

Discover

Tyler County

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EAT THE DESSERT, BUY THE SHOES, GO ON VACATION

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EXCEPTIONAL RURAL HOSPITAL

TYLER COUNTY HOSPITAL CONTINUES SERVING THE COMMUNITY

DISCOVER YOUR LIFE IN MUSIC

MUSIC'S POWER TO CONNECT PEOPLE



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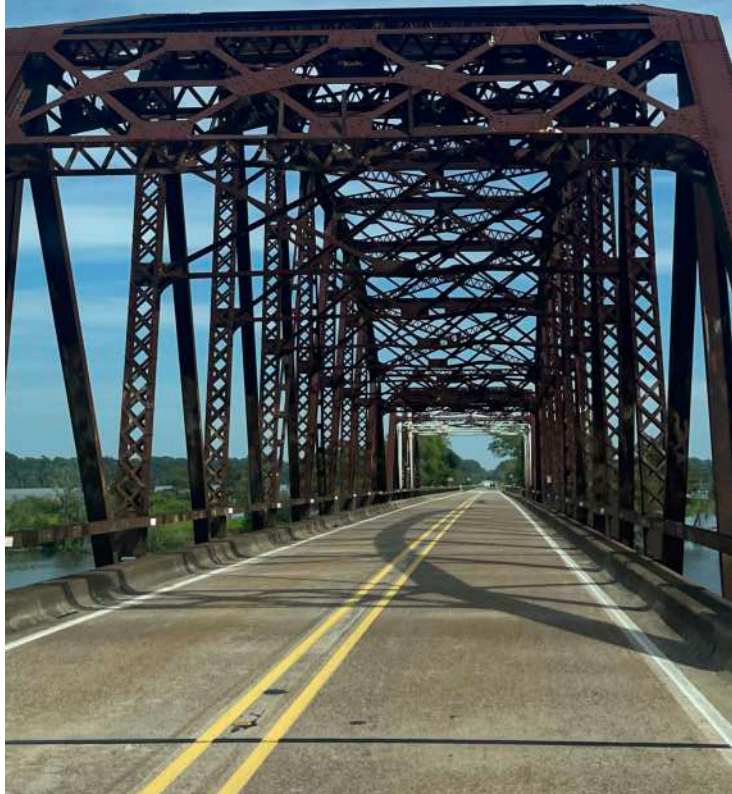
on the cover

US 190 Bridge

The US 190 Bridge is a Parker through truss bridge that was designed by the Texas Highway Department and fabricated by the Virginia Bridge Company. It was built by the Gaylord Construction Company of Houston in 1941.

It brings US 190 across the Neches River between Jasper County and Tyler County and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in Texas in 1996.

COVER PHOTO BY DONNA HAMMER
INSIDE PHOTO BY BETH FAIRCLOTH



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Allan Shivers Library and Museum

The fully updated Allan Shivers Museum welcomes visitors Tuesday-Friday, 10am-3pm and Saturday, 10am-2pm.
Tickets for self-guided tours are available for purchase at the Library checkout desk.

302 N. Charlton St., Woodville, TX 75979 | 409-283-3709



TYLER COUNTY

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tylercountyartleague.org

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409-283-3832
emporiumstage.org

Discover

Tyler County 2024

Polk County Publishing Co.

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936-327-4357

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Discover Tyler County Magazine 2024 is published by Polk County Publishing Company, Inc. serving Alabama Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Chester, Colmesneil, Doucette, Dam B, Fred, Hillister, Ivanhoe, Spurger, Warren, Wildwood and Woodville. Discover Tyler County Magazine is a visitor's guide to the pineywoods of deep East Texas, with emphasis on Tyler County and surrounding areas and is dedicated to the people and businesses that make Tyler County such a wonderful community to work, live and play.

Tyler County Area Map



25 YEARS of Discover Tyler County

I was a child the first time I discovered Tyler County. Traveling to Lake Tejas in the summertime was so much fun. Ironically, years later I was privileged to live and work here as well. It has been a beautiful life...from the first day on the job at the local newspaper in June of 1990, to the first edition of the new magazine in Tyler County in 1999, to this 25th edition in 2024. Each one is special, but this year seems better than ever. We welcome you to discover for the first time, or re-discover some of the treasures that make Tyler County a great place to visit, to work and raise a family, and to retire.
—Kelli Barnes

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Aubry Bradley Stadium PHOTOS COURTESY OF BECKI BYRD

CHESTER

City of Chester

Chester is the fourth largest city in Tyler County with a 2022 population estimate of 277 residents.

Mayor Robert Poynter leads a four-member city council. Gale Williams is Mayor Pro-Tem. City Secretary is Balela Mahaffy. Director of Public Works is Gerald Couthran.

City Hall is located at 141 Cade St. and can be reached at (936) 969-2360.

Electricity: Entergy Texas and Sam Houston Electric Co-op provide service to Chester residents.

Entergy can be reached by calling (800) 368-3749 or by visiting their website at entergy.com

Sam Houston Electric Co-op can be reached by calling (936) 327-5711 or (800) 458-0381 or by visiting their website at sam-houston.net

Landline Telephone: Eastex Telephone provides services to residents in Chester. They can be reached at (936) 967-1000 or

toll free at (800) 732-7839. Their website is eastex.com.

Water: Chester Water Supply (936) 969-2360 141 Cade St., Chester, Texas 75936

Natural Gas: Chester Gas System (936) 969-2360 141 Cade St., Chester, Texas 75936

Garbage Pickup: Two providers service residents in Chester. Local Sanitation can be reached by calling (409) 224-1780 or by visiting their website at localsanitation.com Pineywoods Sanitation can be reached by calling (800) 324-2092 or by visiting their website at pineywoodssanitation.com

Trash Collection Facility: Local Sanitation maintains a county-wide collection facility located at 1921 County Road 1010 in Woodville. For more information call (409) 224-1780.

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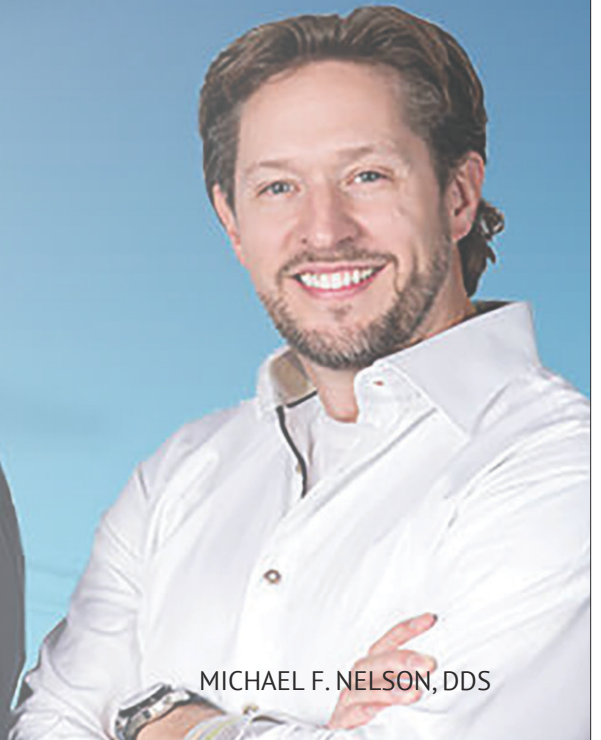
Port Arthur
7900 Medical Center Blvd.
409-729-2371

Lumberton
228A Country Lane Dr., Ste. B
409-751-2010

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MICHAEL F. NELSON, DDS

LOCAL SERVICES

COUNTY OFFICES

Chamber of Commerce
717 W. Bluff St., Woodville
75979
409.283.2632
tylercountycoc.com

Veterans Service Office
200 Veterans Way #200,
Woodville 75979
409.283.3751

Tyler County Sheriff's Office
702 N. Magnolia, Woodville
75979
409.283.2172
Sheriff Bryan Weatherford

Tyler County Courthouse
100 W. Bluff, Woodville 75979
409-283-2141
County Judge Milton Powers

District Attorney's Office
100 W. Bluff, Annex Building,
Woodville 75979
409.283.8136
District Attorney Lucas Babin

Office of Emergency
Management
201 Veterans Way #19,
Woodville 75979
409.331.0874

PLACES OF INTEREST

Allan Shivers Library
and Museum
302 N. Charlton,

Woodville 75979
409.283.3709

Heritage Village Museum
206 US Hwy. 190,
Woodville 75979
409.283.2272

WT Colmesneil Library
and Museum
106 S. Pitzer St.,
Colmesneil 75938
409.837.9946

Naskila Casino
540 State Park Rd. 56,
Livingston 77351
936.563.2946

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Woodville 75979
Art Gallery: 409.242.7851
tylercountyartleague.org
Emporium for the Arts:
409.283.3832
emporiumstage.org

MEDICAL SERVICES

Tyler County Hospital
1100 W. Bluff, Woodville 75979
409.283.8141

Tyler County Family
Medical Clinic
104 N. Beech St.,
Woodville 75979
409.283.2822

Dedicated Medical

Urgent Care Center
703 W. Bluff St., Woodville
75979
409.200.2811

Fred Health Care
20290 FM 92 S.,
Fred, TX 77616
409.429.9494

The Children's Clinic
of Woodville
900 W. Bluff St.,
Woodville 75979
409.283.2090

Dogwood Family Clinic
613 W. Bluff St., Woodville
75979
409.331.1000

Woodville Family Healthcare
920 S. Magnolia St., Woodville
75979
409.283.5556

Lambeth Physical Therapy
1209 W. Bluff St.,
Woodville, TX 75979
409.200.2804

Woodville Chiropractic Center
1101 W. Bluff, Woodville 75979
409.283.2633

FOOD BANKS

Caring is Sharing
Woodville
409.283.5800

Catholic Charities
409.924.4400

East Texas Support Services
Senior Nutrition
409.283.2400

Heavenly Blessings Food
Pantry
Colmesneil
409.429.8639

Lakeside Apostolic Church
Town Bluff/Dam B
409.429.3788

New Shady Grove Baptist
Woodville
409.283.2218

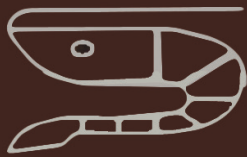
SNAP Food Stamps/Lonestar
409.283.3765

Spurger United Methodist
Church
Spurger
409.429.3401

Warren Methodist
Warren
409.547.2558

Women, Infant &
Children (WIC)
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office@cajuntax.com

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& More



Colmesneil City Hall Photo by Beth Faircloth

COLMESNEIL

Colmesneil is the third largest city in Tyler County with a 2020 population estimate of 542 residents.



Colmesneil City Park Photo by Beth Faircloth

City of Colmesneil

Mayor Duane Crews leads a four-member city council. Elbert “Bubba” Sheffield is Mayor Pro-Tem. City Secretary is Wendy Bendy. Director of Utilities is Keith Barnes.

Colmesneil City Hall is located at 204 West Elder Street and the phone number is (409) 837-5211. City Hall is open Monday-Friday 7:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m.

Electricity: Entergy Texas and Sam Houston Electric Co-op. provide service to Colmesneil residents. Entergy can be reached by calling (800) 368-3749 or by visiting their website at entergy.com. Sam Houston Electric Co-op can be reached by calling (936) 327-5711 or (800) 458-0381. Or by visiting their website at samhouston.net

Water: The City of Colmesneil provides water to most residents, however Tyler County Special Utility District provides water to residents outside of the city’s service area. To find out if your location is serviced by the city, call (409) 837-5211. TC-SUD can be reached at (409) 429-3994 or by visiting their web-

site at tylercountywater.com. They are located at 12139 FM 92 Rd. S., Spurger, TX 77660.

Natural Gas: Two providers service residents in Colmesneil. Tyler County Propane can be reached by calling (409) 877-4427. Shaw Propane can be reached by calling (409) 283-2552

Garbage Pickup: Two providers service residents in Colmesneil. Local Sanitation can be reached by calling (409) 224-1780 or by visiting their website at localsanitation.com . Pineywoods Sanitation can be reached by calling (800) 324-2092 or by visiting their website at pineywoodssanitation.com

Trash Collection Facility: Local Sanitation maintains a county-wide collection facility located at 1921 County Road 1010 in Woodville. For more information call (409) 224-1780.

Community Center: The Colmesneil Community Center is available to members of the community. For rates contact City Hall at (409) 837-5211



Ivanhoe City Hall Photo courtesy of City of Ivanhoe

IVANHOE

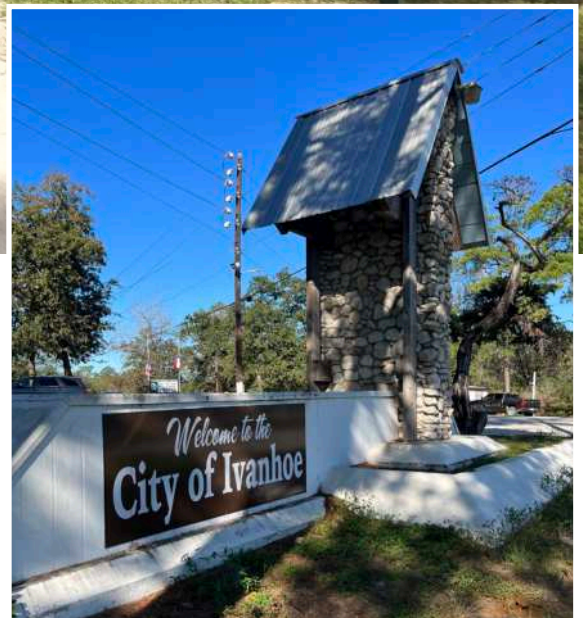
City of Ivanhoe

Ivanhoe is the second largest city in Tyler County with a 2020 population estimate of 1,454 residents.

Mayor Skip Blackstone leads a five-member city council. Mayor Pro-Tem is Will Warren. Ivanhoe City Hall is located at 870 Charmaine Dr. East, Woodville, TX 75979 and can be reached at (409) 283-3299 or by visiting their website at cityofivanhoe.texas.gov. The City Marshall and Municipal Court are also housed in this location.

Electricity: Sam Houston Electric Co-op. services residents in Ivanhoe. They can be reached by calling (936) 327-5711 or (800) 458-0381. Or by visiting their website at samhouston.net

Water: SouthWest Water Company (Monarch) provides water to residents in Ivanhoe. They can be reached by calling (866) 654-7992 or by visiting their website at swwc.com



Entrance into Ivanhoe Photo by Beth Faircloth

Natural Gas: Tyler County Propane can be reached by calling (409) 877-4427.

Garbage Pickup: Local Sanitation can be reached by calling (409) 224-1780 or by visiting their website at localsanitation.com.

Trash Collection Facility: Local Sanitation maintains a county-wide collection facility located at 1921 County Road 1010 in Woodville. For more information call (409) 224-1780.

Community Center: The Ivanhoe Community Center is available for rent. Call City Hall for pricing and availability. (409) 283-3299.

Municipal Court: Judge Robert Jackson holds court at 870 Charmaine Dr. E. For information, call (409) 444-7048.

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TYLER COUNTY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPTS.

Chester VFD
Fire Chief: Bryan Davis
409.200.4192
165 Feagan St.
P.O. Box 188
Chester, TX 75936

Colmesneil VFD
Fire Chief: Alan Moffett
409.383.3135
304 N. Wheeler
P.O. Box 428
Colmesneil, TX 75938

Dam B VFD
Fire Chief: Marc Holcomb
409.673.6634
2988 FM 92 South
Woodville, TX 75979

Fred VFD
Fire Chief: Tim McWilliams
409.377.1279
20707 FM 92 N.
P.O. Box 324
Fred, TX 77616

Ivanhoe VFD
Fire Chief:
Brandon Yarbrough
505.636.6256
130 Friar Tuck North
Woodville, TX 75979

Shady Grove VFD
Fire Chief: Jonathan Phillips
409.384.0970
636 County Road 2050
Woodville, TX 75979

Spurger VFD
Fire Chief: Ellis W. Jones
409.200.0409
111 County Road 4433
P.O. Box 645
Spurger, TX 77660

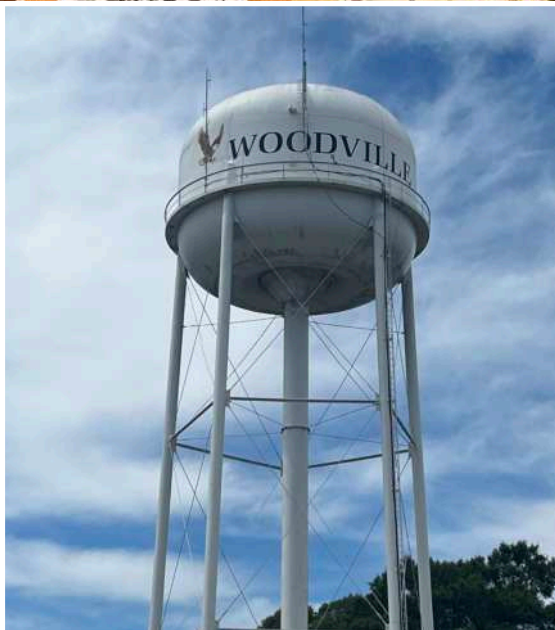
Warren VFD
Fire Chief: Ryan Knott
409.444.6044
221 County Road 1550
P.O. Box 152
Warren, TX 77664

Whitetail Ridge VFD
Fire Chief: Robert Hoffman
409.659.3981
1204 County Road 2200
Woodville, TX 75979

Woodville VFD
Fire Chief: Alan Gartner
936.334.3534
215 Walt Davis Dr.
400 W. Bluff St.
Woodville, TX 75979



Downtown Woodville Photo sourced from Adobe Stock



Water tower in Woodville Photo by Beth Faircloth

WOODVILLE

City of Woodville

Woodville, the largest city in Tyler County, with an estimated 2,043 residents in 2020, also serves as the County Seat.

Mayor Amy Bythewood leads a four-member city council. Mayor Pro-Tem is Joyce Wilson. City Secretary is Terri Bible. City Administrator is Mandy K. Risinger. Chief of Police is Michael McCulley. Director of Public Works is Charles Odom. City Attorney is Brad Elrod.

City Hall is located at 400 W. Bluff St., Woodville, TX 75979 and can be reached at (409) 283-2234 or by visiting their website at Woodville-tx.gov.

Electricity: Entergy Texas provides service to Woodville residents. Entergy can be reached by calling (800) 368-3749 or by visiting their website at entergy.com

Water: The City of Woodville provides water to most residents, however Tyler County Special Utility District provides water to residents outside of the city's service area. TCSUD

can be reached at (409) 429-3994 or by visiting their website at tylercountywater.com. Cypress Creek Water Supply also provides water. They can be reached at (409) 283-7116. Seneca Water Supply Corporation provides water as well. They can be reached at (409) 283-7116. To find out if your location is serviced by the city, call (409) 283-2234.

Natural Gas: Two providers service residents in Woodville. Tyler County Propane can be reached by calling (409) 877-4427. Shaw Propane can be reached by calling (409) 283-2552.

Garbage Pickup: The City of Woodville provides garbage pickup. To start pickup call City Hall at (409) 283-2234.
Municipal Court:

Municipal Court: Judge Sergio Ramos presides over municipal court

TYLER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Chester ISD

Superintendent: Dr. Paul Drake
Assistant Principal: Amy Dinger
Mascot: Yellowjackets
273 Yellowjacket Dr.
Chester, TX 75936
936-969-2211

Colmesneil ISD

Interim Superintendent: Sharon Tule
Elementary Principal: Shelby Tillery
High School Principal: Stephanie Smith
Mascot: Bulldogs
610 West Elder
Colmesneil, TX 75938
409-837-5757/409-837-9107

Spurger ISD

Superintendent: Jeff Burnthorn
JH/High School Principal: Michael Hatton
Elementary Principal: Tanya M. Cain M.Ed
Mascot: Pirates
12212 Hwy. 92 North
Spurger, TX 77660
409-429-3464

Warren ISD

Superintendent: Rusty Minyard
Assistant Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer: Tyra Storie
High School Principal: Keith Collins
Fred Elementary Principal: Jessica Schneider
High School Assistant Principal: Brianne Dean

Jr. High Principal: Kristina Wiedman
Jr. High Assistant Principal: Sharon Jeansonne
Warren Elementary Principal: Heather McInnis
Warren Elementary Assistant Principal: Stephanie Jones

Mascot: Warriors
Fred Elementary:
140 County Road 4650
Fred, TX 77616
409-547-2241
Warren ISD:
307 FM 3290
Warren, TX 77664
409-547-2240

Woodville ISD

Superintendent: Lisa Meysembourg
Assistant Superintendent/Finance: Cody Jarrott
Director of Federal Programs: Ashley Weatherford
Wheat Elementary Principal: Allison Mosley
Wheat Elementary Assistant Principal: Charlotte Champagne
Intermediate Principal: Allison Mosley
Intermediate Assistant Principal: Earl Bryan
Middle School Principal: Gina Greaff
Middle School Assistant Principal: Miguel Garza
High School Principal: Lara Robinson
High School Assistant Principal: Andrew Ireland
Mascot: Eagles
505 N. Charlton St.
Wooville, TX 75979
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Discover your life in music

“Music expresses that which cannot be put into words.” – Victor Hugo

By Chris Edwards

Leave it to the Almighty to bless our mortal existence with the tools to create and combine rhythm, melodies and storytelling. Those elements, together, more than anything, transcend cultural boundaries and speak directly to the soul of man.

The reason why music makes the world of pain between the cradle and the grave so pleasurable has much to do with its ability to evoke emotions, to trigger fond memories and to influence our moods and behavior.

One of the most compelling aspects of music is its power to connect with people on a deep, emotional level, and this connection is fostered through the act of listening.

Whether it's the brilliant, soothing melodies of Romantic-era classical composers one is listening to, the rhythmic beat-driven strains of hip-hop, the beauty of a timeless gospel melody or the untrammelled expression of a band like Acid Bath, listening to music has a profound impact on the lives of the listener.

Music has the power of healing and can soothe the psyche of the worn and weary. Research has shown that the act of listening to music can reduce stress and anxiety, as well as lower one's blood pressure and can even alleviate physical pain.

In that soothing, soulful experience, the listener can be transported into a different state of mind; a place far removed from whatever troubles occupy the perceived forefront of existence. For centuries, music has been used as a therapeutic tool, and has helped countless humans cope with emotional and physical challenges.

Music can also inspire and motivate the listener. Many an intense workout for many folks was aided by an earbud full of Slayer, Alice in Chains or Metallica, and some writers (including yours truly) enjoy the

sounds of good, traditional jazz or slow country blues when churning out thoughts upon the page.

Many people find that music enhances their creativity and focus, allowing them to tap into their inner reserves of talent and innovation. Musicians themselves often cite their experiences with music as a driving force behind their passion and dedication. Whether you are in this category of someone who makes music, or are someone who can't sing a note, but listens, it is all valid, and is an interactive experience at not only soundtracking our lives but providing sweet and rich textures to them.

It is beautiful how a single song can transport us back in time and evoke the power of a memory. Whether you're listening to Townes Van Zandt's masterful "If I Needed You" and it brings you mind of your best friend's wedding, or, like me, you're brought into mind of Saturday morning trips to town with your granddad, set to the Carter Family and Guy Clark pouring out of the pickup truck's speakers, those songs create a sense of timelessness, as a bridge to our past, to set foot into those places, and with those people, who only exist in those memories.

The power of music cannot be overstated as to how it enriches our lives. Art impacts the human experience in so many ways, be it through visual representations or the written word, but the medium of music might be the most immediate and the longest lasting of all the artforms.

Find you some music that speaks to your soul and opens up your mind to new experiences. You'll be lifted above your present moment. Discover some sounds that elevate you, whether it's a new artist or band on a streaming platform, a new record that catches your eye in the store or a good live act you'd heretofore not seen/heard in a nearby bar, restaurant or coffee shop, there are amazing sounds everywhere just awaiting your "Eureka!" moment. ■

“When the music hits, I feel no pain at all.” – Tim Armstrong of Rancid, “Radio”

Discover what we're listening to

The Discover staff compiled a list of their favorite songs and albums for you to consider in your musical journey.

Chris Edwards: My 12 desert island discs

Townes Van Zandt – Live at the Old Quarter
Alice in Chains – Dirt
Lucinda Williams – Car Wheels on a Gravel Road
Guy Clark – The Dark
Jawbreaker – Dear You
Mississippi John Hurt – Today
Brutal Juice – Mutilation Makes Identification Difficult
Robert Earl Keen – No Kinda Dancer
Turnpike Troubadours – Diamonds and Gasoline
Steve Earle – Train a' Comin'
Depeche Mode – Violator
Hank Williams – 20 Greatest Hits

Mollie LaSalle: My 12 Desert Island Picks
Albums I can't live without

Chris Stapleton- Traveler
Meat Loaf- Bat Out of Hell
Reba McEntire- 50 Greatest Hits
George Strait- 50 Number Ones
Tom Petty- Wildflowers
The Beatles Collection- 1962-1966/1967-1970
Willie Nelson- Red Headed Stranger
Elton John's Greatest Hits
Queen's Greatest Hits
Alan Jackson's Greatest Hits Volume II
Brad Paisley- Original Album Classics

Jim Powers:

Well, since I'm old and have been relentlessly listening to music for over 60 years, this could be a long list. But, rather than rehash all the old chestnuts, I would like to list a few of the artists I've been following over the last 10 years.

I favor independent singer/songwriter stuff these days, particularly those who have a message. I doubt anyone reading our paper has heard of any of these artists, but that's o.k. They cross several genres.

Several are influenced by HipHop artists from the Dead Prez and early Eminem era, but with a modern twist. A couple do more mainstream music. They tend to be Gen Z artists. Let's give 'em some of favorites that are outside their box.

Some of these are explicit, just label the whole group explicit if you like. All of these are on all or most of the streaming services. So, in no particular order, artist name followed by the song title:

Victus – “Voices”
Ren – “Genesis”
Chinchilla – “Fingers”
Sam Tompkins – “Lose it all”
Ren and Chinchilla duet – “Chalk Outlines”
Venbee – “Gutter”
Mary Spender – “You can have Chicago Back”
Dirt Miller – “Kansas”

Kelli Barnes:

I am stuck in the 70s...as a young child, age three to 13, my siblings were teens so the popular songs of the day were placed in my head at an early age. I love most music, and have relied on Christian music, country music, children's music and Christmas music also during different seasons of my life. A few of my favorites/constants today are:

Chicago – “If you leave me now”, “Saturday in the Park” and “Hard for me to say I'm sorry”

Dolly Parton/Kenny Rogers – Once Upon a Christmas
Lauren Daigle's “Remember” and “I Am Yours” and “You Say”
Olivia Newton John/John Travolta's “Grease”, the original music soundtrack...the whole album!
Beach Boys “California Girls” and “Kokomo”

Beth Faircloth:

My all-time favorite albums in no particular order
Thriller-Michael Jackson
Purple Rain Soundtrack-Prince and the Revolution
Yourself or Someone Like You-Matchbox Twenty
Traveler-Chris Stapleton
The Greatest Showman Soundtrack-Various Artists
Slippery When Wet-Bon Jovi
Religiously. The Album-Bailey Zimmerman
Open Up and Say...Ahh!-Poison
Their Greatest Hits 1971-1975- Eagles
Daughtry-Daughtry

Donna Hammer:

Stand by me – Emily Linge and Sara Niemietz
I will always love you - Dolly Parton
I thank God – Maverick City & Upperoom
Oh happy day – Marlin Monroe Williford & Lena Starks
I can love you like that – All-4-One
Slow Hand – Conway Twitty
I heard it through the grapevine – Marvin Gaye
Kiss – Prince
Happy – Pharrell Williams
All Star- Smash Mouth





Melody and Steve Daigle COURTESY PHOTOS



Steve with his buddy, "Amos Moses"

IT'S BEEN QUITE A PARTY, AIN'T IT WOODROW?

By Mollie LaSalle

Melody Daigle is as vivacious and full of cheer and peace as the 50 acres of land she and her husband, Steve, have transformed into the rustic slice of heaven known as Black Creek Ranch. Tall, poised and embodying a free, easygoing spirit that one doesn't seem to encounter every day, the story of the land that birthed Black Creek Ranch spans five generations, and that story flows through Melody.

Black Creek Ranch is a family affair. Melody's daddy C.C. Haygood bought the land in 1975, and it's been a work in progress ever since. Melody said "my late husband Paul Seago and I had a house in Beaumont, we had our own construction business, and we would come up here on the weekends and work the land because we were going to retire here; Paul and I added to it in 1988, and made it bigger.

“ This old hill has seen a tremendous amount of living ”
-Melody Daigle

We moved a job trailer up here, and stayed in it while we were clearing the land. We dug a water well, and added a bathroom and kitchenette onto the trailer; we thought we were in high cotton then. We were rocking and rolling, pouring concrete for the driveway, we had a big ole deck with a hot tub, Paul dug the pond with a bulldozer, we put up fencing, and poured the slab for the house. One morning in July 2000, I went out and found Paul laying dead in the yard from a heart attack. Paul's favorite tree was the white oak; my son Michael brought me a little white oak and we planted it where I found Paul laying; matter of fact, Paul is in the tree, he had cut his finger off in the garage door at our house in Beaumont, and he put it in a fruit jar and poured some alcohol on it. After he died, I'm thinking what do you do? Michael dug a little hole at the base of the tree and we put Paul's finger in there.”

Melody confessed that she spent a lot of years cry-



Seago/Daigle family: Left to Right in back- Steve Daigle, Lindsey Seago Wright, (granddaughter), Michael Seago (son), Kim Seago (Michael's wife), Michael Seago II (Michael and Kim's son), Melody Seago. In front is Addison Wright, Melody's great granddaughter (Lindsey's daughter).



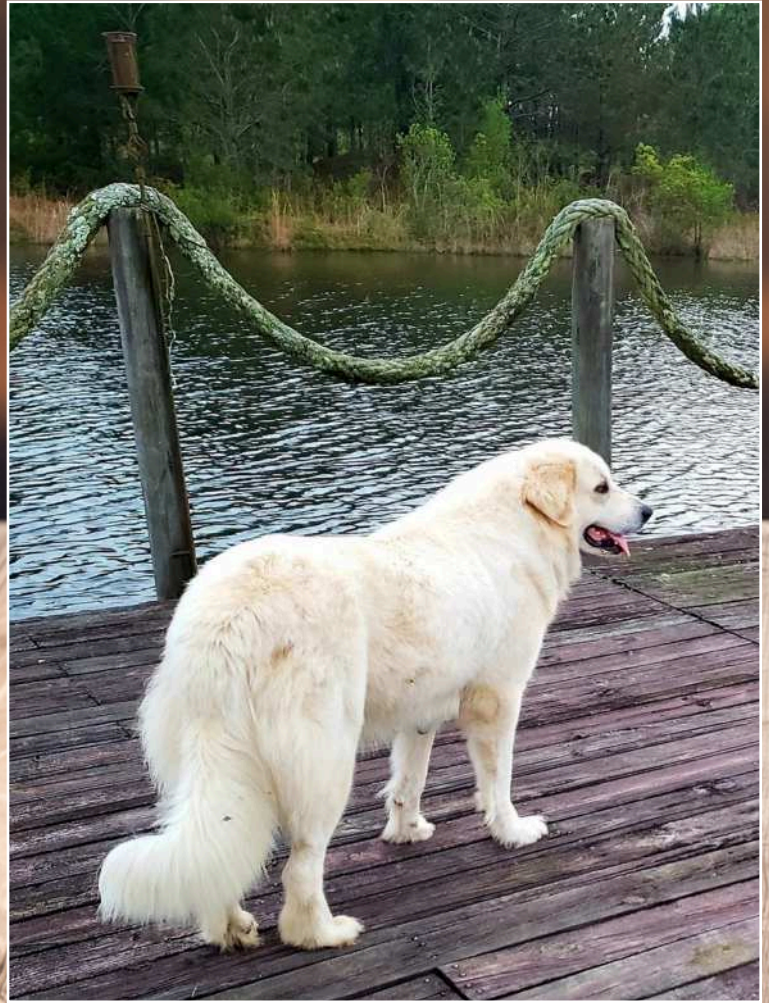
Lonesome Dove Bridal Cabin



Melody's painting of Lonesome Dove



Cabin with Cows



Maggie at the pond

ing over Paul and her son Daniel, who passed away in 2001. In 2006, she met her Louisiana 'swamp man' Steve Daigle, and started laughing, mainly because she couldn't understand what he was saying. She said "his accent was so thick, I couldn't stop laughing, and I've been laughing at him ever since."

Steve lost his wife Cheryl in 1999, after 25 years of marriage, and he was having a hard time. "You don't expect to lose your soul mate," she mused. "Steve and I both walked on the wild and literally crazy side until 2006. We started out pretty rocky, but here we are, 17 years later. We both knew what it was like to lose a spouse, been there, got the shirt". Melody and Steve were married in 2007.

Melody brought a son, a daughter-in-law, a granddaughter and a grandson into this new relationship. In time she would add a great granddaughter, with another due in December 2023. Steve has three daughters, one son, thirteen grandchildren, and five great grandchildren. Steve worked in the oilfields for 37 years, eventually having to retire, due to foot amputations, in 2013. Steve jokingly tells people that an alligator bit his foot off. He has proven himself to be one heck of a carpenter around the ranch. "It's been a big change for both of us, we've been working on this venue for years, it's been a long, sometimes tragic, sometimes humorous road to get to this point", Melody explained.

"There's so many memories, the heritage that's here is mind boggling, there's not a place that I can point that doesn't have a story, where it came from, or what's behind it", Melody said. The ranch is something that was Melody's vision and she thought it would be a fun and unique place to have in Tyler County, but had convinced herself that she was

too old to make it happen. "This has always been a family affair, if these old trees could talk, they have seen a ton of laughter, this hill has seen a tremendous amount of living", she added.

Family has always been the most important piece of the puzzle for Melody. Without a doubt, the biggest piece of the Haygood/Seago/Daigle family tree has been her daughter-in-law, Kim, who has been married to her son Michael for almost 30 years. "They were just babies", Melody added.

"That child has been my saving grace, she and Michael have lived in the brick house my daddy built way back when on the property, and raised their two children here. Kim is the hub of the wheel, without her, there would be no wheel, without her, there would be no me. God sent her, I did something right to have a daughter-in-law like her, she has held this family together; I will shout it from the rooftop, she is like a little pit bull."

When you first meet Melody and Steve, you come away thinking that they have been together forever, they just give off that vibe. Steve always wondered what Melody would want with a self-proclaimed "dumb old coonass" like him. They are so much in tune to one another, it's uncanny.

Steve's thick Cajun accent has provided Melody with over 17 years of laughter, and most importantly, love. You can see it when they exchange glances at each other. She recently made a video and put it on Facebook where she asked Steve to do her a favor; she wanted him to dress up as Santa Claus at the ranch, so the little children could come and have their picture taken with him. Steve put the kibosh on the idea, saying, "No, no, no. I'm no Santa Claus, I'm too skinny, can't you



The Hitchin' Post at night

find a fat man in the fire department to do that?" She couldn't get him to commit to it, so she said she would keep looking.

The video has been viewed more than 5,000 times since it's been up. Melody and Steve were leaving a business on the courthouse square recently, and while Steve was waiting for traffic to go by so he could get in the truck, a vehicle slowed down at the light, and the driver yelled out, "Hey Santa". Melody busted out laughing, and continued laughing when they got to Walmart. "I laughed so hard, he wouldn't get out. He loves going into Walmart". He said, "see what you done, old woman? I ain't going in there, everybody laughing". Melody's reply was, "First of all, you better back off on that old woman comment, and second, you get laughed at anyway, you dress like a dumpster diver". Steve said, "well, I am, where do you think I find all that old stuff you like?"

The love story of Melody and Steve is still being written, and every day seems to bring something new to their life together. She will tell you that she is "married to Steven Daigle, 175% pure cajun, 'swamp man' that keeps me laughing, children that keep me living, grandchildren that keep me loving, family that keeps me needed, all together, they all keep me going."

Melody wants to leave something positive, and go out with a smile. "I want to know that I left something good, that I accomplished something, If I ever let modern in here at the ranch, it's going to kill the whole place. I want it to say 1800's. I don't want anything to look modern. The sentimental value of this place can't be touched. It's just amazing in my mind what I see when I look at it. What makes it different is that everything that's been put here since Steve and I got married has either been given to us or gotten out of a junkyard or came from his

place in Louisiana after we tore it down. It's been years of hard work and having weddings, reunions, showers, memorials, and birthday parties to making sure all the t's were crossed, but I would always get to the last thing and have to stop."

The whole place is based on the movie *Lonesome Dove*, it was Melody and her late husband Paul's favorite; "he reminded me of Woodrow", she said. There is a pair of white pyrenees dogs named Gus and Maggie, the bull is named Woodrow, the bridal cabin is called the Lonesome Dove suite, and the open-air pavilion is the Hitchin' Post.

Someone suggested that she "open the ranch up and start doing things". She wanted to make sure it was going to work. "I was driving towards something, but I really didn't know what, she said". Eventually, the stars aligned, and Black Creek Ranch held their official ribbon cutting in March 2023. Melody said, "giving back to the community is what it's all about; all we have to do now is enjoy the fruits of our labor."

Take a step back in time at Black Creek Ranch; Melody and Steve strive to provide a unique experience that compliments your individual preferences, all while enveloping you in the warm embrace of authentic Texas hospitality, scenic beauty, and rustic charm. Black Creek Ranch is located at 358 County Road 1525 in Warren, Texas. The phone number to schedule a tour is 409-377-2829. Email Melody at: info@bcrvenue.com, and check out her website: bcrvenue.com for more information.

That's all for now, folks, but stay tuned. Like the oldie but goodie by Bachman Turner Overdrive states, "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet". ■

A Glimpse at Traditions

TYLER COUNTY IS HOME TO MANY TRADITIONS THAT ARE CELEBRATED COUNTYWIDE. HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO ENJOY.



Dogwood Festival

Twenty-twenty four marks the 81st year for the signature festival of Tyler County. Starting March 23-24 with Festival of the Arts Weekend, the festival is three weekends of fun and celebratory events. Weekend two, March 29-30 is Western Weekend, with a parade and a rodeo, and on April 6, the Queen's Weekend, a new Dogwood Queen will be crowned.

Natalie Standley is the reigning Dogwood Queen.
PHOTO BY JIM POWERS



Harvest Festival

During the third weekend of October, Heritage Village plays host to an epic folk-life festival. Blacksmithing demonstrations, live music and indigenous dance are only a few of the sights to see.

Wild West Reenactment at the 2023 Harvest Festival.
PHOTO BY JIM POWERS



Tyler County Fair

During the first full weekend of October, the county turns out to the fairgrounds, located west of Woodville on US 190, to see what the young people have been working so hard toward. From show animals to home economics projects and arts and crafts, the fair is the place to be with plenty to see, and lots of great food to eat, too.

Paisley Seamans showed the Grand Champion steer in 2023 MEAGAN DUNN PHOTO



Christmas in Tyler County

The Tyler County Chamber of Commerce hosts this event, which happens the first weekend after Thanksgiving, and includes a ton of fun to be had on the square in downtown Woodville on Friday. Saturday features more fun, such as the Rotary Club of Woodville's pancake breakfast and a cookie market at the Woodville Methodist Church, and of course, Heritage Village hosts the incredible Twilight Tour on Saturday evening, and Ivanhoe has its awesome lighted boat parade.

County Judge Milton Powers presented a key to the county to Santa Claus in 2023. PHOTO BY MOLLIE LASALLE



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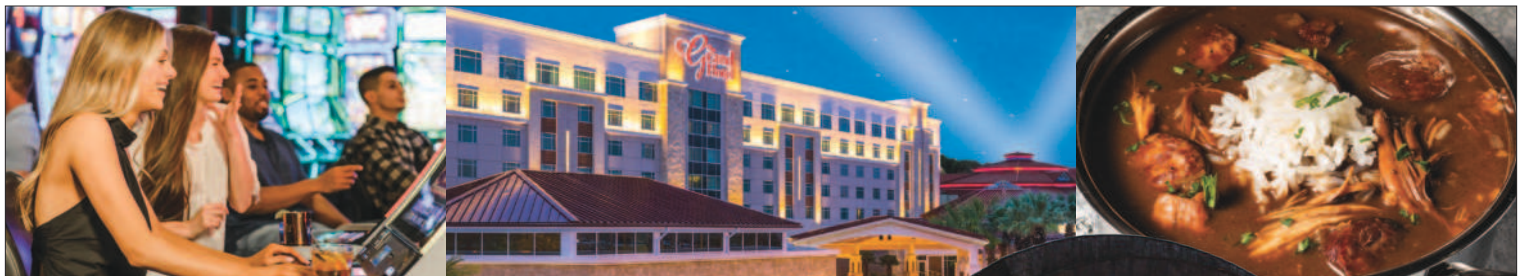


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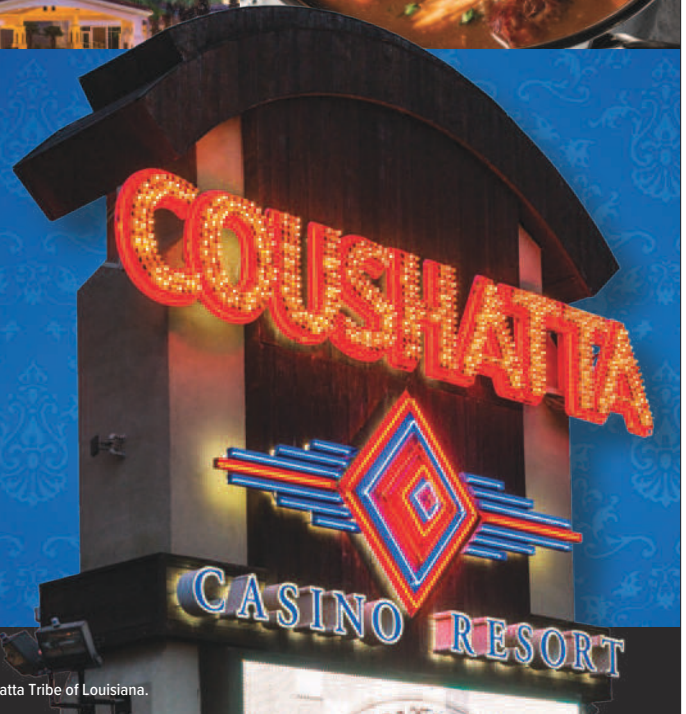
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EXCEPTIONAL **Rural Hospital**

By Kelli Barnes

A 90-year-old Tyler County resident recently had a heart rhythm issue late in the evening on a Thursday. After a quick call and visit from his home health nurse, he decided to hitch a ride with family to the Tyler County Hospital emergency room, where he was met by a team of healthcare professionals. The staff was obviously experienced, and within one hour he was resting and being monitored. This visit required an overnight stay and some medication adjustments, but he was very adamant with the nursing staff and doctors. “I need to get home ... I have work to do.”

Stories like these can be told by most families in the rural community of Tyler County, Texas, and for this, they are blessed. Within a 20-minute drive from anywhere in the county, there is a 24-hour healthcare facility with the

staff, equipment, and medicine to solve several healthcare issues and the ability to stabilize patients for transport to larger facilities when the situation calls for more advanced care.

Since 1950, the hospital has served the community, but instead of going downhill or closing all together, as many rural hospitals have done, the facility has been growing and thriving. Established initially by churches in the area, within five years it came under the administrative umbrella of the Tyler County Commissioner’s Court. In 1965, a hospital district was created. Today, the hospital also has a nursing school, a rural health clinic and a level IV trauma emergency room center.

The hospital is funded by grants and property taxes. It provides indigent and charity health care within the county, while at the same time investing in the latest in life saving equipment and technology.



Other vital services available include cardiopulmonary care, medication management, diabetic education classes, lab and pharmacy services, and radiology.

Another asset the hospital provides is outpatient visits with specialists from the region. The current schedule is:

Every third Tuesday of the month
Greg Gilbreath, NP (Cardio)
Hours: 8-4

Wednesdays
Burke, Lufkin
Hours: by appointment

Every other Thursday
Dr. Kutchback (Podiatrist)
Hours: 7-4

Last Friday of every month
Sound Works (Hearing)

The certified rural health clinic is currently staffed with two doctors, one physician assistant and three nurse practitioners. No appointment is necessary to visit the clinic, but routine healthcare visits are also available by appointment. They are open six days a week. ■

**Information sourced from <https://tchospital.us>*





This front page is Volume 1, Issue 2. If anyone has Volume 1, Issue 1, from December 11, 1933 let us know!

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Some of the very first advertisers in the Tyler County Booster

Local Newspaper History

By Emily Wooten

Although numerous newspapers have served Tyler County over the years, it is the Tyler County Booster that has outlasted them all and continues to thrive today. The first issue of the Booster was published on Dec. 11, 1930. A partial copy of the second edition – Volume 1 Number 2 – can be viewed on the newspaper's website easttexasnews.com. In that issue, Star Café, J.H. Fain Store, Woodville Automobile Co., Citizens State Bank and J.B. Best to name a few, advertised their goods and services. The publishers and editor at the time were Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Willard.

A number of newspapers preceded the Booster, including The Woodville Eureka which was published by T.D. Rock and served Woodville and Tyler County in 1883-1884; the Colmesneil Weekly Times, or "The Times," published in Colmesneil by Frank H. Robinson from 1888-1892; and the Tyler County Times which was published by F.A. Peary from 1888-1899.

From 1905-1916 there was the Tyler County Messenger which was owned by A.W. Williford, W. A. Johnson and later S.W. Baker. In 1928 there was the East Texas Optimist which was owned and published by George K. Gibbs & Sons who were later known as The Gibbs Printers (George, James and Woodrow Gibbs).

In 1947, the newspaper changed hands from the Willifords to David Read as publisher with Chuck Stamps as editor. Stamps served as editor of the Booster between 1947-1957. Also in 1947, the newspaper began running an official logo stating its membership in the Texas Press Association. The phone number advertised for the newspaper office, a place to get "distinguished invitations" and all your office supplies, was 4434. Although Stamps was still listed as editor in 1955, the ownership was listed as Tyler County Publishing Company.

Another newspaper, the Pineywoods Press, started on March 28, 1963 with Stamps as its editor. It is unclear what happened to the Booster from March 1963 to December 1964 because the only records are of The Pineywoods Press during this time. Jerry M. Zuber became publisher and editor of the Booster on Jan. 7, 1965. It appears The Pineywoods Press was still in existence through September of 1965, but in the Oct. 14, 1965 issue of the Booster, Stamps is listed as editor and The Pineywoods Press is no longer found.

Advertising definitely picked up during this time with big grocery store ads from Piggly Wiggly. A&M Motor Company had ads on several pages, as did Birdwell's Department Store, Citizens State Bank and Sutton-Fain Chevrolet. Robert Thompson, a new publisher and editor, took over in 1957 and by the early 1960s Sullivan's Hardware and Globe-Mann Insurance were regular advertisers.

Woodville businesses came together to sign a \$700,000 motel contract in December of 1961.

On April 1, 1965, R.E. Jackson became the new owner and publisher of the Booster with Paul Hill serving as editor and "ad man" until Stamps came back to the Booster, becoming its managing editor. This team of Thompson and Stamps continued until 1972.

The deer contest began in 1969 and the first winner in January of 1970 was E.G. Sheffiend, followed by Harold Tucker in second place, Frank Reid in third place and L.C. Sturrock in fourth.

In April of 1972, Raleigh Lamb became the owner and publisher of the Booster with Don Wilkinson serving as news editor. "Lamb has had 27 years' experience in newspaper work. He worked with a small daily newspaper and weeklies. He bought the Trinity Standard in 1967 and sold it to David Durham and Alvin Holley with Polk County Publishing Co." The article goes on to say that Lamb's son Larry had helped in the newspaper business since age 11, worked on staff for the yearbook at his high school in Trinity and planned to major in journalism and photography in college and then come to work for the Booster. Many years later, Larry Lamb went to work for Polk County Publishing Co. as sports editor for the Houston County Courier, a position he held until his retirement in 2023.

In October of 1975 John Morrison became the owner and publisher of the Booster. In the early years of his ownership, Ernestine Faircloth worked at the newspaper, along with Diane Sitton, Jim Powers, Janice Wilkinson, Pat Hensarling, Madelon Graham, Flor-

ence Williams, Luther Lowery, John Tompkins and Janie Stock, to name a few. By 1975, another newspaper – The Woodville Star – began with Troy Hensley serving as editor. In the 1980s, John Yearwood started The Woodsman newspaper and the two papers ran side by side through the 80s until September of 1992 when Alvin Holley and Polk County Publishing Co. bought both papers, merging them into one paper. Morrison remained manager of the newly-merged paper until 2005, when he left to do a short stint for the Corrigan Times before leaving the newspaper business.

The current editor of the Booster is Chris Edwards. He was a stringer for the newspaper while in college, hired as a reporter in 2014, and was promoted to editor in 2018.

Alvin Holley has remained owner and publisher of the Tyler County Booster until recently when he named long time employee Kelli Barnes as publisher of his group of newspapers in 2020. Barnes serves at the helm of Polk County Publishing Co.'s four newspaper publications with a total circulation of 32,550 covering four counties. These newspapers are the Tyler County Booster, the Polk County Enterprise, the San Jacinto News-Times and the Trinity County News-Standard. Other publications of Polk County Publishing Co. include East Texan Magazine, a quarterly publication distributed in 28 counties throughout East Texas, and Discover Tyler County, a publication that is a visitor's guide to the pineywoods of deep East Texas and serves the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Chester, Colmesneil, Doucette, Dam B, Fred, Hillister, Ivanhoe, Spurger, Warren, Wildwood and Woodville.

The Booster has an e-edition for subscribers via email, a Facebook page, and a twice-weekly newsletter. The newspaper's website is easttexasnews.com and provides local and regional news and lots of contests including Best of Tyler County and Best of East Texas, in addition to providing the print editions it has produced for nearly a century. The Booster is located at 205 W. Bluff St. in Woodville. It is a proud member of the Texas Press Association (TPA) and the Texas Gulf Coast Press Association (TGCPA) and has been honored over the years with a number of awards from each association. Holley is a past president of TPA and TGCPA and Barnes is a past president of TGCPA.

The Booster may be contacted at 409-283-2516. News items and photos may be emailed to Editor Chris Edwards at news@tyler-countybooster.com. Barnes may be reached by emailing kelli@polkcountypublishing.com. ■



A participant in the annual Western Weekend parade travels the parade route down Hwy. 190 in front of the Tyler County Booster newspaper office. PHOTO BY DONNA HAMMER

Good old-fashioned
TART APPLE
pie
best served with Blue Bell® Ice Cream

Recipe and photo by Julia Bailey



Ingredients:

7 large Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and sliced into 1/2 inch slices
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
2 tbs. Flour
1 tsp. Cinnamon
1/8 tsp. Nutmeg
1 tbs. Lemon juice plus the zest of half of a lemon
1 large egg lightly beaten in a small bowl for egg wash
2 tbs. Sanding sugar for top of pie

Directions:

Peel, core, and slice Granny Smith green apples. In a mixing bowl, toss the apples with sugar, brown sugar, flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, lemon zest and lemon juice. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Buy or make two pie crusts. When they are room temperature, place one in a deep dish pie plate. Put your apple mixture in the unbaked pie shell and spread evenly. Cover with the second pie crust, and tuck the top one into the bottom one around the edges and pinch to seal. Cut slits into the top of the pie crust for steam release and it also looks pretty. Take the extra pie dough

from slits and cut into whatever lines/shapes you want to put on top of the pie crust. Be creative...it will look beautiful when baked. Place the pie on a baking sheet. Brush the top of the pie with egg wash and sprinkle with sanding sugar. Cover edges of pie with aluminum foil during part of the baking if desired to make sure the edges do not get overcooked. Bake for 25 minutes on 400 degrees, then take off foil shield, turn oven down to 375 degrees and bake an additional 30 minutes. The top will be golden brown and the juices will be bubbly. Cool 3 hours at room temperature before serving if desired. Serve with your favorite vanilla ice cream or whipped cream.



CHILI Charcuterie

Recipes and photos by Kelli Barnes

Make your favorite pot of chili in a nice dutch oven. On a tray, wooden board, brown sack paper, or favorite creative container place the following choices, or add your favorites for the perfect chili night:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Saltine Crackers | Grated cheese |
| Homemade cornbread | Sour cream |
| Fritos | Chives |
| Bread bites | Cilantro |
| Weiner bites | Jalapeno peppers |
| Chopped onions | |

My favorite chili recipe is:

Ingredients:

Two alarm chili package from grocery store
 Two lbs. ground beef
 One large white onion, chopped
 One 14.5 ounce can of tomato sauce
 Three 14.5 ounce cans of water
 2 extra tbs. Chili powder (or to taste)
 2 extra tbs. Cumin (or to taste)
 Extra salt and pepper to taste
 Add beans, drained, the variety of your choice if you like beans in your chili

Directions:

Brown ground beef with chopped onion,

drain excess grease. Open all packets in the 2 alarm chili kit except the mesa package and add to meat mixture. Pour in one can of tomato sauce and use the empty can to put three cans of water into pot. Bring all to a boil and reduced to simmer. At this point add drained beans if desired, then add the mesa pkg., mixing it with water first, as directed on the package, then stir into simmering chili. Next, taste test and add your extra chili powder, cumin, salt and pepper to taste. This is a very tasty chili with plenty of juice for soaking up your crackers, cornbread or other fixings. Enjoy!



Spicy Butter Sandwiches

For years, these have been called funeral sandwiches. Our family loves them so much, we make them frequently and needed a name change. We discovered you can vary the ingredients and then vary the seasonings put into the melted butter, changing the flavors easily but never sacrificing how special they are and how they disappear so quickly when served! So our new name is Spicy Butter Sandwiches. This is the traditional recipe, but you are encouraged to look up the Rueben version, the cracked chicken version, or make up your own special mixtures.

- One package of 12 Hawaiian dinner rolls
- 1/2 lb. Thin sliced deli ham
- 1/2 lb. Thin sliced swiss cheese
- 1/2 cup butter, melted
- 3 tbs. Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tbs. Dijon mustard
- 2 tbs. Brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp. Onion powder
- 1 tbs. Dried minced onion

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut your rolls in half and lay the bottom half in a 13x9 pan. Layer your meat and cheese on the rolls and then replace the tops. Some people slice all rolls at one time for two large pieces, then cut with serrated knife in between each sandwich before adding sauce. The other option is to make each one individually in the pan. Next, mix all other ingredients into your melted butter and pour over the top of each sandwich, using a spoon or marinating brush as needed to ensure even coverage over all sandwiches. Bake for 20 minutes and serve warm. They are also good room temperature so no worries! These sandwiches can be made in advance and refrigerated for up to four hours before baking, without worrying about the bread getting soggy. Enjoy!



Power of *Preservation:*

Watson Preserve a testament to the legacy of 'rock star' botanist

ALL PHOTOS BY CHRIS EDWARDS

"The loss of each plant, or each animal takes us, and me personally, closer to extinction," she says. "We're all part of the chain of life." - Geraldine Watson

Nineteen seventy-four saw the stroke of a pen from President Gerald Ford to create the Big Thicket preserve, which now encompasses more than 105,000 acres. A self-taught botanist, Geraldine Ellis Watson, was one of the Big Thicket's best friends: an ally to the rich biodiversity of the Thicket.

Watson passed on to the lush, evergreen forest in the sky on April 6, 2012, at the age of 87, and though her views are now, likely, filled with the most beautiful virgin pine that most folks down here would give their souls for, the Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve is a peaceful tribute to its namesake, and has many rare species of native plants, which include seven species of orchids, 10 species of ferns and four of the five types of carnivorous plants native to North America, among others.

Photojournalist Ron Kabele once interviewed Watson for a story about the decline of hardwood bottomlands in the region. He was unaware of the often volatile history between environmentalists like Watson and the timber companies.

Kabele, who recounted Watson for a piece in the April 2012 issue of *Texas Highways*, wrote that "If we truly are products of our memories and experiences, I am so much richer because of Geraldine Watson."

The "little old lady in the tennis shoes," as Kabele fondly recalls her as, was a rock star among plant folks. Aside from her efforts to create the Big Thicket National Preserve, she also wrote *Big Thicket Plant Ecology*, which is, in essence, the bible of Deep East Texas botany, was published in 1979. Another book, *Reflections on the Neches: A Naturalist's Odyssey along the Big Thicket's Snow River*, was published in 2003, and along with these books, she was also a talented visual artist, and kept a small gallery to display her paintings, which depicted her favorite subject: the rich flora and fauna of the Big Thicket.

In a 1999 interview with the Texas Legacy Project, Watson provided an overview of the Big Thicket Association's beginnings, as well as her often contentious relationship with the timber industry in the region. By the 1960s, 90 percent of the virgin forests in the Big Thicket were already gone, which fueled the fire of Watson and other conservationists. Watson recalled how she'd witnessed the clear-cutting of the huge, old-growth forests, starting when she was a child, to fuel the fires of progress, thus planting the seeds for her future work.

The lumber companies, she said, had placed full-page advertisements in newspapers proclaiming that if the Big Thicket bill passed, it would take people's homes and they would lose their oil royalties. The Big Thicket Association (BTA) began in the fall of 1964, and with Watson as a board member, and with her outspoken views finding their way into a newspaper column she wrote for the *Pine Needle*, efforts of preservation picked up steam. When she testified before Congress, she spoke of the widespread poverty of the region and how a national preserve would boost the region's economy.

Although the efforts spearheaded by Watson were ultimately successful, it did come at a price to her and her family. "During the 10 years that we were trying to get the bill passed to create the Big Thicket, my children, who were growing up in the area, faced a lot of persecution," she said. "If I had known then what it would mean to my family, I would never have got involved in the Big Thicket. You never go against the powers-that-be in an area that has a one-product economy."

Watson said she would have to write a book to even begin to explain some of the persecution, which ranged from fire bombing offices, assaults, harassment from law enforcement of her children and husband and even the suspicious death of an attorney who was an ally of the group's efforts. "Everybody hated my guts," she said.

In the mid-1970's, while birding near Warren, Watson saw a piece of property on the shore of Lake Hyatt that was so diverse in its plant offerings that she knew she had to have it. "When she bought that first lot, she didn't know how she was going to pay for it, but she was determined," according to Pauline Singleton, the president of the board of directors that oversees the Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve.

When Watson acquired the 10 acres near Warren, she built a cabin on



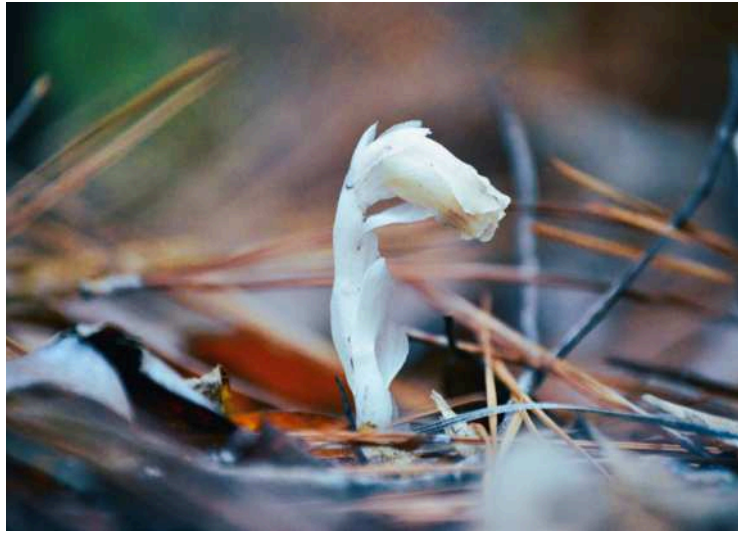


PHOTO COURTESY OF ZACH CARRELL





Photo courtesy of Sam Houston State National History Museum

Inset Photo: Geraldine Watson holds an injured bird in her hand as she leads a tour group in this undated photo.
PHOTO COURTESY OF WATSON RARE NATIVE PLANT PRESERVE

the land, which is still standing. In the history and statement of purpose she prepared to apply for non-profit status for the preserve, she detailed how she built the cabin herself, from the framing and masonry work to the flooring and wiring. That A-frame cabin, which still stands on the property, became her retreat, and the land around it was initially called “Watson Pinelands Preserve.”

The preserve, which she incorporated in January of 2009 as a 501c3 non-profit corporation, is open to the public, free of charge, 365 days a year during daylight hours. The preserve boasts a diverse range of rare species of native plants, such as milkweeds, wild azaleas and four of the five species of carnivorous plants. She had, since acquiring the property, believed it should be preserved for future generations to study, enjoy and bask in its richness, and when she incorporated the preserve, she deeded the land to the corporation.

It is a hidden gemstone to many hikers and nature enthusiasts who come out regularly to walk its trails and see what there is to see. Avid hiker and nature photographer Zach Carrell praised the efforts of Watson and the rich biodiversity offered by the preserve. Carrell said “You can see things out here that you can’t find anywhere else.”

That diversity is what drew Watson to the Big Thicket in the beginning. In the interview from 1999, she said “There are at least nine different plant associations here, which are totally distinct, yet so close together, that you can literally walk from swamp to desert in a few yards.”

Watson recalled when she was a young girl, and witnessed the still-virgin forests, of how her mother and she would go walking in the woods, picking birdfoot violets and winecups, with her mother explaining what the plants were and how they could be used.

Her father, who worked at a lumber mill, also instilled a deep appreci-

ation in nature at an early age in her, as he would take her up and down the streams and through the woods of the area. “The perfection that’s in the balance of nature is empirical evidence of the creative genius of God,” Watson said.

During her childhood, as her family spent most of their time in deep east and southeast Texas, including stints in Doucette, and Jasper and later Port Arthur, she witnessed two opposing forces that would frame her life’s work – the bounty of nature and the economic abuses of the timber industry, as her family had worked in the mills for generations. “I never planned to be a botanist,” she said. “I just seemed to drift into things.”

Throughout the years, through her advocacy and expertise of the Big Thicket, she came to know more about the ecology of the region as anyone.

“All around us there are little spots like this,” she points out. “If we just look for them and protect them and appreciate them, we’ll always have them,” she said of the preserve, and pointing out the empirical evidence of God in her own backyard.

The Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve is open to the public year-round, free of charge. Driving directions: the preserve is off of US 69 near Warren. From US 69 – turn east on County Road 4770, drive about a half a mile to the bridge and then across the dam. At the top of the hill, turn left on County Road 4777. The entrance is about a quarter mile on the left, and there is a parking area. Guided tours can be arranged by calling Pauline Singleton at 281-421-2469, or by emailing her at pollytx1@gmail.com. Donations can also be made out to the preserve and to honor Geraldine Watson’s efforts. Make a check out to “Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve,” and send to the attention of Brenda Peck at Citizens State Bank, PO Box 160, Warren, TX 77664-0160. ■

Eat the Dessert, Buy the Shoes, Go on the Vacation...

"LIFE IS SHORT, WEAR THE SHOES, CARRY THE PURSE, AND LET YOUR LOVED ONES KNOW THAT THEY ARE ADORED.
EVERY DAY IS A SPECIAL OCCASION"- AMY BYTHEWOOD

By Mollie LaSalle

Two thousand and fourteen was a year just like any other for Ben and Amy Bythewood; Ben was in his third term as mayor of Woodville. Amy had a successful law practice on the courthouse square, and life was good. They were anticipating the arrival of their first grandchild in October, and Ben was running for re-election in November.

The Bythewoods celebrated an anniversary, their adored grandson ("Mr. Blue Eyes") arrived right on schedule, and Ben was getting ready for the election less than a month away. Ben had already served three terms as mayor, beginning in 2008, and was anticipating a fourth term that fall. "He did such a wonderful job for his city and community because he loved it, and because it was who he was. Everything he did was with style and grace; he helped change Woodville for the better", Amy said. As it sometimes happens, the voters decided to elect someone else that year. Amy explained, "When Ben called me and told me that he had lost the election, my first thought was, this man's going to die, I don't have him for very long, I don't know why that was my first thought, but it was pretty accurate, we had our grandchild, we spent some major quality time together, and eight months later he was gone". The Bythewoods planned their first cruise together in May of 2015. They left port at Galveston on May 31; Ben fell ill on board the ship, and by the next evening, he passed away; his obituary said he "sailed into eternity".

Amy Renee Cook Bythewood came into the world at a naval base hospital in Kingston, Rhode Island. She was a tiny baby when the family moved to Texas, and she grew up and attended school in Lake Jackson. "I graduated from Brazoswood High School, and people like to think it's in Lake Jackson; it's actually across the street in Clute, we don't say that out loud, but it's the truth, I graduated in Clute, Texas". Amy spent the next five or six years attending community college, in Clute, and in Alvin; this was the period in time when she first met Ben. Amy said, "my family owned Lake Jackson Paint and Floor, and Ben's grandmother came in for carpet. I met him through his grandmother; I like to think that his grandmother set us up. We were really good friends, Ben was not a bad boy, he was very clean cut, and very sweet. He was from Mont Belvieu and moved to Jones

Creek for a short time. We were just really good friends, which is the best way to start a healthy relationship, to have a good friend". They were married in October 1990.

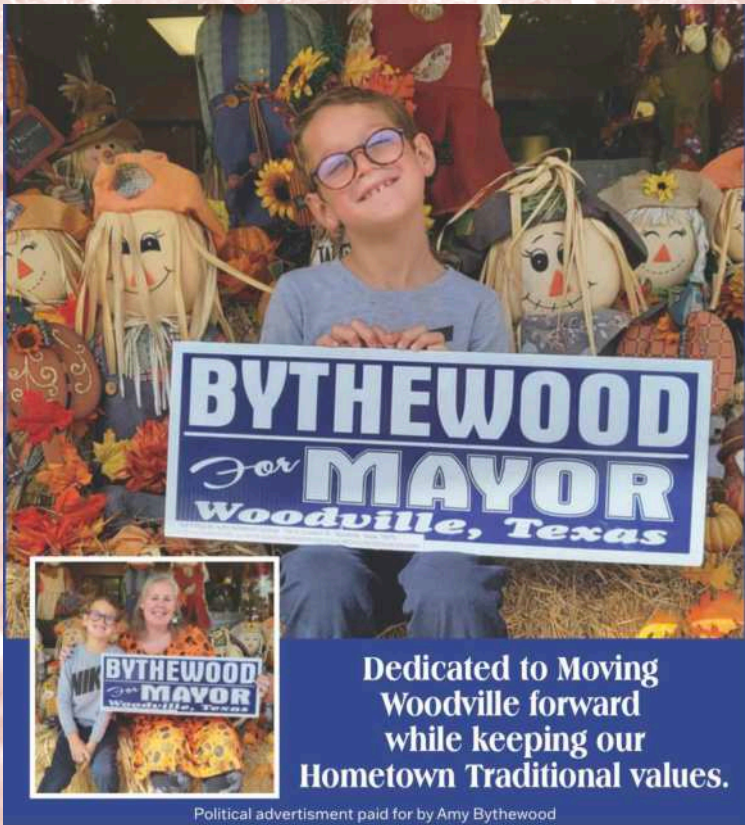
"I did a couple of years at community college and then the kids came, it's hard to go to school and raise kids at the same time. We ended up here in Woodville, and when my daughter started kindergarten, I ended up driving back and forth to Houston every day to go to school. My schedule was their schedule, they would go to school, I would go to Houston and back. I was there when they got off the bus, I was there for girl scouts, for soccer, and I was able to still be their mom", Amy explained. She added, "when I was a little girl, and people asked me what I wanted to do, I told them I wanted to be a lawyer. I've always wanted to be a lawyer, I don't know if I always knew what that was, but I always wanted to be a lawyer". She went on to get a bachelor of science degree in political science from the University of Houston. "I minored in Russian and majored in 'I'm gonna go to law school.'" However, in the grand scheme of things, Amy did in fact go to law school, graduating from South Texas College of Law in Houston with a Doctor of Jurisprudence in 2005. In November 2006, she passed the bar exam. Ben had a career as a finance manager for several dealerships, and in 2004, started his own network consulting business, Bythewood Network Consulting.

Amy said that before she got her bar exam results, she had interviewed as a CPS investigator, and she got the job, but never went to work for them. She called them back two days later and politely declined the job offer. It was then suggested she apply for a job as an attorney for CPS, and she was put on an appointment list, "I had been a lawyer for about two or three seconds", she said. She has been a voice for children who have no voice, "I am their voice, I get to tell the judge what they want, even if it's not a good thing; they deserve to have that voice, even if you're not on the right side, sometimes you just need somebody on your side". She has been a practicing attorney for 17 years, in the same location, on the courthouse square in Woodville. Amy was officially board certified in child welfare law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in December 2020, joining an elite group of only 97 attorneys in the state of Texas who were board certified in this area.



Amy in her office. Ben always looks over her shoulder.

Amy and Ben in 2015
PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMY BYTHEWOOD



An ad Amy ran in the newspaper with Mr. Blue Eyes holding signs from Ben's first run for mayor in 2006
Madame Mayor, 2023

"I don't know where the child welfare angle came in, I am an only child, I didn't have a whole lot of interaction with other children; day care doesn't count, school doesn't count, I don't know what drew me into that", Amy explained when asked about being an advocate for abused and neglected children. She added, "maybe giving a voice to somebody who doesn't have one, because when you're representing children, they need to know that somebody's on their side no matter what, and your job is to tell them the truth, they don't get a lot of that either."

The Bythewoods were always civic minded, and both had considered running for city office. Amy confessed that she got the fever first, early in their marriage, but the timing wasn't right. "I wanted to be mayor before Ben was. A dear friend was on city council and it just seemed so interesting to be a part of city politics, to have a voice, and be a part of growth, then Ben decided that he wanted to run for mayor, and I figured it wasn't my time". Ben served three terms as Woodville's mayor. Amy said, "after Ben died, I ran for city council for all the wrong reasons". Amy served one term on city council, from 2016-2018. In 2018, she entered the hotly contested race for Criminal District Attorney. The race did not go in her favor, and the ever gracious Ms. Bythewood placed an ad in the local paper, which said, "I have enjoyed the process of running for the office of Criminal District Attorney and am proud to have focused on my strengths and maintained a positive attitude. I am looking forward to continuing my law practice and working to help make our community the best it can be. Thank you for adopting me as your hometown girl!" Fast forward to 2022. Amy found some of Ben's old signs from his first time running for mayor in a storage shed at home. She took it as a sign from Ben that she should run, "I had already been thinking about it", she said. The mayor's race that November was crowded, she was up

against the incumbent, and two other opponents. Finally, it was her time. Amy was sworn in as mayor in December, the second Bythewood to hold the office.

Amy has a pair of black patent leather shoes with red soles on display in her office. "This is the last Christmas present Ben gave me, she said, he started my shoe obsession". She went on to explain, "when Ben died, the joy went away, there was no sparkle, no glitter, shoes were pretty, and shoes made me feel better". Her daughter had moved out, Ben died, her son moved out, and she was alone in the house, "I had nothing else to spend money on, so I bought shoes. When Ben was alive, he dressed very well, and I enjoyed making sure he and the kids had nice things". August of 2015 was when the shoe thing really hit. Amy joined a lady lawyer group called Hell on Heels; several thousand lady lawyers across the state are members, it's all about women supporting women.

"The older I get, the more forgiving, caring, and believing in others grace I become. I don't think you need to get harsher the closer to death you get. I'd like to think that I've learned something about this world, and how to deal with people, and I don't think we are here to make things worse for each other, I think we are here to make things better. Because of Ben, I am who I am. The day we got married, we promised each other a lot of things, but most importantly loyalty, our loyalty, til death do us part. He loved me and wanted me to be happy, no matter what. I was lucky to have such a man; he loved me enough to take care of me after his death as he did before; he brought new love into my life and a healthier perspective. I thank him for making sure I appreciate those who love me, even the most unexpected ones, he always wished me to be loved. He was a gentle giant with a quiet sweet spirit, and I am better for knowing him. This is the only life you have, live it, and be kind". ■



A few of Amy's shoes

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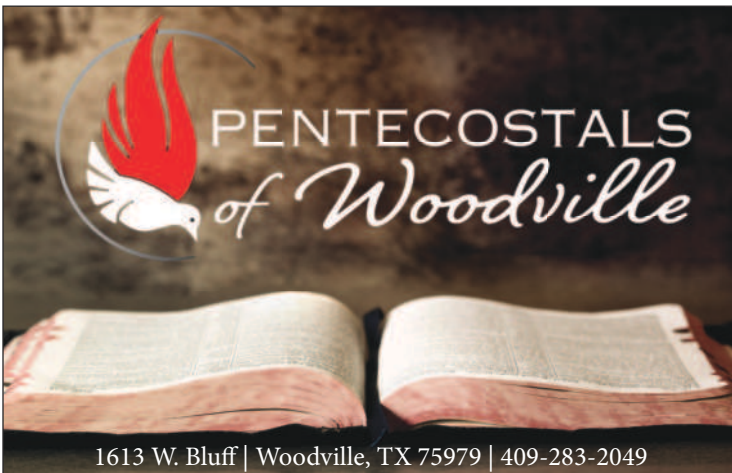


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Worship: 11 a.m.
Come visit us!



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1613 W. Bluff | Woodville, TX 75979 | 409-283-2049



WOODVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST
Keith Bellamy, Minister

Sunday Morning
Bible Class 9:30
Sunday Morning
Worship 10:30
Sunday Afternoon
Worship 1:30 pm
(except first Sunday)
Wednesday Bible
Study 6:00 pm

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Pastor
August S. Francis
(409) 499-6951
pastor@vijbc.org



AGAPE CHURCH

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Tuesday 10 a.m. Women's Bible Study & Fellowship
Wednesday 5:30 p.m. Fellowship & Meal, 6:30 p.m. Bible Study
Sunday Bible Study 10 a.m. Worship 11a.m.

Pastor: Sis Gina Harrison
Assoc. Pastor: Butch Duncan

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DOGWOOD HILLS

BAPTIST CHURCH

Our commitment is to fulfill the Great Commission through love for God and others.

Worship Services & Times

Sunday:
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Worship Service 11:00 a.m.
Choir practice following
Worship Service

Wednesday:
Children's Ministry 6:00 p.m.
Student Ministry 6:00 p.m.
Prayer Meeting/Bible Study 6:00 p.m.

Bro. Jerry Dubose, Pastor

823 US Hwy. 190 W.
Woodville, TX 75979
409-283-3202

Office Hours: Mon-Fri 8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
dogwoodhillsbaptistchurch.org



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