the bar decorated with assorted bottle caps, Chris waits for his beer. Behind the Bearded Monk counter, Esely fills the stainless steel growler. Chris does not live in Denton, but he has noticed how growler-friendly the city is.

“That kind of homegrown feel is very Denton-ish,” Chris noted. “It’s a good dentoning thing to do.”
Carefully walking onto the stage, their paces perfectly measured so as not to be too long or too short, the contestants nervously fidget with their frilly costumes. At their side follow their canine companions. In this competition, it’s the humans who are being judged and the dogs that are just along for the ride. The closer the humans are to looking and acting like their dogs, the more likely they are to take home first place.

The Dog Owner Look-Alike Contest is part of the Dog Days of Denton Festival. Held every fall at the North Texas Fairgrounds, Dog Days celebrates all things dog, from their cuteness, intelligence and physical traits to their abilities to help humans. Dog lovers, enthusiasts, trainers, breeders, rescuers and many more gather for contests and demonstrations. Most contests are designed solely for dogs, and some vendors offer free treat samples and adorable costumes to pose for Glamfur shots available on site.

“I have to say the funniest thing is usually the dog singing contest,” said Clay Riggs, a member of the Dog Days Board of Directors.

The Dog Sing-A-Long Contest has humans putting on their favorite tunes and hoping their best canine friends will join in like they do at home. Participation is easy – anyone who is interested lines up backstage shortly before the competition starts and waits their turn. Pair by pair, they take their places on the stage and sing their hearts out, while their canine companions either join in or just stare. Everyone has a good time and the crowd gets a laugh listening to the howling. Then the audience helps the judges choose the most harmonious pair.

Besides the look-alike and sing-along contests, there are competitions for Longest Ears, Shortest Ears, Longest Tongue, Shortest Hair, Longest Hair and many more. Judges do not always judge alone; many times the crowd helps make the tough choices by cheering their support.

But Dog Days of Denton is not just about entertainment. Many events throughout the day are also educational.

“One year we did a herding demonstration,” recounted Kevin Lechler, director of the event, “and we had live ducks out there and dogs that were trained to herd them. They were showing all of the ways the animals can be trained. To me, that’s very important.”

Other kinds of demonstrations are held to show the true potential of dogs. For example, a group that adopts dogs from shelters trains them to recognize signs of PTSD and calm people suffering from that condition. The dogs are then given to veterans. Other demonstrations have highlighted trained dogs’ abilities to track and discover anything from food to drugs.

Everyone is welcome, with or without a dog. Shelters usually attend, either with dogs needing homes or photos of available animals, and many people have been able to adopt right at the festival – one more way that Dog Days of Denton helps to improve the conditions of down-on-their-luck dogs.

So whether you’ve got a mini look-alike, a singing sensation, or just a plain good dog, all dogs are welcome. Please don’t forget the humans.
When I was younger, I remember asking my mom why people would leave food, envelopes of money, and presents at a table. As my father placed a photograph of my grandfather with an envelope beside the table, she answered. “It’s to remember the people we loved, so we will never forget them.” It was Dia de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, and we were attending Catholic mass. The choir and mariachi bands sang special songs while the priest walked down the aisle. Churchgoers were leaving photographs of their loved ones by a table the church had set up in front of the altar. After the service, everyone made their way outside to enjoy special Bread of the Dead, bread with a hard texture on the outside and fluffy on the inside, covered in sugar. This is what my family and I always did on the Day of the Dead.

The Day of the Dead is celebrated November 1 through 2, every year. Historically, people believe that souls or spirits come back to Earth to visit their loved ones during this time. It has been celebrated since Mexican indigenous civilizations existed, before the colonization by Spain. This holiday has become a day to celebrate traditions passed down through generations.

The city of Denton has embraced this holiday own by hosting a festival in which the community can gather and enjoy different events—some traditional and others uniquely Denton. Denton is a land for the misfits, the dreamers, and the uniquely weird. That’s why I thought that the Denton’s Day of the Dead festival would be a completely different approach to this holiday.

Denton created its Day of the Dead festival so that Dentonites could express their love for different cultures and put their own twist on the Latin American celebration. David J. Anzaldúa Pierce founded the festival in 2011. He wanted an event that would showcase the diversity of the people who live in Denton. The different genres of music, art, food and cultures of the city are mixed in with the traditions of the Day of the Dead, Halloween, and fall celebrations in general. Because of this, the festival isn’t always held on the actual Day of the Dead; it can fall on the weekend before Halloween, on Halloween, or a few days after. In addition, the festival helps local businesses to promote themselves, have fun and raise revenue.

At the festival, families dressed up in a wide array of costumes, from superheroes to traditional Calavera costumes, roaming the main streets of the Square. Many people walk, dressed in costumes, for the Twilight Lantern Costume Parade. Different local restaurants and families compete for the best salsa at the salsa tasting competition. There’s a fee of $40 for each contestant who enters, and they must prepare two gallons of salsa, for tasting throughout the day. The chips are provided by various sponsors. For just $10, you get all-you-can-eat chips and salsa!

For me, the coffin races are the most exciting event of the day. Dentonites show off their creative, personally-designed coffins. The bright colors, skulls, symbols and drawings capture the festival’s eccentric community. I had a birds-eye view as contestants raced to the finish line amid cheers for their friends (or coolest coffin).

Another interesting event at Denton’s Day of the Dead is the Cirque du Horror musical show. This show is the perfect mix of Halloween and Day of the Dead. It is spooky and funny at the same time, perfect for families. Besides this main show, the festival also has many small stories, songs and poems you can see.

When I first heard about the events within the festival, I could not quite understand what it had to do with this special holiday. After I saw them firsthand, however, I realized that this is the point. Denton mixed a Mexican holiday with its own twist, which is part of what makes the city so great. They did not try to recreate it the way my family had always done it; they simply made it their own. Overall, the goal of Denton’s Day of the Dead is to bring families together and celebrate life. Whether you celebrate this holiday the traditional way, or make it unique, it’s a great way to honor your loved ones who have passed away and have a great time with those who are still on Earth.
Rows of empty beds line fallow fields waiting for the bountiful harvest to come. In the summer, these beds will overflow with freshly-grown cucumbers, melons, peppers, eggplants, and more. A hint of things to come are the arugula flowers basking in the sun next to a greenhouse, waiting to be picked. Leaves are just starting to sprout on tomato plants standing under grow lights.

Rooted Heart Farm owner Courtney Swearingen grabs one of the tomato flats. “You’ve gotta take caution because there could be one last freeze,” Swearingen said. “We trick them by using greenhouses. I start seeds in there in little flats and then transplant them out into the fields.”

Rooted Heart is one of the farms that is a part of Cardo’s Farm Project, run by Amanda Austin. These farms provide organic produce to various local restaurants including Barley & Board, Chestnut Tree, and Hannah’s Off the Square.

Any remaining fruits and vegetables are sold at the Denton Community Market, open every Saturday between the months of April and November. Rooted Heart Farm welcomes those who want to visit the farm and learn about growing their own produce. College students, regardless of major, can apply for internships at the farm, which is how Courtney Swearingen got involved.

“I worked with Amanda and started as a student intern in 2013 – and just kept coming back,” Swearingen said. “That’s how I decided I wanted to be a farmer.”

The farm plays host to service projects and encourages volunteers to come out on Mondays and Wednesdays to help with field work. Beginning in March, Wednesdays are designated harvest days. Visitors can enjoy farm tours, even when working is not on their mind. But for those interested in growing instead of just buying their own foods, volunteering is the path to hands-on knowledge and farming experience.

“The internship and volunteer work is more learning by doing,” Courtney said. “It’s not classroom style – you’re actually out in the fields working. We’ll talk about stuff. I’ll explain everything before we do it. Why we do it, how to do it.”

Locally-sourced produce is more than a current culinary fad. It’s evolving into a practical and healthy lifestyle choice for more and more people. Cardo’s Farm Project shows how it’s done and teaches anyone the DIY route to good, fresh food.
‘LOCAL WHEN POSSIBLE’

The Chestnut Tree finds its produce close to home

Story By McKeni Franklin
Photo by Amber Reece

It was springtime on a plate: red strawberries, orange cantaloupe, green kiwis, purple grapes. And on the other half, two slices of a freshly baked English muffin garnished with sautéed spinach, thinly-sliced pieces of spiced-baked ham, and a perfectly poached egg drizzled with hollandaise sauce. The meal was almost too perfect to eat. With the first bite – crunchy, buttery, savory, sweet, then tangy – one tastes the fresh and real flavors and textures as only a locally-sourced meal could provide.

The term “locally-sourced food” tops the National Restaurant Association’s 2016 Culinary Forecast list. We are becoming a more health-conscious society, so it’s only natural that we want our meals prepared with fresh local produce and meats, with healthy ingredients coming from somewhere that you know. Denton has you covered. Whether you’re looking for a night out or just a quick snack, there are plenty of healthy options around town.

The next time you’re around the Denton Square, stop by the Chestnut Tree Teahouse and Bistro on West Hickory Street. You can’t miss the only bright green building on the street. The restaurant has evolved over the last 22 years (it used to be an antique store with a tea room), but the one constant has been its preference for locally-sourced ingredients.

“Our thought process behind that is, ‘Local when possible,’” said Suzanne Schneider Johnson, head chef and Chestnut Tree general manager.

In fact, that is why Suzanne wanted to work there. “I was a customer before I worked here, and part of the reason why I wanted to come here is because I liked what Valeree Clegg, the owner, was doing.”

The Chestnut Tree uses locally-sourced produce, from farmers such as Cardo’s Farm Project, Earthwise Garden & Produce and Denton’s Backyard Farms. When it comes to getting the food from farm-to-table, Suzanne’s communication with the farmers is very direct. “When I buy from farms, farmers usually say to me, ‘Here is what we’re going to grow’ and ‘Here is when this is available.’ They ask, ‘Is there anything that you would like to see that we don’t have?’ So, that’s how the whole process starts when dealing with a farmer.”

It may be easier and more convenient not to buy locally but not usually healthier or tastier. Mass-producing food vendors often treat produce with wax or chemicals to prolong its shelf life, robbing consumers of the true taste of the produce.

“A mass-produced tomato will have kind of a waxy texture to it that is not naturally occurring,” Suzanne said. “Whereas with local, farmers will call me and tell me they have tomatoes and will have them delivered by tomorrow. The lifespan is shorter because it doesn’t have that wax coating, but it tastes like what a tomato is supposed to taste like.”

Going completely local isn’t possible in North Texas. Weather plays a huge factor in what restaurants can get.

“There are times where we are more local than other times of the year. In the winter, greens are heartier. In the spring, tomatoes are heartier. In the winter, we don’t get local tomatoes because they just don’t exist,” Suzanne said. With foods sourced outside our area, Suzanne notes that they always try to make the right decision by buying from the best food vendors and buying non-mass-produced poultry and fish.

“You have to figure out what’s the best solution and do as much as you can from around the area, while maintaining options and affordability for customers.”

Another reason for choosing local: it puts money back into the local economy. “I think there’s a lot more concern and consideration in investing in local economies than there used to be,” Suzanne said. “It directly affects your neighbors. The guy who owns Earthwise Produce is Ryan Crocker. When you pay money to Ryan Crocker, that money is not going to pay some CEO’s $400,000 salary. It’s going to make sure his kids have soccer practice.”

The longevity of the Chestnut Tree is a testament to its success here in Denton. It isn’t a coincidence to Suzanne that her older, successful restaurant features locally-sourced food.

“A lot of businesses will fight to stay open,” Suzanne acknowledged. “We’re busier than we’ve ever been and that’s a good place to be. And I definitely think a lot of that has to do with the fact that we do use local.”

Food bursting with flavor, helping local farmers and keeping businesses open longer —locally-sourced food is definitely a win-win-win proposition for Denton!”

Check out these locally-sourced restaurants in Denton

The Chestnut Tree Tea Room
107 W Hickory St • 940.591.9475

Everyday Nectar
515 S Locust St • 940.387.4567

Barley & Board
100 W Oak St • 940.566.3900

940’s Kitchen & Cocktails
219 W Oak St • 940.218.6222

discoverdenton.com
Hoods are up in a “come look at me” stance, the rebuilt, modified, or original engines of everything from old farm trucks to 60s muscle cars are on display inside sparkling eye-catching sheet metal and fiberglass. These rolling works of art are surrounded by brightly-colored booths, populating the vast courthouse lawn. Each one advertises local business services and artists dealing their wares to the crowds of people enjoying the still-warm weather of early fall. Nearly every spot on the Square is taken up with old and new classics that can make even non-car lovers stop to take a second look.

They are competing for trophies made out of salvaged car parts – painted and mashed together in new ways – displayed on a nearby table. The added colors of the items previously considered junk swirl together and are presented as prizes for the numerous contests held at the auto show. “Fifty years ago, you used to see these cars, parked downtown on a regular basis,” said Christine Gossett, DMSA Event Coordinator. “Now that they’re part of our history and culture, it’s nice to bring that nostalgia back to downtown.”

With so many different classes of vehicles, the auto show has something for everyone. There are the straightforward categories where vehicles compete within the decade they were produced, to specialty categories that feature everything from military vehicles to souped-up golf carts. And rat rods. A “rat rod” is a uniquely custom hot rod that imitates cars of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, but largely remains “unfinished.” While the event has had a few over the years, they were usually included in the specialty category. Now they have their own class to shine in all of their rusty glory.

“Most of the show participants sit nearby because they enjoy talking,” event helper Craig Thomas said. “It’s a great event where they get together, see their friends, and talk cars.” Motorcycle lovers also have a good time at this show. There are several contests for the two- and three-wheeled crowd, as well as a display of antique tractors and an antique fire truck perfect for photo opportunities.

An old rusty car sits in the street, covered in chalk pictures and writing by the end of the day. CTC Auto Ranch brings the car, which acts as a sort of guardian to the colorful world waiting just a little further down the street.

The usually blank sidewalks will soon be "People who don't even know we're here find us somehow.”

- Traci Davis, Garden Gate owner

ARTS & AUTOS EXTRAVAGANZA
BRING NOSTALGIA BACK TO DENTON

Story by Kady Shirley
Photos by Ed Steele Photography

Denton Arts and Autos Extravaganza
Where: Denton Square
When: September 10
Time: 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
More info: dentonmainstreet.org
be covered by elaborate works of chalk art, some that take up to five hours to complete.

ChalkFest is a sidewalk art competition held alongside the car show where contestants of all ages register to compete for cash prizes. Started by Bill and Ann Ennis after the couple saw similar competitions in other Texas towns, this isn’t your traditional playground chalk contest. ChalkFest has morphed into something uniquely Denton.

Coordinated by local art gallery A Creative Art Studio, ChalkFest used to take place around the sidewalks of the Courthouse. It has since moved to the walkways of Oak and Elm Streets, having outgrown the Square. The event has some guidelines – all artwork must be family-friendly – but for the most part you are allowed to freely express yourself. Contestants draw from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m., when judging starts. Colored chalk is included in the nominal contest entrance fee, but artists can opt to bring their own chalk palette, supplies, and even pictures to use as visual aids for their masterpieces. Sidewalk spots are first come, first serve for artists on the day of ChalkFest.

“The first year I was involved, there was a lady doing chalk art dedicated to her mom who had passed away,” said Robin Huttash, owner of A Creative Art Studio. “She did a three-dimensional swan, and it was pretty incredible.”

There is plenty of room for the kids to participate too. Selwyn School offers free lessons in making handmade kites, just as it has every year since the beginning of the festival. Denton’s SCRAP store also sponsors activities from year-to-year. The shops of the Square are open all day, welcoming festivalgoers into their spaces to show off their wares.

“Visitors from the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and surrounding areas come in the stores,” said Traci Davis, festival helper and owner of Garden Gate. “People who don’t even know we are here find us somehow.”

Festival goers can also take a break from all the activities to rest their feet and enjoy live music from local artists around the courthouse. People bob their heads or get up and dance to the wide variety of music, from country to rock. Afterwards, attendees head inside the courthouse to participate in the silent auction that helps raise money for the DMSA. Local businesses donate packages such as hotel stays, tickets to local events, free meals at restaurants, and other great prizes.

“You might have a Corvette across the street from a Rat Rod and it looks silly,” Gossett said with a chuckle. “The festival is just a real good example of the diversity of Denton. The art part of our event puts the fun into a car show for people who might not be into cars, but want to come downtown and see some cool stuff.”

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“Compete like champions every single day. It’s not a quick fix, but we need to make sure that we set a solid foundation that can carry over for years to come.”

Mean Green football coach Seth Littrell repeats the goal he has set in place for many months now. He sits with one leg crossed over the other, determination in his eyes and a calmness in his deep voice that reverberates around the room.

The big office is a nice asset for the job ahead of him. At 37 years of age, the Muskogee, Okla. native has been surrounded with football his entire life.

After leading North Carolina to the 17th-ranked offense in the nation in 2015 as the Tar Heels’ offensive coordinator, Littrell was a deserving candidate for a head coaching job. Now, as a first-time head coach, he must turn around a program that has seen one bowl game appearance since 2004.

**THE SPORT**

**Q:** You’ve worked under some great coaches – Mike Leach, Mike Stoops, Kevin Wilson and Larry Fedora. What have you learned from them and who impacted your career the most?

**A:** Each coach has their different personalities and their different strengths and weaknesses. Coach Leach had a great vision for what he wanted to do. He didn’t ever sway from that. I learned a lot about my philosophy offensively, what to do, and we’re still doing it to this day. Mike Stoops had a passion for the game. He had a big heart and he cared about the staff. Kevin Wilson is probably one of the best offensive minds I have ever been around, and one of the smartest people I have ever been around. I learned a lot from him. I can’t say enough about Coach Fedora. He really taught me what it looks like to be a head coach. He had a great vision for what his program was going to look like, he was great with the staff, and he taught. I’ve been blessed to have been around a great group of guys, and each one played a part in where I am today.

**Q:** Describe your coaching personality on the sidelines: fiery, calm or composed?

**A:** I think you have to be calm and composed. Obviously, there will be times that you will be passionate and fiery, but the biggest thing is that you are out there, you are having fun, you stay relaxed and you keep the players relaxed. I think everybody is going to take on your personality on game days. In my opinion, if I were to go out there screaming and showing that I have insecurities, then that’s going to reflect
on the players and how they react. Hopefully, you will see on Saturdays a very calm coach who is focused, having fun and is there to compete.

Q: How hard have you hit the recruiting trail?
A: It’s tough because you usually build a class on two to three years of recruiting and getting to know these kids and building relationships. It takes a lot of people to help out and do what we did in a few weeks. Our coaching staff works extremely hard; they’re go-getters, good people and they know what type of talent that we are trying to recruit to our system. I am extremely pleased with our class, and I think that they can set a solid foundation for the future.

Q: What is your biggest goal for this team as you begin to prepare for the upcoming season?
A: Compete like champions every single day. Right now, I’m truly focused on setting the foundation. Obviously, our long-term goals are to be competing for championships year in and year out and to make sure that we establish a program that is set for longevity.

THE UNIVERSITY

Q: What was your impression of UNT’s campus and Apogee Stadium when you saw it for the first time?
A: Apogee Stadium is one of the best in the country. When you look around, you will see that we have a stadium, facilities and a press box that are second to none. They did an unbelievable job. It’s a great foundation and starting point to bring guys in and show them what we have. You can get an unbelievable education, and our administration, athletic director, president and chancellor are all committed to what we are looking for in the future. Their vision is why I came here.

Q: Why do you feel that UNT thinks you are the best choice for head coach?
A: First off, I should say that it was the best fit for me. If I was going to become a head coach, I wanted it to be at a place that had a great vision to compete for championships every year. I also wanted a place that was back home and I felt comfortable staying in for a long time. At the end of the day, North Texas, the administration and the fans have to figure out if I’m the best fit for them. We will go out, set our foundation, and compete.

THE FAMILY

Q: Where did your passion for football begin?
A: I grew up in a football family. My father didn’t coach but he played at the University of Oklahoma in the early 70s. At a very early age, I had a young coach in our league that would take me out on Friday nights to go scout other teams. That’s when I really fell in love with the coaching side of it. I think it helped mold me into who I am today.

Q: Who has been your biggest mentor in your life?
A: I would have to say my parents. I was raised in a two-parent home and they were both very supportive. They both motivated me differently. My mom was very positive, and she would always talk about things that I could do. My dad was an extremely hard worker. He was a great character and set a great foundation for my sister and me. They are my biggest mentors by far.
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NOV. 12 at WKU *
NOV. 19 Southern Miss *
NOV. 26 at UTEP *

HEAD COACH
SETH LITRELL

HOME   AWAY    * C-USA GAME
A little girl belts out the classic holiday tune, unable
to contain her excitement as she waits in line to see
Santa. Amidst the glow of thousands of dazzling lights,
people of all ages around her begin to join in. Soon,
this impromptu choir’s voices echo throughout the
Courthouse square, filling everyone with the special joy
of the holiday season.

It’s the holiday season on the square, when families
flock to the lights to celebrate the annual Denton
Holiday Lighting Festival. Pictures with Santa, carriage
rides, musical performances, stores and vendors serving
holiday drinks and food can be found around the
Courthouse lawn. This is the place to come and get some
holiday cheer.

Since its inception in 1988, the Holiday Lighting Festival
Association has provided Denton with a way to celebrate
this magical time of the year. The association maintains
the sparkling lights on the trees surrounding the
Courthouse that illuminate its lawn year round, but the
lighting is taken up several notches around Christmas.
The not-for-profit group funds the entire Holiday
Lighting Festival through donations from the
community and local businesses: Beth Marie’s Old
Fashioned Ice Cream, Atomic Candy and Jupiter House
are among many local businesses that donate money
to fund the festival every year. The donations provide
lights, banners and other decorations for city buildings.

But the main attraction on this night is the towering
Christmas tree, sparkling on the Courthouse lawn.
Festival visitors pose with the tree and lights, and snap
a few holiday photos.

“I appreciate the atmosphere and how it’s a culmination
of spirit,” said Denton resident Matt Payne, who attends
the festival every year. “The beautiful, festive displays
truly depict it.”

During the Holiday Lighting Festival, a number of
musical acts perform on and off the square. The Denton
Community Band has been a favorite every year since
the festival’s inception. Carol Lynn Mizell, the band’s
director for 38 years, brings Deck the Halls, Jingle
Bells and other holiday favorites to the festival stage,
encouraging visitors to sing along.

Last year, nearby St. Andrew Presbyterian Church
(300 W. Oak) offered a living nativity, complete with
a petting zoo, where kids pet sheep, ducks and other
animals surrounding the Holy manger.

“Christmas in Denton really wouldn’t be the same
without the festival,” Denton resident Sara Marshall
said.

The Denton Holiday Lighting Festival is one of the
best and happiest nights of the year in the city. The
Courthouse Square fills with people joining together to
start the holiday season on a bright note with thousands
of lights, heartwarming carols, and smiles on children’s
faces as they visit Santa. It’s a splendid start to the
season, a joyous beginning to everyone’s Hanukkah,
Kwanzaa and Christmas – whether or not you want a
hippopotamus.
“Okay, are you ready?” Judy says with a flicker of delight in her eye. We had just finished winding our way through her garden, past deer statues with large eyes sitting in tall grass and three stone statues of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus resting near an old well house. She pauses before opening the door to make sure I am ready for what’s inside her cottage.

With my anticipation mounting, she swings open the door to her gallery full of her life’s passion and dedication. Dozens upon dozens of shelves are overflowing with natiivities cascading like waterfalls of ceramic, wood, metal, plastic, rubber and more, visuals of Christ’s birth replayed in every color and material imaginable.

Since 1970, Judy has collected more than 3,300 crafts, trinkets and works of art depicting the Holy Nativity, and she displays them for the world to see in a place she calls Bethlehem in Denton County.

In 1999, after nearly 30 years of collecting nativity scenes and crèches, Judy had accrued so many that she and her husband, Monroe, had to construct a new building to house her fascination. Still, just having the collection wasn’t enough. Judy gets the most satisfaction by sharing her natiivities with the world. That’s part of being a Christian, she said. Although, she doesn’t feel that she needs to push her beliefs onto people. “I don’t want to infringe on anybody’s religion,” Judy said. “One man was out here, and another man told me, ‘Did you know that he’s not Christian?’ I said, ‘Really?’ And, yet, he brought other people here. God works in strange and mysterious ways, and that’s fine.”

Bethlehem in Denton County is also a refuge for Judy to get away from the world, work and all the other stresses in her life. In Denton’s Bethlehem, Judy is the curator of one of the most diverse collections in the world. The museum, open to the public by appointment on evenings and weekends, celebrates humanity through the common thread of adoration for the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas trees sag with the weight of hundreds of nativity ornaments; the floors are lined with statues and stables; colors of green, gold, ruby red and navy blue weave in and out of...
the display shelves. Everywhere you look, the view is bursting with wise men, donkeys and angels.

Judy’s nativities come from all over the world. Some come from as far away as Indonesia, Africa, Russia and Japan. The most impressive materials constructing these decorations include kitchen tools, grains of rice, cypress roots and cinnamon tree pulp. Some are enormous and extravagant, and some can fit on the head of a pin. Judy has collected most of the nativities herself, but some have been donated by family, friends and visitors inspired by her collection.

She parades proudly as she exhibits her favorite pieces in the collection. Her hair is angel-wing white. Her eyes are bright blue and warm. She wears a crisp, clean black and white blouse, complimented by a gold nativity necklace hanging around her neck. Her champagne-pink nails wrap softly around each piece that she handles with the utmost care.

Picking up a nativity masterfully carved from one piece of wood, Judy explains that her daughter found it in a garage sale. “Why would anybody put that in a garage sale? What were they thinking?” she recounted.

“They put it in a garage sale so my daughter could find it,” she said, her eyes gleaming.

Judy has a special bond with her nativities that resembles a young girl taking care of her dollhouse. She talks to them. She pats them on the head. She bounces a camel up and down in the air like a toy horse. She points to a statue of Joseph. “I call him Cozumo Joe, so I will remember this nativity is from Cozumel,” Judy explained, grinning lovingly at the statue.

Judy calls herself the “Mangermaid,” a nickname that comes with a double meaning. On one hand, she is caretaker, curator and manager of the gallery. On the other, she is God’s humble servant performing her duty as a dedicated Christian. Dedication is kind of Judy’s thing. Whether she is playing organ for her church, which she did for years, volunteering her time to an assisted living center or working her day job at a funeral home in Denton, Judy is always focused.

In Denton’s Bethlehem, she keeps a keen eye out for any opportunity to perform what she calls “accentuating her collection” with her own creative flair. For instance, she had collected several silver figures of the nativity, but they were “homeless” as she calls them, or without a stable scene. It just so happened that she had gifted her sister with a silver candleholder, so she waited until the candle was exhausted until she asked for it back. “Why?” her sister had asked. Of course, it was to be the perfect little silver platter to display her orphaned figures.

There’s not a trip to a garage sale, resale shop or craft store where Judy isn’t looking to find the missing accents to her nativities. A sheet of fabric here, a string of beads there, and Judy has designed the perfect way to display her collection. Every aspect of her gallery is carefully planned. The power outlets and shelf brackets are painted to match the carpeted walls. Sometimes there are accents or pieces that fall into her lap by happy coincidence, such as an entire furniture set found at a yard sale that matched a hutch inherited from her mother, Mimi. “Thank you God, you knew what I needed. Not just what I asked for,” Judy prayed, as she clasps her hands together and looks up toward heaven.

Another curious happenstance in the world of Denton’s Bethlehem is the appearance of a nativity made of nails. One visitor remarked that Judy had not collected a piece from Puerto Rico. Judy owned nativities from all over Latin America, but hadn’t yet collected one from the Caribbean island. Months
later, the visitor sent Judy the nail nativity from her home country. One day, as Judy was guiding a young girl and her mother through her collection, she noticed the girl had grown bored of the gallery. Instantly, Judy thought to show the girl the nativity from Puerto Rico. “Puerto Rico!” the girl exclaimed. “My grandmother is from Puerto Rico.” It turned out that the young girl’s grandmother was the person who crafted the nail nativity now displayed in Denton County’s Bethlehem.

Miracles are actually commonplace in Bethlehem in Denton County. Judy tells of one visitor who had an odd interest in a nativity made from a gourd. As he turned the gourd around and read the inscription on the back, Judy remembers that he said, “Just as I thought. I made this.” He had traveled across the country only to be reunited with one of his creations.

“If it weren’t for Judy’s enchantment with the crèche, many would have missed the inevitable joy that comes with each visit. But how did Denton County’s Bethlehem get to this point? After a visit to Europe in the early 1990s, Judy’s collection of nativities skyrocketed. She began avidly and actively collecting nativities from anywhere she could find them. In a bittersweet moment, Judy inherited 300 nativities from her late mother, and soon after, Monroe began construction on what would become Bethlehem in Denton County. It was a way for him to reclaim their home, but it was also a gift to his devoted wife. By October of the new millennium, the first nativity was placed inside of Judy’s Bethlehem. Sixteen years later, Judy is the proud owner of a burgeoning, ever-growing Holy collection. So much so that Judy is Texas’ representative in the international organization known as Friends of The Crèche.

At the end of the tour, Judy is eager to show off her next project. A stack of cypress logs sits outside in a tall patch of grass. She yanks one up with her hand and points out a curve that will make a perfect arch for the Holy Family’s stable.

The sun is setting on the Kleins’ rural, picturesque property. The towers of Texas Woman’s University can be seen miles off on the horizon. Judy points up to a metal star wrapped in white lights that is perched atop her shed. “At night, instead of looking for the entrance, you can see the star,” says Judy, “And from there you’re looking north.”

Just like the three wise men following the star in search of Bethlehem, you can follow Judy’s star to Bethlehem in Denton County. O come let us adore Him!

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WASSAIL WELCOME

By Faye Darku

Parents and children hunt down Santa for a selfie. Hundreds sip holiday drinks and stroll the Square bundled up in winter clothes. Families make memories, taking pictures with Christmas decorations, shopping and singing along to the Christmas music heard everywhere you go. And they line up to go into stores to get a taste of a Christmas tradition: wassail.

Wassail is a heated mulled punch mixed with cinnamon, orange, honey, ginger and other spices. The medieval German drinking ritual of wassailing involved patrons going door-to-door, singing and being offered a drink from the wassail bowl.

During Denton’s Wassail Weekend, local shops around the Square make their favorite top-secret recipes for the throngs walking store-to-store. At stake in this modern version of wassailing are bragging rights for the best wassail. The participating merchants are competing for a crown – all hail the King and Queen of Wassail! Or even The Duke and Lady of Wassail!

“Back in 1999, the merchants wanted to be more active in the Holiday Lighting Festival,” said Christine Gossett, Denton Main Street Association Event Coordinator. “So a committee said ‘Let’s do wassail tasting because it’s Christmas time and wassail is a traditional Christmastime drink.’ It’s a great way for the merchants to say ‘Thank you for supporting downtown, and we welcome you.’ It’s a fun way to kick off the Christmas season.”

Wassail Weekend is a two-day event within and around the Denton Holiday Lighting Festival showcasing Denton’s fun-loving creativity in a holiday light. Occurring the weekend after Thanksgiving, it captures the Christmas feeling: the rush of love people show each other, and the excitement, laughter and joy found in being with family and friends. Wassail Weekend is also about giving back to the community, showcasing Denton’s uniquely diverse spirit. Friday night is festive, energetic, loud and busy. People are rushing to make all 40 wassail stops. It’s like the anticipation and thrill of opening gifts Christmas morning and getting what you wanted. Saturday is calmer, a great time to walk, drink and shop at a leisurely pace.

During Wassail Weekend, businesses are putting on their best holiday pageantry, trying to grab your attention. Every store wants you to come in and drink their wassail that’s been simmering for hours. Each shop’s wassail is characteristic of their business: Atomic Candy means sweet and fruity wassail and Wine Squared has alcoholic wassail (which is not in the actual competition).

“People get really creative and do their own thing. Some have fruits floating in them and others are a little thicker,” Gossett said.

Preparations begin in July for Wassail Weekend. Two days before, the merchants start brewing their wassail, making gallons of the holiday drink. Each year, more and more businesses around the Square participate to get their shot at the crowns.

“Anything that we do downtown gets people walking around,” Ryann Reid, Sweetwater owner, said. “Wassail Weekend is just one of those events that do to encourage people to take a tour down Oak Street, down Elm Street off of Locust, and not just venture on the four streets around the Square. It helps businesses.”

The winner gets the coveted crown, while second and third runners-up are given sashes to recognize their achievements. As they stroll and sip, customers pick up ballots from any of the Wassail Stops, tasting all the wassail options, then vote for their favorites and drop the ballot off at any of the shops. The votes are tallied up at the end, and a winner is announced on Saturday evening. The coveted crown is finally given on Monday. Last year’s King of Wassail was iTeach/iHeartDenton. People’s Jewelers was the Duke of Wassail and Twice as Nice was the Lady of Wassail. Winners proudly keep their crown until this year, when they hand them off to the new winners.

“The winner usually places the crown in their store for people to see they are the King or Queen of Wassail,” Gossett said.

So even old medieval drinking traditions can be Dentonized, just right for the holidays.
The aromas of home-cooked soul food and slow-roasted pulled pork fill the air on a sunny afternoon, interrupted by blues guitar riffs punching and gyrating in the air. Crowds of people break out lawn chairs and cold beverages to sit, relax and listen. Today, mowing the lawn and other usual weekend chores are pushed aside for this special gathering. For one weekend, people of Denton and travelers from across the country immerse themselves in the soulful vibes of the blues.

The Denton Blues Festival has celebrated one of America's most original musical genres every third weekend in September since 1995. Throughout the years, the festival has evolved into something that brings the Denton community together to embrace a common purpose: music of the soul.

As more and more local musicians offered to play at the community stage for free every year, the festival began to attract bigger and better talent for its main stage – Denise LaSalle, Little Milton, Johnnie Taylor and many others. The festival offerings grew more diverse, and now – from local dancers to arts and crafts to rappers and headlining bands – there’s entertainment for people of all ages.

Some years, the sun shines bright, but in other years, thunderous clouds hover over Quakertown Park, raining heavily and muddying the grass and walkways. Nevertheless, a little bad weather isn’t anything a few tarps can’t fix. Embracing the bad days is what the blues are all about.

“Everyone during their life feels the blues at some point,” said Kerry Goree, Denton Black Chamber of Commerce chairman. And perhaps no single artist portrayed that feeling better than one of the festival’s fixtures: Pops Carter.

An empty chair always waited for Pops in the middle of the main stage. As his guitarist Chris Tracey and the rest of the Funkmonsters did some last-minute tuning, Pops would arrive with sunglasses on, rocking a snazzy outfit, capped off with a top hat and his iconic cane. He’d often give audiences a background story before cueing his band to start a tune. “Y’all having fun yet?” he’d ask, always eliciting a cheer in return. Then he’d channel the lessons of his stories through the poetry of song. Pops wasn’t a trained musician, but he consistently impressed some of the most skilled bluesmen in the country with his voice. Passersby became spectators, spectators became listeners, and listeners became fans. Pop’s lyrics elicited a gamut of emotions, but the show always edified the audience.

Pops was a genuine blues man – a consummate stage performer, always conveying a powerful message. “To get up on stage in front of people and literally bare your soul takes a lot of sack,” said Dan Mojica, owner of Dan’s Silver Leaf, one of Denton’s most popular music venues. “I admire performers that can get up and do that, and he was one of them.”

Everyone that came into contact with Pops loved him, and they could always count on seeing him at the Denton Blues Festival. Guitarist Chris Tracey explained that Pops and the Funkmonsters loved playing at Blues Fest because it was family-friendly and always heavily populated with locals as well as visitors.

“It’s just a more comfortable party,” Tracey said. “It’s like if you go to a club

“Y’all having fun yet?”

Pops Carter still influences yearly Blues Fest celebration

Story and photo by Alex Lessard
and it’s jam packed, and you can’t move and you can’t get a drink. That’s less enjoyable than having just the right amount of people.”

Festival organizers never have problems finding enough people to fill each stage, due in part to Denton’s prolific music scene. In addition to the blues, the community stage is the home of rap, rhythm and blues, jazz and virtually anything that evokes the spirit the festival has created. In recent years, the newest generation of artists have engaged, conveying fresh perspectives on modern-age issues while channeling the hardships of their musical ancestors at the same time. But crowds especially appreciate those performers who have experienced hardships first-hand – like Pops.

Pops grew up in Houston during the Great Depression, running away from home when he was just 11 years old. During years darkened by segregation and inequality, Carter found his calling through the blues. He made his way off the streets of Denton to becoming one of the city’s most recognizable icons. Words weren’t required for him to send chills down the backs of those who listened to him sing. For up and coming bluesmen, Pops was the greatest role model imaginable – on and off the stage, he kept his friends close to his heart.

“I’ve met a lot of musicians that are just bulls---,” said Bone Doggie, member of Denton’s Hickory Street Hellraisers. “Pops wasn’t bulls---. Pops was just Pops.”

Pops grew up in Houston during the Great Depression, running away from home when he was just 11 years old. During years darkened by segregation and inequality, Carter found his calling through the blues. He made his way off the streets of Denton to becoming one of the city’s most recognizable icons. Words weren’t required for him to send chills down the backs of those who listened to him sing. For up and coming bluesmen, Pops was the greatest role model imaginable – on and off the stage, he kept his friends close to his heart.

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Pops Carter performs at Denton’s Blues Fest in this undated photo. (Photo courtesy of the Denton Black Chamber of Commerce)
It’s Lucky Luke!” yells the bad guy. Enter the man who shoots faster than his shadow, moseying in, straight up and tall. Its 6 p.m. in Cameroon, and my brother and I sit wide-eyed and silent in front of the television, watching every minute of the cartoon, amazed at how fast Lucky Luke shoots his gun and rides his horse. At six years old, this is the very first time I learned about cowboys.

Equally fascinated with cowboy movies starring John Wayne and Paul Newman as I grew older, I imagined these mystical people spending their days riding horses, fighting evil men with their big guns and getting the girl in the end. My life then was spent believing that’s what these animal herders did – that is, until I moved to Denton and learned about rodeos.

On North Carroll Boulevard in the heart of Denton, there are 21 acres of enclosed land where, for nine days, the North Texas Fair and Rodeo takes place every August. The North Texas State Fair Association organizes this event, considered one of the best in the Southwest, annually drawing 170,000 people from all over the world – and professional cowboys!

“We have people coming from Italy and Australia,” said Nanci Kimmey, executive assistant of the association. One of the Fair’s main attractions is the PRCA rodeo. Cowboys come here to show off their skills and win cash awards amounting up to $100,000. The rodeo brings in a lot of foreign visitors who know very little but are drawn to the cowboy culture, like me. Coming from Cameroon, all I knew about cowboys was from the movies. Now that I’m here, the North Texas Fair and Rodeo gives me the chance to get immersed in the cowboy experience, just like a Texan.

Besides rodeos, I learned that cowboys do ranch work, tend horses and cattle. Most cowboys begin riding horses at a very young age, surprising to someone like me, who at a young age could only watch cowboy cartoons. “I have been riding horses since I was too little to remember,” said Tom Shaw, longtime volunteer at the Fair and former rodeo contestant.

The rodeo is quite a show to take in: bull riding, bareback riding, steer wrestling, barrel racing and more. All the different rodeo contests display the cowboy’s and cowgirl’s best qualities: being strong and courageous as they compete with and against spirited animals. But it is bull riding that is the rodeo’s most dangerous contest and probably the most popular.

“Everybody wants to see the bull riders at the end of the show,” said Jay Brewer, Bullfight Team Coordinator. Bull riding makes me wonder why people would risk their lives; but, as dangerous as it is, it’s quite fun and amazing to watch. Bareback riding is also popular. Like the bull riders, the bareback cowboys must stay on for eight seconds and are scored on how well and hard they ride the bucking horses.

As cowboys ride these animals, all sorts of thoughts go through their
minds. Shaw remembers having an adrenaline rush during his bareback-riding days. “I could hear my heart beat a little faster and hear the horse breathing,” he said. “I was thinking, ‘why did I get on this horse?’”

Both of these contests gave me a great appreciation for what cowboys do. I now imagine myself riding a horse and competing in a rodeo one day – the spirit of Lucky Luke and the Duke still live strong in me!

But at the North Texas Fair and Rodeo there’s so much more for cowboys and cowgirls. There’s a wide range of activities like live concerts, livestock shows, food and games. It is a complete adventure, no matter how old you are.

“It’s great to be able to do all the extra stuff beside the rodeo,” Brewer noted. “For example, there aren’t many fairs and rodeos that have music.”

If you are a country music fan, you can attend live performances of renowned artists such as Steve Wariner, Josh Abbott, Ryan Bingham, and Charlie Daniels. The Budweiser stage, with more than 30 artists featured over the nine days, is the center of attraction between 9:30 and 11 p.m., after the rodeo is finished for the day. At that time, the carnival rides and games and food booths are still doing brisk business, catering to all of us who still haven’t gotten enough, such as Don Olson, one of the lemonade vendors at the fair, who has been selling there since 1988.

“It is like a tradition. I come here to meet people and it is part of my business,” Don said. He’s built long-time relationships with customers and their families, some up to three generations. Don’s booth is also a favorite of the rodeo cowboys and the rodeo clowns.

The fair holds beauty pageants for competitors from age one to eighteen. Miss North Texas Rodeo Queen is the most popular pageant, for contestants between the ages of 18 and 24. Other rodeo royalty contestants range in age from 4-18. There are also art contests for children between the ages of 5 to 12. Through paintings and drawings, the children describe their experience at the fair.

The Fair is not just tremendous fun – it also impacts the lives of people in Denton. The money raised by the event goes back to the community through scholarships that help students attend colleges and universities. The North Texas State Fair Association contributes back into the Denton community approximately $400,000 annually. Fair visitors stay in partner hotels, dine at local restaurants and shop at businesses in town. The economic impact of the whole event is estimated to be about $7 million.

This event would not be possible without the help of about 300 volunteers. Their service helps keep the fair prices affordable. Shaw, for example, has been volunteering for almost 23 years. “I feel like I’m contributing to my community,” he said. “It’s an opportunity to meet people that you would never meet.”

Tom and other volunteers check the electricity, plumbing, change the air conditioning, and make sure that the buildings are in good condition. The routine maintenance of the facility starts 30 days before the fair, and it takes another full 10 days after it is finished for volunteers to clean up. These volunteers come from different walks of life, some of them are professors, others are retired workers and others are still students.

“We all take pride in what we do, and we come together for a common cause,” Shaw said.

Like mine, many a childhood was filled with television and movie images of cowboys, we always wished to someday see face-to-face. The North Texas Fair and Rodeo makes this possible every year. Now, I don’t see these animal herders so much as characters, but as real people I greatly respect because they’re strong, courageous, skilled with animals, and protectors of the land.

So, I still want to be a cowboy.

Bullfighters protect a rider from the bull during the rodeo. In addition to the PRCA rodeo, the Bull Blowout is three nights solely dedicated to bull riding.

Charlie Daniels performs at the 2015 North Texas Fair & Rodeo. Daniels will once again play the closing night of the 2016 fair, August 27.

Contestants at the Ranch Rodeo compete in team roping. The North Texas Fair & Rodeo features nine days of rodeo action.
LIVING ON THE EDGE

Summit gym offers new highs

Story by Kyle Blankenship
Photos by Roberto Aguilar

I am 10 feet off the ground, clinging to an angular wall strewn with artificial holds in shapes unknown to nature, when I come to a crossroads. I can either take the “easy” path, wildly grabbing for a small blue handhold roughly the size and shape of a walnut above me, or swing my leg up above my head toward a slightly larger orange hold that feels miles away. To be clear, my legs don’t go that way – even if I could stop them from quaking for just a moment. Either move, if done correctly, will get me to the top of my route.

With sweat dripping down my face and, more importantly, all over my palms, I choose the first option, hurling myself skyward – OK, sure, it was only a few inches above me – and narrowly grab the handhold. I precariously scale the rest of the face, touch the top with a wheeze and drop down to the padded blue floor below. Although it wasn’t the hardest route offered – one particularly muscular college student to my right dangles like Spiderman in the middle of a difficult path – I feel a bit of elation. I beat the wall.

That’s just another day at Summit Yoga, Climbing and Fitness Gym in Denton, the only privately-owned climbing gym in the city limits. Summit is not only the premier site for indoor “bouldering” – a sport modeled after rope-free rock climbing – in the city, but also a central hot spot for yoga enthusiasts and those looking for the feeling of having the outdoors and community in their fitness routine. For those seeking a new experience – and maybe a bit of trial and error – Summit is the place to go.

Summit is a new fixture just off Denton’s downtown square, although one would think a building lined floor-to-ceiling with angular climbing walls would be a bit more conspicuous from the street. Instead, the new space – it opened its doors in November 2015 – lies in a discreet building just one block from Denton’s main tourist hub and offers a small home away from home for its members and visitors. Summit Denton is the fourth branch of the Summit gym chain, with other locations in Dallas, Carrollton and Grapevine, and it is the first local gym outside of the University of North Texas’ Recreation Center to offer indoor climbing. With climbing walls, a yoga and exercise studio in the back and a friendly staff, Summit is reminiscent of any local spot – including its own unique characters and an “everybody knows your name” mentality.

“The people and the music are really cool, and I’ve made some friends just coming in and hanging out,” said Rachel Jacobs, a student at the University of North Texas. “The staff just makes the whole experience so welcoming.”

But the highlights of any trip to Summit are those ubiquitous climbing walls of which I, as a beginning climber, failed to conquer far more often than I succeeded. For many folks first getting into climbing, or any new sport for that matter, comfort is key. As you first enter Summit, that feeling of acceptance is immediate – and don’t mind those first falls, climbing is all about chasing the thrill of victory. What’s victory without a few (completely safe) tumbles first, right? That’s what I keep telling myself, at least. From the climbing courses for beginners, to friendly staff willing to give you crucial climbing advice and...
even reasonable gear rental prices, everything is covered for the budding climber.

“We try to provide you with all of the tools necessary to live a healthy, active lifestyle while minimizing risk of injury,” said Logan Prentice, an assistant manager at Summit. “We will take you on an orientation your first time here to show you the ropes, and we’re also available during any of your subsequent visits if you ever need a refresher or some help on a specific climb.”

Indoor bouldering has become a legitimate phenomenon in cities throughout the country. In Texas, outdoor destinations like McKinney Falls, Rogers Park and bouldering mecca Hueco Tanks have become hotspots for climbers to venture into the wild and hit some world-class climbing. But in cities all over the state, indoor gyms have captured the outdoor craze by installing artificial walls with movable grips and holds, joined together to form full route “problems” in bouldering parlance. Summit offers hundreds of “problems” for climbers, ranging from beginner climbs to more advanced routes. Each of the problems are rated on “V” grades, increasing in difficulty from 0 to 16 and put together by Summit’s dedicated group of route planners – men and women tasked with tinkering with the wall to challenge climbers to push themselves on each visit to the gym.

This range of options allows Summit to court a wide range of climbers, not just athletic college students fresh out of the weight room but also men and women of all ages (including kids) and physical capability. And even if new customers are uncomfortable with renting out their first pair of climbing shoes – a sort of tight, hybrid ballet shoe that helps your feet stick to the holds and caused my virgin feet to turn blue – and hitting the wall, Summit’s selection of in-house classes appeal not only to the budding climber but also those looking to up their skill set. The gym offers Climbing 101 courses, aimed at beginning climbers and those looking for a welcoming and non-judgmental climbing experience, as well as a new program called ClimbFit, which is a targeted exercise program for many climbers to broaden their “problem-solving” ability on the wall.

Despite the immense satisfaction that bouldering offers, Summit also holds a range of courses in yoga and core-building for those feeling slightly less intrepid and far more flexible. Classes in Vinyasa and Hatha Yoga and shoulder and hip “liberation” are held most days of the week at reasonable prices for non-members and allow any visitor to jump into a friendly environment and exercise in a more controlled environment. While Summit is one of many yoga studios in the Denton area, it offers the benefit of a central location – something that might be a surprise for longtime yogis. In addition, the gym also rents out yoga mats to its customers.

But a major concern for many visitors – not just college students – to any yoga and climbing gym is the prohibitive prices. This is where Summit’s membership program steals the show. Becoming a member at Summit offers a wealth of benefits, including earlier access to the gym’s climbing walls, unlimited courses each month, free gear rental for the first month and a continuing discount on rentals after that. But there are many ways to pay to play beyond the membership program, with a number of prepaid options as well as group prices. The gym even offers daily rates for visitors who may just be passing through to soak up a bit of the Denton atmosphere. And make no mistake, that atmosphere is what Summit has in spades.

“We like to think of it as a family that you’re joining when you come sign up,” said Logan. “Climbers are a notoriously close knit group of people and Summit is no different.”

Summit has gone out of its way since its inception to market to Dentonites and visitors, including offering special ladies’ and guys’ nights on Friday and Saturday evenings respectively, 2-for-1 specials on Wednesdays and even matinee pricing on Mondays before 2 p.m. With all of these deals, and all of the savings offered through its membership programs, Summit has made a significant effort to appeal to those willing to try a new experience with limited pocketbooks – yes, myself included. Even despite that, I might argue, the welcoming environment is enough to give it a try.

On top of all of the exciting attractions in Denton Square and numerous options to soak up the “dentoning” experience, choose Summit for a refreshing change of pace. If you are in search of a local business that captures the Denton flavor – and maybe makes your forearms sore for three days afterward, assuming you are in as poor of shape as I am – then there’s a good chance you have found your home away from home. Also, don’t hike your leg above your head while climbing. That was a choice I regret.
It’s happy hour at the Abbey Underground and the drinks are flowing! Robert, the bartender, is busy serving beer and mixed drinks before tonight’s show starts. It’s almost time, and the crowd’s anxious for the show to begin. And the performers, also in the crowd, are even more anxious to start. Jake, the emcee for the evening, checks the sign-up sheet. It’s almost 8:30 p.m. and he realizes that both the Abbey and the list are full. Maybe I’m too late! I rush over and ask if I can still sign-up. He lets me know that if I am willing to stick around he could work me in.

“I hope the talent is good tonight,” uttered some unseen person in the crowd. I’m excited to be part of the crowd, but my palms begin to sweat, while I wait for the emcee to take the stage. Just thinking about performing makes me a little queasy. Chase, the sound guy, checks the mics, and I notice a musician tune his guitar on the right side of the stage. It’s been years since I’ve performed at an open mic, and this guy is really good. Fear is taking over, so I hit Robert up for a drink.

Abbey Underground’s Open Mic is where up-and-coming comedians, musicians, poets, and basically anyone with the guts to get in front of an audience can come to get their kicks and hone their craft. The regular performers show up week-after-week and consider themselves a special community, but newcomers are welcome too. The performers show great support for each other, giving me the courage to get up and recite poetry from a poet that I love.

It’s showtime! The spotlight beams brightly at the front of the stage. The emcee runs up with a mic in his hand, the crowd cheering him on. Everyone stands to their feet as he introduces the first band. “Let’s hear it for Vanderslu!” This is their first time playing at the Abbey, but Vanderslu are regulars on the Open Mic scene and already have a strong following. They

“There’s nothing like feedback from the audience.”

- Open Mic performer Melanie Preslar
play a mixture of songs from rock to country. The crowd sways and sings along. Several couples get on the dance floor and dance the two-step. The 15-minute time limit goes by quickly, and the crowd wants more. The emcee waves for the band to play one more song.

At the Abbey, you never know who will show up to perform on the Open Mic stage. I watched in admiration as Drew Hoberer played an up-tempo song on his Spanish Cajón drum while Jesse Rya accompanied him with a soulful tune on his guitar. I notice that they also have quite a fan base tonight at the Abbey. I have known about Jesse for quite a while, as he often plays spontaneous concerts in front of supermarkets. Recently, he was performing in front of a supermarket in Irving when two men came up and began to sing with him, turning the moment into an amazing jam session. A customer recorded the three singing together and put the impromptu performance on YouTube. Shortly afterward, the video went viral and Jimmy Kimmel Live came calling. But regardless of the recognition that followed, Jesse “still loves performing at Open Mics.”

Ages of the talent can range at the Abbey. Just ask 53-year-old Melanie Preslar. Best known for her work playing the acoustic guitar, you can catch her at Open Mics on most weekends. A musician her entire life, she proudly tells the story about singing backup for blues legend B. B. King. Melanie, who has four adult children, is a nurse by day and a musician by night, and recently taught herself to play the ukulele. Tonight she is trying out her new instrument on the crowd. “There’s nothing like feedback from the audience,” Melanie responds.

Support from the audience and the other performers is heartening. Colton Jones has only been a comedian for two months. As he jumps on stage, Colton is cheered on by the Open Mic community. A theater student at Texas Woman’s University, this is also his first time performing at the Abbey. He tries his new comedy bits on the audience, and his first joke about college life is a big hit. His next joke falls a little flat, but that doesn’t discourage him. After he continues with a few more jokes on his own, he calls another comedian on stage. The two get the crowd going as they exchange jokes back and forth. Their energy fills the room. “As a new comedian, it’s important to try different materials with an audience. It’s all part of growing as an artist,” Colton said.

“Put your hands together for Stella Payne!” The long night of many performances has gone by quickly, and now it’s finally my turn. I felt all the eyes in the room on me as I nervously walk up to the stage. Thank God it’s not that crowded! I announce to the audience that I am going to recite poetry from one of my favorite artists, Dr. Maya Angelou, and I lean forward into the mic. The spotlight shines brightly on my face, blotting out the audience from my view as I gently say the first line.

“And still I rise,” slowly echoed into the dark. “You may write me down in history with your bitter, twisted lies.” Someone out there was cheering, dissipating my stage fright. I am having a blast! Amidst the thunderous applause when I finished, I got it — why we all wanted to be here, performing at Open Mic.

Sitting on the stool, the bright lights illuminating me, I didn’t want the evening to end, because for two short minutes, I was a star. After waiting most of the night, it was over too fast. But now I’m part of the special group who performed at the Abbey Underground, and I was already thinking about what poem I would perform next time.

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**Weekly Open Mic Nights**

**Abbey Underground**
100 West Walnut St.
Sundays, 7:30 p.m. - midnight

**LSA Burger**
113 W Hickory
Mondays, 7-10 p.m.

**Andy’s Bar**
122 N Locust St
Mondays, 10 p.m.

**Audacity Brewhouse**
1012 Shady Oaks Drive
Thursdays, 7 p.m.
Alexander Solorzano, a mechanical and energy engineering major at the University of North Texas, plays at the Golden Triangle Mall every Wednesday from 6 to 8 p.m. He has only been playing there for six months, but he has a full 13 years of playing piano on his résumé. He's good, but sometimes his nerves get the best of him.

“I buy an ICEE from Morrow’s Candy ‘N’ More every time and sip on it throughout my set to help deal with my nerves,” he said. “It has become a weird tradition for me.”

Alexander’s music is only one of many attractions at the Golden Triangle Mall. The recent additions of H&M and Francesca’s have drawn even bigger crowds to the mall. H&M, the popular European-based chain, has an outside entrance, giving customers direct access. While it’s convenient for quick trips, shoppers who only go in and out miss some of the mall’s delightful surprises, like Alexander the piano man.

The Golden Triangle Mall’s recent renovation enhanced the shopping experience with a complete facelift. They reconstructed the food court, center court and added seating areas with charging stations. All the edgy upgrades drew new tenants, including Zumiez, Bakers Shoes, Torrid and Sephora.

“There’s always a great deal and more to choose from at this mall — more than any other I have gone to in the area,” said Texas Woman’s University student Brianna Ellis.

According to Golden Triangle Mall marketing director Carrie Carter, there’s a lot more to come.

“Victoria Secret is doubling their store size by moving from their current space to a roomy 8,000-square-foot location by the center court,” Carter said. “Bath & Body Works will also be relocating to a larger area.”

Carrie’s job is all about attracting shoppers to a complete entertainment experience, like during the holidays, when kids line up for pics with Santa Claus and a chance to whisper their Christmas list. She focuses on creating special events, such as the Sweetheart Market, featuring local handmade goods for Valentine’s Day.

Kara Nelsen owns Kara’s Bake Shoppe, a custom baking and decorating business. She normally sells her wares at the Denton Community Market on Saturday mornings in downtown Denton. She was eager to expand to the Golden Triangle Mall for this special new event, where she delighted customers with themed cupcakes, decorated sugar cookies, chocolates and cake pops.

“We and other Denton Community Market vendors are local to North Texas and only sell handmade items,” Kara said. “It was nice to reach a new clientele at the mall that we don’t usually get.”

One of the biggest events held inside the mall is the Summer Music Series. This is one of Carrie’s ideas that has become a Denton favorite. The series features free, live music at the food court every Saturday evening, linking the mall to the vibrant music scene for which Denton is known.

J.R. Byrd, an acoustic singer/songwriter, was part of the local talent featured during last summer’s series. Byrd has played numerous shows around town in the ten years he’s played music professionally, but he has fond memories of the Summer Music Series.

“I don’t always get to feature my originals,” J.R. said. “But it gave me a chance to play my own music and get paid for it, which is ultimately what all musicians want.”

Alexander’s final notes hang in the air as he completes another successful day as the piano man. He is just one part of the music, shopping and entertainment mecca that is the Golden Triangle Mall.

Sounds like a little piece of Denton, doesn’t it?
Stay and Play
From dusk ‘till dawn, Denton’s hospitality team will work to make your visit a memorable one!

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<th>Meeting rooms</th>
<th>Free breakfast</th>
<th>Kitchen/kitchenette</th>
<th>Complimentary Internet access</th>
<th>Indoor pool</th>
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<th>Fitness room</th>
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Calendar  July-December 2016

July 4: Kiwanis Fireworks Show, Apogee Stadium
Aug. 19-27: North Texas Fair & Rodeo, North Texas Fairgrounds
Sept. 10: Arts & Autos Extravaganza, Downtown Square
Sept. 17-18: Denton Blues Fest, Quakertown Park
Sept. 22-24: Oaktopia Fest, Downtown Denton
Oct. 1: Dog Days of Denton, North Texas Fairgrounds
Oct. 22: Industrial Street Pop Festival, Downtown Denton
Oct. 27: Planner’s Zone, UNT Gateway Center
Oct. 29: Denton’s Day of the Dead Festival, Downtown Denton
Nov. 17: Beaujolais, Denton Civic Center
Dec. 2: Denton Holiday Lighting Festival, Downtown Denton
Dec. 2-3: Wassail Fest, Downtown Denton

Campus Theatre
June 10-19: Rumors
July 1-17: Always Patsy Cline
Aug. 12-21: West Side Story
Oct. 21-30: Shrek the Musical

Center for Visual Arts
May 6-July 29: International Nightscapes: Recent Works by Bob Chilton

TWU Margo Jones Performance Hall
Oct. 12-16: Antigone by Jean Anouilh
Nov. 16-20: Gun Show by Steven Young

UNT Department of Dance and Theatre
Nov. 10: The Siege of Numantia

UNT Murchison Performing Arts Center
Nov. 2-13: UNT Opera, TBA
Nov. 22: One O’Clock Lab Band Fall Concert
Dec. 17: Tuba Christmas

FESTIVALS

MARKETS & OTHER EVENTS

April-Nov: Denton Community Market, every Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Denton County Historical Park
Oct. 1, Nov. 5, Dec. 3: North Texas Horse Country Tours, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., horsecountrytours.com
First Friday of every month: First Friday Denton, offering special shopping deals at several Square locations, 7-10 p.m.
Dec. 16-17: TWU Graduation, Kitty Magee Arena
Dec. 16-17: UNT Graduation, UNT Coliseum

Photo by Ed Steele

Photo courtesy of UNT

For more calendar events in Denton, visit discoverdenton.com
Y’all come back now, ya hear?

Don’t miss Denton’s great events from January-June!

Denton Black Film Festival, end of January

Thin Line Film Festival, mid-April (photo by Kristen Watson)

Cinco de Mayo, first weekend in May

Denton Arts & Jazz Festival, last weekend in April (photo by Ed Steele Photography)

Denton Redbud Festival, end of April (photo by Kristen Watson)
It’s happening in Historic Downtown Denton


Denton Main Street Association

For information on events and promotions, visit dentonmainstreet.org or call (940) 349-8529.

#DowntownDenton

Take a tour through the storied history of Denton’s heroic firefighters!

Learn about the amazing history of triumph, tragedy and true local heroes. Explore the museum as you honor our brave firefighters both past and present.

Denton’s Firefighters’ Museum

Open Weekdays 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
Located inside the Denton Fire Department Headquarters
find out more at firefightermuseum.com

discoverdenton.com Denton Convention & Visitors Bureau
Texas Woman’s University

We’re Painting Denton Maroon

Texas Woman’s University has been an innovative partner in the Denton community for more than a century. Our students, faculty and staff spend countless hours volunteering and working with community leaders to make Denton one of the best places to live, laugh and learn.

Whether you’re taking advantage of our health care clinics, cheering the Pioneers on to victory, enjoying a performing arts show or ready to earn your degree from a university with nationally ranked programs, think TWU. www.twu.edu
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