

THE COMMUNITY NEWS

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Lawson Gratz was a buffalo soldier who retired to farm in Annetta. He was recently honored with a star on the Texas Walk of Fame.

ANNETTA

Buffalo Soldier honored with star on Texas Trail of Fame

Lawson Gratz spent later life in Annetta

By Brandi Addison
The Community News

It was more than a century after his death that Lawson D. Gratz received the statewide recognition he deserved as a Buffalo Soldier.

His great-grandson, Josef Gratts — whose name is spelled differently after a misspelling occurred when Gratz volunteered in the 114th United States Colored Infantry in 1864 — spent decades studying their family's history to rediscover Gratz's past as a Buffalo Soldier.

"There were rumors when we were children that he was a Buffalo Soldier, but no one could ever really prove it, because there was nothing there to prove it," Gratts said. In 2012, Gratts applied for a Texas Historical Monument on the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Civil War.

"Of course, it was awarded and is at his grave site now. It tells his life about being a slave, and also about being a Buffalo Soldier, so that's when his recognition basically started," he added.

Buffalo Soldier is a term synonymous for Black soldiers in the 19th Century.

"The Natives respected the fighting skills and tenacity of the Black soldiers and compared them to the revered Buffalo," Gratts said.

In late October, Gratz was posthumously inducted into the Texas Trail of Fame at Billy Bob's Texas in Fort Worth. Gratts accepted the award on his great-grandfather's behalf.

"I do a lot of things that bring his life and history to the public," he told *The Community News*.

Turn to **GRATZ**, page 4

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

In College

After life-altering surgery as a kindergarten student at Stuard Elementary School in 2008, Jessica Hall now lives life "Turbocharged With a Hemi." Her story is one of inspiration and determination.



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS

Jessica's Hall is shown in her high school graduation photo in 2021. Now she attends classes at Weatherford College.

By Jeri Petersen
The Community News

It's a happy irony when a young lady who functions with just the left half of her brain says she thinks she can do anything to which puts her mind. In the 13 years since surgery to remove the right half of her brain, what Jessica Hall has put her mind to is astonishing.

In 2007, 5-year-old Jessica — better known as Jessie to Aledo residents who've been around for the last decade or so — began having seizures. Her left hand twitched and became weak. The symptoms became more frequent and intense, occurring around the clock.

After many excruciating months and endless tests to pinpoint the kind of seizures Jessica was having, neurologists at Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth confirmed the diagnosis of Rasmussen's Encephalitis (RE).

This rare neurological disease affects a single hemisphere of the brain and causes severe seizures, weakness on one side of the body, loss of motor and speech skills and of cognitive functioning. It generally occurs in children under the age of 10.

Because RE does not respond well to conventional seizure medications, and because patients already have lost strength on one side of the body and are incapacitated by seizures, removal of the affected part of the brain offers the best outcome for a high-functioning life. Since younger brains have higher neuro-plasticity — the brain's ability to modify its connections — neurological recovery from the procedure generally is rapid in children.

Turn to **JESSICA**, page 3



Welcome to the 27th annual Good News edition of *The Community News*.

Twenty-six years ago, we made a decision that one issue of the paper each year ought to be devoted to good news. News about pandemics, train wrecks, and political corruption can take a week off while we celebrate the end of one year and the beginning of a new one.

We invite you to check community-news.com for breaking news during the holidays.

We hope you enjoy this issue - and we hope you and all who are dear to you have a wonderful 2022!

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THE COMMUNITY NEWS

The community threw a send-off party for Jessica on May 9, 2008, complete with a ride in a hot-pink hotrod and smiles from Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders.



WJZ BALTIMORE

Jessica's father Cris Hall discusses her surgery with Dr. Ben Carson in 2008.



Jessica is shown with her dog Carlie in 2021, the same dog that appeared in the front-page story "Saving Jessie" in 2008.



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS



WJZ BALTIMORE

Jessica is shown talking to her brother, Matt, after she was moved out of ICU at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS

Jessica is shown with Dr. Ben Carson in 2008 following her surgery.

JESSICA

from page one

Hard Decisions

Jessica's parents Cris and Kristi Hall sought a second opinion at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, considered the top U.S. hospital in epilepsy treatments and procedures. They made the agonizing decision for Jessica to have an anatomical hemispherectomy, or the complete removal of one hemisphere of the brain. (In a functional hemispherectomy, less brain is removed but the diseased portion is completely disconnected from the normal hemisphere.) The operation would be performed by Dr. Ben Carson, then the world's top pediatric neurosurgeon and chief of pediatric neurosurgery at Hopkins'

Children's Center. Dr. Carson retired in 2013.

On June 10, 2008, the day before Jessica's surgery, Cris wrote on a blog for Jessica, "Jessie is having fun on her 'vacation' to Baltimore. She is more alive today than I have ever seen her. Her spirit is what is going to get her through this."

Following the 7-hour surgery, Jessica's seizures and left-hand twitching stopped immediately. As she emerged from recovery, Kristi noted that Jessica was breathing on her own and moving the right side of her body. The empty brain cavity fills with cerebrospinal fluid, which is normal but also carries the risk of hydrocephalus (build-up of fluid in the cavities deep within the brain that can put pressure on the brain.) Typical of this type of surgery, Jessica was left without the use of her left hand, a limp in her

left leg, and sight in only one-half of each eye.

A Little Girl in the National Spotlight

As word of Jessica's rare disease and its radical treatment spread throughout the community, support extended well beyond Aledo and Parker County. The *Community News* reported regular updates, as did Fort Worth-Dallas and Baltimore media. Prayer groups were organized, numerous fundraisers assisted the Hall family, including flying Jessica's three brothers to Baltimore for a post-surgery visit. Aledo mayor Kit Marshall declared May 9, 2008, Jessie Hall Day. Many volunteers helped Stuard Elementary School throw a send-off party that day, complete with bubbles, pink balloons, ribbons, posters and t-shirts, the Dallas Cowboys

cheerleaders, and a ride in a pink hot rod. Students at other Aledo schools lined her route home to wave and cheer.

The eyes of the nation were upon her as well. Two weeks after her surgery she received a personal letter from Pres. George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush. Rep. Kay Granger sent Jessica the flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol on the day of her surgery. She appeared on "The Doctors" TV show and other programs. The Halls didn't push Jessica to do any appearances, and they only allowed it in order to raise awareness of RE and of the foundation they established to help families in similar situations.

Setbacks

Two months after her surgery, Jessica returned to first grade at Stuard. She was seizure-free for two years, but hemi operations are rarely one-and-done. Jessica began having episodes with upset stomach, vomiting, and her right eye twitching. Her neurologist believed she was having seizures so she began taking seizure medications. She spent a lot of time at Cook's having tests and being monitored. She was taking seizure medications that helped somewhat, but an MRI showed signs of hydrocephalus, which causes many of the same symptoms of epileptic seizures.

Jessica underwent her first shunt placement surgery in Aug. 2010 to drain excess cerebrospinal fluid and relieve pressure on her brain. With decreased pressure, the left brain returned to normal size. However, this allowed a subdural pocket of cerebrospinal fluid to form on top of her brain, which was pushing the brain into the hemispherectomy side, and the brain was pressing on the brain stem. At the end of October, she received a 12-inch Halloween scar down the back of her head from a shunt revision surgery.

By December, EEGs showed she was having seizures in the right

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GRATZ

from page one

Gratz was born in Kentucky and was enslaved until he was 26. After the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect he joined the 114th United States Colored Troops and left his past life as a slave in Kentucky behind.

According to Gratts, his great-grandfather was a spy in the Black Dispatches during the Civil War and was in battle during many operations, including the pursuit and surrender of Gen. Robert E. Lee and his army.

An article in the Aug. 9, 2013, issue of *The Community News* provided some details of Gratz' service:

Records at this point in Lawson D. Gratz's military career show a surprising trend, which Josef, thanks to that National Archives Records, decoded.

"He was gone from his company for two to four months at a time, so naturally his troop thought he was running off, but that wasn't so," Josef said. "He was actually behind Confederate lines as a black dispatch."

Black men were dispatched behind Confederate lines to spy on troops and weapons, then reported back to the Union. Whenever Lawson was found after his disappearances, according to records, he was in a freedman's hospital, either malnourished or injured.

"Every time, his company would take his stripes away, but each and every time they took his stripes away, the War Department would write a letter to his company giving him a raise in stripes."

His undercover work, combined with his education – Lawson's slave overseers did not mind if he read or wrote in his free time, which was uncharacteristic for the time – propelled him forward in the military. Less than a year out of slavery, Lawson made sergeant.

Lawson then joined the 10th Calvary, one of the two groups the US designated as black troops. Lawson was assigned to backbreaking jobs, such as constructing rock buildings and working on the railroads, before moving on to fighting Native



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS

A replica of the Lawson Gratz star on the Texas Trail of Fame.

Americans in the West, where the 10th Calvary picked up the name "buffalo soldiers."

Records vary as to how the name developed, but Josef discovered his great-grandfather battled Cheyenne Indians in present-day Oklahoma. The Cheyenne Indians were said to have respected the valor of the black soldiers, saying they fought hard like revered buffalo.

The name stuck and later applied to the 9th Calvary, the only other black troops at the time, too.

Lawson D. Gratz is the only buffalo soldier to be buried in Parker County.

After leaving the service in 1872, Lawson became a teamster, driving animal hides from Albany, Texas, to Dallas/Fort Worth. Here, he met his soon-to-be wife, Roseanne Cass. The two married and had a son, Bernard, and Lawson decided to take advantage of a government program to allow former slaves to purchase land, choosing a section in Annetta.

"He was an outdoorsman and he loved the land," Josef said of Lawson. "He did the only thing he knew how to do as a former slave – he farmed."

Lawson raised his family on his Annetta property, reading to his children every night.

Josef said Lawson passed down the family value of education. A freed slave, Lawson knew the importance of reading and writing.

"If you keep a man's mind chained without knowledge, the he'll be a slave for the rest of his life," Josef said.



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS

Josef Gratts speaks at the Texas Trail of Fame banquet, accepting the honor of a star on the Texas Trail of Fame for his great-grandfather, Lawson Gratz.

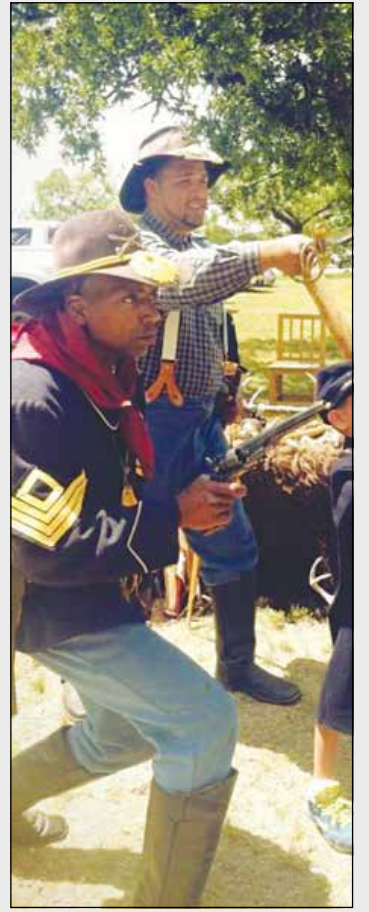
Lawson Gratz passed away on his farm surrounded by loved ones on Sept. 18, 1909.

"I'm pretty sure there's a lot more to his everyday sacrifices that he made that we will never know about, because not all of that is privy to all of us since he's not here to tell us about it," Gratts said.

He added that the recent award is such an honor because it esteems the name of his great-grandfather

and symbolizes his sacrifices as both a slave and a Buffalo Soldier.

"The star that's been laid in the sidewalk is something that people can see every day," Gratts said. "They will know who Lawson Gratz was. A lot of people didn't even know who the Buffalo Soldiers were until they started reading some of the things about him. And it opened their eyes to what the Black soldiers actually did for this country."



JANUARY 15 - 16: ON THE TRAIL WITH THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS

The Botanical Research Institute of Texas and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Buffalo Soldier program will present a free living history event with story-telling and displays. The session leader will discuss the historic Buffalo Soldiers and their role throughout Texas and the Western Frontier. Displays will be up outside the BRIT building from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 15-16, and do not require entrance to the Botanic Garden or registration to visit.

Both days will also feature a special 45-minute presentation at 1 p.m. at BRIT, 1700 University Drive in Fort Worth. For more information, or to register, visit <https://shop.brit.org/education?page=1>

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SETBACKS

from page three

hemisphere of her brain. Cook's neurology team collaborated again to find the cause. Jessica underwent two more surgeries, the first in April 2011 to retrace the connection between the right and left brain. It didn't work. The seizures increased in intensity and frequency.

"A few months later, Dr. David Donahue and Dr. Saleem Malik found with a scan that a tiny bit of tissue in the right frontal lobe they leave for cushioning was firing. Dr. Donahue removed it, and all the neurological activity stopped. She was seizure-free after that," Cris said.

Recovery and rehab were rough, very much like the original hemispherectomy. Nevertheless, Jessica was back at school in about three weeks.



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS

LEFT: Jessica was a varsity cheerleader at Hill School in 2017. | RIGHT: Jessica is shown with Aledo Mayor Kit Marshall at her graduation from Cornerstone Academy in Granbury..

Indomitable Jessica

A few weeks ago, on Dec. 7, Jessica completed her first full semester at Weatherford College, earning all As. She now has 24 credit hours, with a cumulative GPA of 4.0 and is registered for 12 hours in the spring.

Every time RE knocked Jessica down, she got back up and seemed to come back stronger. In elementary school she sang in choir and acted in plays. In middle and high school, she was a cheerleader, was on the student council, played volleyball, and participated in drama and 4-H.

Jessica does everything one-handed, from tying her shoes to playing video games and knee-boarding to using a mechanical can opener. At 17, she learned to drive a car until her vision sidelined her. That's temporary, she insists.

"I haven't given up that dream," she says. "The main issue was my vision. But this is really cool: there are these things called prism glasses that enable me to see the full picture. It took us a year to get them, and now I have them. Next year I think I'm going to start driving again."

Change and Progress

The Aledo community supported the Halls in myriad ways throughout Jessica's illness, diagnosis, surgeries, rehabilitation, and beyond. But as Jessica reached middle-school age, Cris and Kristi realized Jessica would have more opportunities to flourish at a smaller school. After seventh grade she enrolled at Hill School in Fort Worth, where she attended eighth and ninth grades. She was a varsity cheerleader both years, and her oldest brother Matt played on the football team.

Post-surgery, Jessica had spent six weeks in rehabilitation at the Kennedy Krieger Institute next to Johns Hopkins, followed by three weeks of inpatient rehab at Cook's after she came home. She went to physical therapy twice a week from age 6 to 14.

"At the beginning of physical therapy, I looked at it as something I have to do," she says. "After seventh grade, my parents said, 'You're moving to a new school, you're doing cheerleading, and they're encouraging cheerleaders to work out with the football

players.' I ended up being the only cheerleader to work out with the football players consistently."

The football workouts strengthened the entire body, which is what Jessica's physical therapy was intended to do. Not only did she get to work out with Matt, but the workouts replaced her physical therapy sessions.

"At first I was terrified, but that was my drive," she says. "Going to physical therapy ended after my seventh-grade year, but I do my own PT myself still. I go on walks with my parents, do core workouts in my room, and we have weights in the garage that I use."

The People Factor

Jessica's school activities challenged her physically and mentally, but just as important, they built her confidence through socialization. She cites spending time with friends as the highlight of her school years.

"I didn't know anything about volleyball, but I did it anyway to have fun and meet new people. I was right, I did well!" she says.

Although Jessica has lived in Granbury for the past five years, Aledo ties remain strong. She graduated in May from Cornerstone Christian Academy in Granbury, having spent her sophomore, junior, and senior years there. Her second-grade teacher at Stuard, Linda Surrat, and Mayor Kit Marshall attended her graduation. She recently received a card from former AISD football coach and athletic director Tim Buchanan, his wife Rebecca, and daughter Mady, who babysat Jessica when she was in elementary school.

Full Circle

Jessica enrolled in summer classes at Weatherford College, where she says she plans to earn her associate's degree and then transfer to Tarleton State University. She intends to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Child and Family Studies-Child Life Education.

Child Life specialists are trained to help pediatric patients and their families cope with the stress of dealing with illness, pain,

Turn to **CIRCLE**, page 7

HEMISPHERECTOMY FOUNDATION

When Cris and Kristi Hall's daughter Jessica was diagnosed with Rasmussen's Encephalitis and they had to decide whether to allow neurosurgeons to remove half her brain, no organization existed to guide their decision. As they buried themselves in research, they vowed to create a foundation that would be a single stop where parents could find the information and support they themselves so desperately needed.

The Halls were at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Md., with Jessica for six weeks for her surgery and rehab, with a lot of downtime to work on setting up the Hemispherectomy Foundation.

"I think it's what kept us sane," Cris says.

Mission: To provide emotional, educational, and financial support for families who undergo or are considering a hemispherectomy.

Official name: Hemispherectomy Angels, Inc, is the name of the 501(c)3 non-profit, public charity, as recognized by the IRS and the State of Texas.

DBA (Doing Business As) certificate: "The Hemispherectomy Foundation" or "The Hemi Foundation."

Official website: www.HemiFoundation.org

Please visit the site to find Hemi resources, read Hemi patients' stories, and to see the impressive list of Medical Advisory Board members.

Secure, tax-deductible donations can be made on the site or mailed to The Hemispherectomy Foundation, PO Box 1239, Aledo, TX 76008.

The Hemispherectomy Foundation receives no funds from the U.S. Government.

"Once you start taking grant money, you have to give up your goal for theirs," says Cris Hall, Foundation executive director. "We are funded only by generous individuals who seek to make a difference in a child's life. The more people give, the more we're able to do. We operate on a zero-deficit budget, we don't spend money we don't have, and we don't go into debt like a lot of nonprofits or other organizations."



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Music of the season

A big part of December is the music of the holiday season. The Aledo High School band program and the combined Aledo High School, Middle School, and McAnally choir programs held concerts during the month. All photos by Randy Keck.

The choirs performed individually and combined with a finale of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas."

The McAnally Intermediate School Choir performed favorites such as "Jingle Bell Rock."



The Aledo Middle School choir performance included "Listen to the Rain."

The Aledo High School Choir, Varsity Choir, Chamber Choir, Mens' Choir, and Womens' Choir performed several selections. The choirs were directed by Karen Paul and Carnell Simmons.



Skylar Cabrera



Teague Shelton, Andrew Marshall



Gabriel Galvez

The Aledo High School Symphonic Band, Wind Band, and Jazz Band I entertained with a blend of music styles.

The Symphonic Band's performance included "A Sirius Christmas," Director Jake Albin's arrangement of "Carol of the Bells."

The AHS Wind Band included "Christmas at the Movies" and the concert concluded with four numbers by AHS Jazz I, including "I'll Be Home for Christmas."



The bands were directed by Jake Albin and Dext Moore.



ABOVE FROM LEFT: Logan Belt and Lincoln Moore; Edgar Ayala; Addyson Pennington, Jules Caldwell, Tyler Jackson, Nick Brandt, Kendall Korvis-Verner | RIGHT: Tyler Paul; Derrick Jackson and Cohen Beard



CIRCLE

from page five

disabilities, and hospitalization. They soothe and distract a child with activities like coloring books, video games, or just conversation while he or she undergoes uncomfortable procedures.

"Jessica remembers so many days in the hospital and how those folks made her life more bearable," Cris says. "One of most obvious things about her growth is that throughout this semester she realized she wants to do Child Life herself. She's worked really hard. Her professors like her because they see her work ethic when other students are skipping class or not turning in work."

Challenges, Rewards and the Future

A lifetime of challenges has a way of forging work ethic. Every single thing Jessica has wanted to do requires effort, determination, and hope. A lot of that is her nature, but a lot is nurture, too. Her parents say they don't let her get lax in developing life skills.

"I know getting older, you can't rely on your mom to make your food for you. For the most part, I don't use special tools, I do everything one-handed. But I have a special cutting board that has pointy things [that hold] the food so I can cut it up," Jessica says.

At 19, she has her eye on cutting the apron strings.

"Nobody wants to live with their parents for the rest of their lives," she says. "I absolutely do have plans to live on my own. I don't know where, but I know I want to have a life of my own, to not live with my parents forever."

Jessica and her brother Matt have been close, and she credits him with pushing her out of her comfort zone as they grew up together.

"Whenever we would go to the lake house, he would wake me up to go fishing. Physically and mentally, he let me know I could have a normal life and not see myself as a disabled person who can't do

activities that an average person would do," she says.

Gratitude

For all that Jessica and her family have overcome and achieved together, Cris emphasizes that they still have day-to-day challenges that most families don't have to deal with.

"We're OK with that," he says. "You appreciate life and the little things more when things happen to your kids. We still consider ourselves blessed."

Kristi says she continues to find comfort in knowing she can hand her worries over to God. "We don't have to shoulder everything," she says. "And you can just turn around and always find someone having bigger troubles than you."

Having done a mind-numbing amount of research on all aspects of epileptic seizures, and knowing how alone and overwhelmed families can feel when they receive such a diagnosis, they had a strong desire to share their knowledge with other families.

Jessie's Angels and The Hemi Foundation

During Jessie's sendoff event at Stuard Elementary in May 2008, her father Cris Hall thanked the crowd for all they had done, calling them Jessie's Angels. Friend and then-Aledo resident Caren Jennings created a website, prayforjessie.org, as a repository of information about Jessica, which became the precursor to The Hemispherectomy Foundation. Jennings and her husband John eagerly got to work helping Cris and Kristi set up the Foundation.

"We four were instrumental in doing the groundwork, and the fifth was God," Kristi says. "Things fell into place too well that couldn't have happened without divine help."

These "Angels on Earth" as Cris called them, appeared at every turn, offering professional services to create a website, handle the legal work in setting up a 501(c)(3), and do accounting.

"When the Hemi Foundation was first created, it had a simple mission to award scholarships to



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS

Jessica and her prom date, Holt.

youngsters who had endured this radical brain surgery and had gone on to college, trade school, or other post high-school education," Cris says. "From there, it grew into so much more, with international conferences, financial assistance, a full medical advisory board, and spun-off Hemi Foundations in Australia, Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and the UK. Some are fully government organizations, and others are an online presence."

In February 2009 Dr. Ben Carson agreed to serve as the honorary chair of the Foundation's Medical Advisory Board. Carson's reputation and position attracted some of the best surgeons in the world to serve as active members of the Board.

"We turned something really bad into something positive," Cris says.

Connecting Families for Emotional Support

One of the first tasks the Foundation undertook was to create a brochure that was sent to thousands of neurologists and neurosurgeons worldwide to inform them and their patients of the Foundation and its resources.

The Foundation's mission has expanded but is still simple: to provide emotional, educational and financial support for families who undergo or are considering a hemispherectomy.

Cris and Kristi's initial intention was to raise funds for scholarships

to camps and schools to aid in rehabilitation after surgery. They quickly realized that when a doctor tells parents who have been dealing with a child's seizures that they need to discuss removing a portion of the child's brain, what those parents immediately need is connection to someone who's been through it.

"We provided that early on – back then social media didn't exist way it does now. We did lots of phone calls, e-mails and visits, and there was a Yahoo! message board," Cris says. "We created a website so we would come up in Google searches. Immediately people didn't feel alone anymore."

As the Foundation took off, it sponsored conferences in Anaheim, Baltimore, and Denver. Families came from all over the world. "That was so good," Kristi says. "Families had never met another family who had had a hemispherectomy. The immediate bond was apparent. Our whole idea was to connect."

Jessica spoke at the Hemispherectomy Foundation Australia Conference, in Melbourne, in 2019.

"She has also spoken at Hemispherectomy Foundation Conferences in the United States, has helped with Kid's Camp, visited many other children in the hospital, helped with fund raising, and has simply been a good ambassador for the organization," Cris says.

Due to costs, liability and a worldwide lockdown in 2020, conferences are no longer possible.

The Foundation eventually created a Facebook group, and now there are seven Facebook pages associated with hemispherectomy, in addition to the main Facebook page, which has 3,200 members. Thanks to social media, the Foundation can now connect parents geographically or by disease.

Financial Mission

Financial help through the Foundation includes scholarships for children who want to attend college or trade school but might not because of their disabilities. It helps pay for camps and life-aid

equipment, and assists with travel to hospitals. Families can fill out a simple application on the website and submit it online.

Kristi says they learned there are other disease etiologies that necessitate a hemispherectomy and that all Hemi kids have the same disabilities – limbs, vision loss, cognitive disabilities among them. Camps and other programs help kids function with their disabilities, so the Foundation broadened the scholarship to include all Hemi kids, not just those with RE.

Educational Mission

In the 13 years since Jessica's ordeal began, a wealth of knowledge and experience has accumulated in the Hemi Foundation. "We laugh and say we have a degree in neurology. A lot of the families say we train brain surgeons," Cris says.

Although the Halls still head the Foundation's board of directors, Kristi as President and CEO and Cris as executive director, they have stepped back from the day-to-day functions.

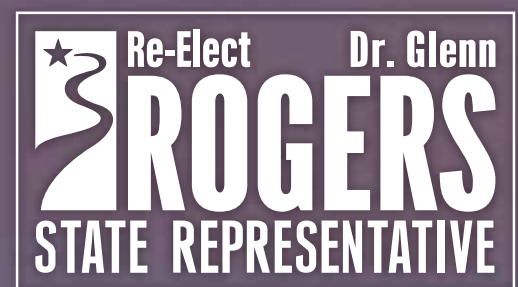
"Kristi and I read every post on our social media outlets, but we mostly let the newer families answer questions. They are more up-to-date with medications, protocols, and procedures for treatment. It is very satisfying to watch as the neophyte families are now the teachers, emotional support group, advisers, and cheerleaders for the Foundation," Cris says. "Honestly, we never dreamed we would put something in motion that would be self-perpetuating and had a life of its own."

The virtual nature of Hemi connections even spawned a long-distance romance. Hemi patients Abby Lampley, from the United States but now living in Scotland, and Colin Bodie, from Scotland, met through the Hemi Foundation and fell in love from afar. They manage the "Teen and Young Adult" Hemi Facebook group and moderate monthly Zoom meetings. They will be married Feb. 14.

"This will be our first 'Hemi Wedding'! A whole brain together," Cris quips.

As President Biden and Democrats in Congress continue to fail at protecting our border, conservative Republican Representative Glenn Rogers stepped up and helped lead the effort to increase border security funding by \$2.8 billion – the largest amount in Texas history. Representative Rogers also supported the deployment of more troopers and technology and provided more funds to finish the border wall, where President Trump left off. We can't wait on Washington, D.C. to keep our families safe, so Dr. Rogers is working hard to protect Texas.

As state representative, one of my top priorities is securing our border. The Biden Administration's disastrous policies have put all of Texas in danger. The lack of a secure border puts all our communities at risk, not just those on the border. Crime rates are rising as drug cartels, gangs, and human traffickers come across an open border into our local communities. Taxpayers are forced to pick up the tab for these reckless policies, and we must put a stop to it. I am proud of the historic strides made during the session, but more work remains. Texans demand and deserve a secure border. Stand with me, and let's continue the fight to secure our border and hold the Biden Administration accountable.



DR. ROGERS' EFFORTS TO SECURE THE BORDER

- ★ Increased Texas' border security funding by \$2.8 billion
- ★ Deployed more troopers and technology to protect the border
- ★ Restarted building the border wall between Texas and Mexico
- ★ Provided \$576 million to combat human trafficking
- ★ Increased Texas law enforcement salaries

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AdvoCats Help & Hope Luncheon focuses on children in need

Aledo Children's AdvoCats hosted its annual Help & Hope Luncheon on Friday, Oct. 8, at Ridglea Country Club. Thirty-one sponsors and their invited guests enjoyed socializing and learning more about AdvoCats outreach programs. International bestselling author and child advocate Ashley Rhodes-Courter touched hearts as she told the audience about her childhood as a foster youth. Her message celebrated the power of volunteers to help children and families in need.

Lauren McMurrey, Communications Vice President for the AdvoCats, thanked the event sponsors on behalf of the AdvoCats.

PHOTOS BY

KATHY CHRUSCIELSKI



Reflections in the chandelier



Laura Anderson, AdvoCats President



Lisa Robertson, Vice President of Fundraising



Kristy Howington, Jodi Beard and Julie Ellison



Dawn Poston and Heather Sinott recruit helpers at the Angel Project Table



Ashley Rhodes-Courter signs a copy of her book for Courtney Adams



Chelyne Leifeste is photographed with author Ashley Rhodes-Courter



Dedra Vick, Honorable Judge Lynn Marie Johnson, Parker County Sheriff Russ Authier and wife Linda

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Capital Highlights

State steps up DUI enforcement in holidays



Gary Borders
gborders@texaspress.com

The Texas Department of Transportation has kicked off its state-wide "Drive Sober. No Regrets" drunk driving prevention program for the holidays. Throughout the month, TxDOT has released videos of people who deal with the daily consequences of driving while impaired, either as an offender or survivor.

The stories and facts about drunk driving can be found at SoberRides.org.

"It is our hope that these moving, first-hand accounts will encourage all of us to make the right choice and not ever drive after drinking or doing anything that can alter our judgment," said TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams. "We don't want to turn a happy time of year into one that could be marked by tragic loss caused by someone's poor decision to drink and drive."

During the December holiday season last year, there were 2,462 DUI-alcohol related traffic accidents, killing 93 people and seriously injuring 215.

Texas to distribute additional \$123.3 million in ed funding

The state will invest an additional \$123.3 million in federal funds provided through pandemic relief legislation.

"The state of Texas remains committed to students and their success in our education systems — that includes ensuring parents have an option to send their kids to a high-quality charter school and providing direct support to families with children who have special needs," Gov. Greg Abbott said.

This final round of funding includes money for students with severe cognitive disabilities; charter school grants; financial aid for nursing students; short-term credential training for front-line health care workers; initiatives to improve student enrollment and retention; financial aid programs for higher education; cybersecurity enhancement; and aid for those seeking commercial driver license training.

"For some of our most at-risk students, this significant new round of funding will prioritize getting families across Texas direct access to special education and other targeted supplemental services to support their children's varied educational needs," said Mike Morath, Texas education commissioner.

Used vehicle prices at record highs

The average listing price for a used vehicle topped \$27,000 for the first time, according to a report from Cox Automotive. A primary reason, according to a story in the *San Antonio Express-News*, is the relative scarcity of new vehicles because of supply-chain

disruptions and an initial drop in demand when the pandemic struck.

For example, Toyota stopped production at all its plants across North America and in Southeast Asia, except for its San Antonio factory. The company had hoped to return to full production in December but has again suspended work at some plants as a shortage of computer chips has stymied vehicle production.

The spike in used vehicle prices has benefitted car owners looking to sell.

"With the way the market is right now, I've seen people make money on their vehicles, especially with diesel. It's crazy," Zachary Gilman, a salesman at the Jordan Ford dealership in Live Oak, told the Express-News.

More funding for Operation Lone Star

The state's Public Safety Office has awarded an additional \$38.4 million in funding to cities and counties along the Texas-Mexico border for law enforcement efforts. That amount doubles the funding provided for those counties since last March.

The funding is for specialized law enforcement equipment, labor costs including overtime, construction of additional communication towers and increased jail capacity and travel costs for law enforcement personnel from non-border counties that provide assistance.

"This additional funding will strengthen our response to the border crisis and ensure our law enforcement and local partners have the resources they need to keep our communities safe in the federal government's absence," Abbott said.

COVID-19 cases spike; omicron variant spreads

As Texans continue to navigate life during a nearly two-year pandemic, the number of new cases of COVID-19 rose during the past week to 51,479, an increase of 41% from the previous week, according to the Coronavirus Resource Center at Johns Hopkins University. The number of new deaths dropped to 266, a decrease of 44%, however. Researchers have said that while the omicron variant is more contagious than the delta variant that sparked the last wave, its symptoms thus far are not as severe.

The number of lab-confirmed hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients stayed at about the same level as the previous week, with 3,376 reported by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

The number of Texans who are fully vaccinated stood at 16.36 million as of Sunday, which is 56.1% of the state's population. In addition, 4.35 million of the state's residents have received an additional dose, according to DSHS.

Gary Borders is a veteran award-winning Texas journalist. He published a number of community newspapers in Texas during a 30-year span, including in Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches and Cedar Park. Email: gborders@texaspress.com.

Slings&Arrows

A promise of the future



Randy Keck
rkeck@community-news.com

And you wonder where we're going

Where's the rhyme and where's the reason

And it's you cannot accept

It is here we must begin

To seek the wisdom of the children

And the graceful way of flowers in the wind

For the children and the flowers

Are my sisters and my brothers

Their laughter and their loveliness

Could clear a cloudy day

Like the music of the mountains

And the colours of the rainbow

They're a promise of the future

And a blessing for today

- JOHN DENVER

RHYMES AND REASONS

By my calculation there have been 1,384 issues of *The Community News* since I had the privilege of becoming the owner of this newspaper.

If you want to count how many stories that comes out to — well, it comes out to a lot of stories.

From time to time someone will say, "do you remember the story you wrote about —?" and I have to admit I don't.

But there are others that stay etched in my mind — the stories of incredible bravery and heart shown by the youngest among us and the intense emotion evoked when I think about them.

And most often those memories bring a profound appreciation for the disproportionate number of caring, giving, loving people in this community.

A giving community

In 1997 we ran the story of six-year-old Colton Dempsey — he developed a condition called aplastic anemia. Colton desperately needed a bone marrow transplant.

Finding a bone marrow donor is a "needle-in-the-haystack" operation. The odds of finding a match are astronomically small.

A testing station was set up in the parking lot of what was then Winn-Dixie (now Brookshire's). There was a little mobile office set up where residents could go in and get their blood tested to see if it was a match.

I saw people from the community lined up all the way down the side of the parking lot waiting to get tested. Hundreds of local residents wanted to help — and in the process were added to the national bone marrow donor registry.

There was not a match for Colton that day, but the story had two happy endings.

Colton somehow recovered without the needed bone marrow transplant, and a local resident was found to be a match for a child elsewhere in the Metroplex who needed the transplant, so that need was met.

Grit and determination

That story involved the giving nature of a community. Another vivid story in my mind involved the grit and determination of a junior at Aledo High School.

In 1998 (if I recall the year correctly) AHS junior Ryan Poe was found to have a brain tumor. While the surgery to remove the tumor was successful, the operation left Ryan without his eyesight.

I still get emotional when I try to imagine what it would be like, between your junior and senior year of high school, to lose your sight.

I imagine Ryan had his moments, but he took it stride, learned braille, finished his senior year at Aledo High School and then went to Lubbock to enroll at Texas Tech.

Ryan now teaches in the children's program at Aledo United Methodist Church. My heart smiles every time I run into him — usually when he is volunteering at the Thanksgiving Trot every year.

Incredible bravery

Two of the most vivid stories involve young students at Stuard Elementary School.

One of those was young Kylie Houx, who had a condition that would require both of her feet to be amputated. Before the surgery Dana Bowman, a veteran who lost both legs in a sky diving accident, went to the school and spoke to all the students about that process.

I lost touch along the way until one year I was standing on the sidelines in the early fall taking photos of the Bearcat Regiment at halftime. There, marching with the band, was Kylie Houx.

Yeah, take a deep breath. I can't explain what I felt seeing that.

We live in a time when we see a lot of people whine and complain about small inconveniences. Ryan and Kylie, as young people, set an example many adults would benefit from following.

Of course, the other story out of Stuard is this week's cover story. The journey of Jessica (Jessica) Hall is remarkable on its own, but there is so much more.

My job at *The Community News* often entails functions other than writing, editing, and photography.

And so it was on the Saturday after our original story was printed about Jessica in 2008. I was trimming some brush at our office and a van pulled up. Inside was the Hall family.

Cris Hall got out and wanted to see if some extra copies of the paper were available with the story. Our office at the time had a little wooden bridge from the parking lot to the office. As Cris and Jessica and I walked across the bridge, my heart jumped into my throat.

I turned to Cris and said I couldn't imagine what the family was going through in making the decision to have the hemispherectomy surgery.

Cris said they were just looking forward to the time Jessica could come back and walk across that bridge.

They had a long road ahead of them. There was not only the big surgery, but others along the way. And in the end, Jessica never did come back to walk across the bridge, but she could have, and she has done so much more than I think anyone could have imagined at the time.

If the story ended there it would be a happy ending indeed.

But there's more.

The family could have been excused in the midst of the angst, the worry, the prayers, the medical procedures, the therapy, and all the other things they had to deal with to leave it at that.

But in the middle of all they had to cope with, they saw beyond themselves and realized that there were others like them — others who may not have a supportive community, others who were going through the same worries.

And so the Hemispherectomy Foundation was born — right here in Aledo, Texas — a worldwide support network with the finest doctors in the field sitting on the board.

These are acts of selflessness and profound generosity.

Our world is very challenging today — but there have always been challenges. The question is how we meet them.

There are countless citizens who will line up to get tested to be bone marrow donors. There are countless Ryans and Kylies and Hall families in this world. They just don't get the headlines. But they are there. And that's good news.

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We're always on the lookout for story ideas. To share one, call Randy Keck at 817-441-7661, ext. 207 or email news@community-news.com. Please provide the basic story information as well as contact information in case we have questions.

We welcome letters, articles and guest opinions from our readers. Opinions expressed in this newspaper will be labeled as opinions, editorials or letters, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the ownership. Letters should be signed, and limited to approximately 300 words. All submissions to the newspaper should

include a telephone number in case we have questions. Letters are due by Monday at noon for that week's paper. Community announcements, achievements and obituaries are due by noon Friday for the following week's paper. Send submissions to news@community-news.com.

Photos submitted should include names of the people in the photograph. For ease in submitting photographs electronically, visit our contact form at community-news.com/contacts.

The *Community News* does not charge for timely wedding, engagement and birth announcements provided they are of reasonable length. Lengthy announcements will either be edited to a reasonable length or, at the discretion of the person submitting the announcement, be charged a fee. The deadline for submitting announcements is noon Friday for the following week's paper.

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and happy*

2022!



TEXAS CROSSWORD
by Charley & Guy Orbison
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ACROSS

- 1 TXism: "sitting in high cotton"
- 5 former Fort Worth red light district: "Hell's Half _____"
- 6 TXism: "_____ light idea" (inspiration)
- 7 TX George Strait's "_____ Really Shouldn't Be Doing This"
- 8 engine surge
- 9 OPEC member: Saudi _____
- 15 burrowing pest describing a defect in some horses (hyph.) _____
- 19 "_____ it for the biscuit" (take a chance to benefit)
- 21 fishing net
- 22 TXism: "_____ in the saddle" (reliable, genuine)
- 27 TX Strait's "If I _____ Me" (1991)
- 28 stinky smell
- 29 blacktip in the Gulf (2 wds.)
- 30 African antelopes
- 32 Santa's word in Dallas County on U.S. 80
- 36 in Wise County on U.S. 287
- 37 most Texans love _____-B-Que
- 38 TXism: "sling it on _____ and see if it sticks"
- 39 banned insecticide
- 41 TXism: "call _____ day" (stop working)
- 42 Mc _____ County
- 45 Texans may use a credit union for a car _____
- 46 pigpen
- 47 TXism: "_____ a bull give milk?" (no)
- 48 TXism: "couldn't find an _____ under a sitting hen" (ignorant)
- 49 puzzles that require thought: "brain _____"
- 52 TX-born Carolyn Jones was this Morticia on TV _____

DOWN

- 1 TXism: "burned some boot leather"
- 2 "Blue Bell" is Texas-made _____ cream
- 3 Foard County seat
- 4 TX Clay Allison's grave marker: "_____ a man who did not need killing"
- 8 cinnamon _____
- 9 TXism: "_____ out of water"
- 10 this TX Ely was TV's "Tarzan" (init.) _____
- 11 TXism: "frisky as unsaddled horse"
- 12 TX Larry McMurry wrote these (2 wds.) _____
- 13 it came before TX 7-11's Slurpee
- 14 TXism: "_____ to" (similar)
- 15 our solar system's galaxy (2 wds.) _____
- 16 a benefit that gives stocks to employees (abbr.) _____
- 17 bind up
- 18 removal of a cow's head projection
- 20 TX Gary Morris sang "The Love She Found _____"
- 22 laugh word
- 23 feminine suffix
- 24 TXism: "park your tongue" (_____ up)
- 25 TXism: "_____ hide" (spank a boy)
- 26 this TX Cobb was the "Wild Man of the Tenor Sax"
- 28 "_____ difference"
- 31 "tender" or "sir" ending (cut of meat)
- 34 it provides care to veterans (abbr.) _____
- 35 TXism: "_____ hat and no cattle" (fake)
- 37 "no _____, just fact"
- 40 TXism: "let sleeping _____ lie"
- 43 TXism: "_____ lick" (none)
- 44 growths on East Texas pine trees in Fannin County on highway 56
- 50 in Fannin County on highway 56
- 51 "Hook ' _____ Horns"

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FOOTBALL

Mathis, Christenson lead Brock to state championship game

Former Bearcats carry on the tradition as coaches

By Nolan Ruth
The Community News

More often than not, Aledo football fans usually get to enjoy watching the Bearcats play for a state championship in December. Unfortunately that was not in store for 2021. However, many people around town found consolation not too far down the road.

On the other side of Parker County, in Brock, Billy Mathis and Blake Christenson have been working hard to build a program with similar pedigree to that of Aledo. The former Bearcats, both as players and coaches, left Aledo in 2017 for Weatherford where they spent four years turning the Kangaroos around before heading further west.

In just one season, with Mathis at the helm and Christenson as the offensive coordinator, the pair led Brock to a 15-0 record and a ticket punched to the State Championships in Arlington.

The two were no strangers to the big stage, appearing there many times as assistants to Tim Buchanan and Steve Wood. But for the first time, they were the ones in charge of leading their team on the gridiron for the coveted title. Despite being there before, the mental preparation for both was very different.

"You've got a lot of stuff to do as head coach," Mathis said about the difference in roles. "As the defensive coordinator you can dial in more. But thankfully I've got great assistants that help me do everything that needs to get done."

"When I was at Aledo it was more about me preparing the quarterbacks for the plan we worked out," Christenson echoed Mathis' sentiment. "Now, the responsibility is on my shoulders to create that plan and it comes down to my



TOMMY HAYS

Brock coach Billy Mathis walks the sideline during the state championship game against Lorena.

decisions. But we have a great offensive staff and I couldn't do it without them."

With Buchanan and his son Caleb on the sidelines before the game, the Eagles took the field to play the Lorena Leopards in the 3A Division I state championship at 3 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 16.

"I got to talk to him before the game," Mathis said about Buchanan being there. "In his cool, calm words he just said to enjoy, and get after their tails."

Unfortunately, it was a rough start for Brock and they trailed 14-0 after one quarter. In the second quarter, the Eagles got on the board with a 1-yard run by running back Kutter Wilson but missed the extra point. The 14-6 score held until halftime.

After Brock gave up a quick touchdown in the third quarter, quarterback Tyler Moody hit Minnesota-commit Nathan Jones in the end zone to keep Brock in it at 21-12. Unfortunately, Lorena would not be denied and scored two more times before the end of the game.

Wide receiver Elijah Potts caught a 34-yard touchdown pass from Moody in the final minutes but there was not enough time for a comeback, and the Eagles fell short 35-18.

"There is never any quit in these guys," Mathis said about his team in a postgame press conference. "They're not going to blame each other, they're not going to pout or feel sorry for themselves. They're tough. They're battlers. They know what it takes to win. They're going to play the game, they're going to play it right and they're going to play it for four quarters. That's what we preach, it's what we coach, but it's been instilled in these guys by their parents."

Though they did not accomplish their goal of a state championship in 2021, the pieces are there for Mathis and Christenson to be very successful at Brock in the future.




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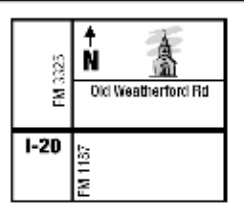
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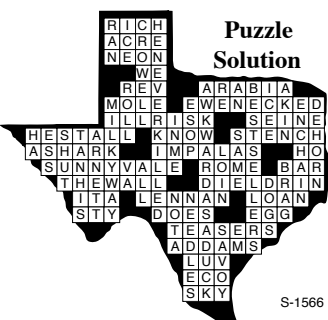
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Five Eagles named Academic All State

Five members of the Trinity Christian Academy football team have been selected as Academic All-State. Academic All-State requirements are a cumulative GPA of 90 or above and must be a junior or senior that was selected to first or second team All-District. Selected to the Academic All-State Team are: Kennan Dowling, Caleb Gabbert, Brayden Smalley, Ben Camp, and Ty Miller.



Ben Camp



Kennan Dowling



Caleb Gabbert



Ty Miller



Brayden Smalley



SPECIAL TO THE COMMUNITY NEWS

Trinity Christian Academy junior Macy Prestwood received All-Tournament honors at the Lifestyle Christian Christmas Classic in Conroe. The Lady Eagles took home the runner-up trophy.



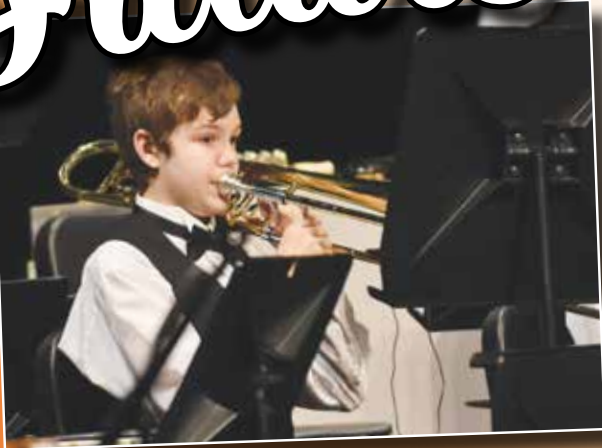
Abigail James

The Trinity Christian Academy cheer team recently competed in the State Cheer competition. Sophie Scott was awarded as a Second Team All-State selection and Abigail James received Honorable Mention All-State.



Sophie Scott

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