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NOW

DECEMBER 2012

Holiday
Shopping
Guide 2012
p. 21

**The Gift
of Music**
Rob Laney
unleashes the
spirit of Christmas
with an annual
tradition

Polished to Perfection

At Home With Gary and Lee Ann Gillespie

Plus:
Forever Friends
Shooting Straight
In the Kitchen
With Kelli Hamilton

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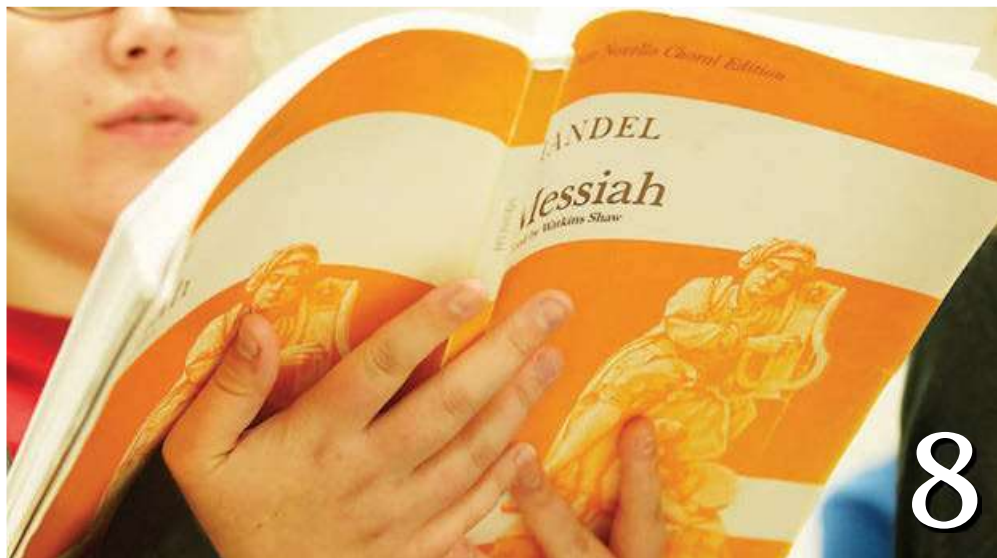


Gary and Lee Ann Gillespie mix Americana decor into their Victorian home.

Photo by Amanda Rooney.

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Editor's Note

Hello Friends,

Since its launch in February 2011, I've served as the community editor for *WeatherfordNOW Magazine*, and I've enjoyed writing stories about good people in Parker County. I appreciate every person I've met — whether in person, via e-mail or telephone — and the wisdom they've imparted to me and to our readers.

I'm off now to delve deeper into NOW Magazines' mission. We publish magazines in nine other markets, and I will be focusing on two of them: Burleson and Granbury. I will miss you, but I

know you are in good hands. Many of you have already had the pleasure of meeting the new *WeatherfordNOW* community editor. Amber Browne has written many of the articles you have enjoyed for the last year-and-a-half. She is looking forward to meeting more of you and telling your stories. Send your story ideas to Amber at amber.browne@nowmagazines.com.

Enjoy your winter!

Melissa

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FOREVER FRIENDS

— By Amber D. Browne

Long-term friendships can be hard to come by. But, that is not the case with Juanita Pennington and Barb Cotton, who have known the women in their Red Hat Society group for the past six decades.

Most of the women have known each other since first or second grade at Castleberry Elementary School in River Oaks. Through the years, many of them kept in touch and decided to join the Red Hat Society in 2003. Although some in the group are a couple of years younger than Juanita, she was acquainted with them at school





through her younger sister. "I'm sort of a come-lately," Juanita said. One of the women in the original group invited Juanita to join several years back. "My husband was dying, and I told them I wasn't interested." The group's Queen Mother, Carol Ann Chauncy Baker, contacted Juanita one day and invited her to lunch. "She called and said, 'We're having lunch down here, and if you don't get down here, we're coming to your house!' So, I went ahead, got dressed and went down there. That's been my story ever since."

Over the years, the forever friends have helped each other through good times and bad. "I would not trade for these girls," Juanita said, lovingly. "We laugh. We cry. We've been through deaths. We've been through marriages. We've been through kids dying, and that's not a good feeling ever. Your children are not supposed to die before you do." Juanita has lost one child, while Barb has lost three over the years.



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Juanita and Barb consider the women in their group like family. "We've been through a whole lot of a life. Life is not so devastating when you have sisters," Juanita said. Two sets of sisters are in the group: Carol Ann and Jerry Lloyd, and Deloris Morgan and Loretta Kitchens. The rest of the group is made up of Billie Bennett, Judy Marlin, Jane Parke, Jeanette Stubbs and Margaret Walker. "We care so much about each other. We can criticize one another, and we always know it's with love, concern and care." The group has lost three members, but they often reminisce about the good times they have had over the years.

They meet once a month to eat and chat. "Sometimes we do crafts at home, and sometimes we go out to eat. Sometimes we go to somebody's house and eat and gossip," Juanita said, grinning. They've traveled to the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, as well as the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Fort Worth. They have taken a road trip to Salado, where they rented a house and shopped at the local boutiques. They even got all fancy for Glamour Shots at one of their monthly get-togethers. "You get all dolled up anyway. When you go to the meeting, you wear your red hat. Always, always wear your red hat!"

The Red Hats also volunteer their time in the local community. They make pillows for cancer and heart patients, and hand craft bibs for local nursing homes. "We try to do mission projects. Juanita and I always take our sewing machines, and the rest of them do the cutting," Barb said.

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Spending time with their friends is mostly about having fun, though. They have plenty of laughs when they dress up in purple and put on that red hat for parties. They even had lingerie showers for the Queen Mother and for Barb when they remarried. "You talk about something being fun. It was!" Barb exclaimed.

When Juanita hosts her annual get-together at her home in Willow Park, it's a pool party. "I usually have mine in the summer time with a chunky dunk party," Juanita laughed. "Some of them swim, and some of them sit with their feet in the water." Others just choose to sit inside her home and catch up with the ladies.

At one of Juanita's swimming parties, her friends got their first glimpse of her boyfriend, Ken Knoppel. Juanita told the ladies she had ordered pizza. "None of us had met him. Here comes this man carrying this pizza. And, she comes out of the pool and goes up to him and starts kissing on him!" Barb laughed. It surprised the ladies, but they welcomed Ken with open arms.

"It's not easy getting into the dating scene at this age," Juanita chuckled. "Times have changed. Our whole society is different now. I finally decided after six years that I was awful lonely." So, she jumped back into the dating scene. Juanita met Ken through each other's daughters. Juanita was not interested at first, but she went with her daughter to Ken's son's 40th birthday party. "He was very attentive," she said. She found out he was a handy man, so she handed over a long to-do list. He started working for her, and the two got better acquainted.

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He asked her to go wild flower hunting and surprised her with a motorcycle ride to see the colorful landscape. When Juanita is not busy with the Red Hat Society, she and Ken often take road trips on the back of his motorcycle.

Barb's husband, Lee Roy Cotton, is very supportive of her being part of the group of friends with the Red Hat Society. "My husband loves for me to do it. He's like me. He loves to entertain," Barb said. She is hosting the Red Hat group's Christmas party this December. "A lot of eating and visiting," Barb said about the party. Each member will bring a nice present for a gift exchange. The women will also make a little handmade craft for each member. They have collected the crafts over the years, including pin cushions and even a light bulb snowman.

And the women look forward to many more Christmases and lunch dates over the years. "Having a group, even if you don't feel good, even if we go somewhere, and you don't want to drive that far, you will make an effort," Juanita said. "When you get this old, any effort you make to make contact with somebody else is a plus," she explained. "It would be easy to sit up on this hill and not get in the car and not put myself out there. I would probably just shrivel up and die. Well, maybe not shrivel up. I would go ahead and eat," she laughed.

They are content with their close-knit group of eleven friends. "We've just been together forever," Barb said. She considers her long-time relationships very precious and believes losing these friendships would leave a void in her life. "We put effort in it. Desire and effort," Barb said. "All these girls have meant so much to us over the years. We just have such a good time being together." **NOW**