



# NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

WINTER  
2007

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## Mayor Will Wynn Encourages You to Join NSCNA!

First, let me express my thanks for the opportunity to talk with you in this first edition of the newly formatted North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Association newsletter. I hope readers enjoy the revamped look and feel of the publication and will take a few minutes each time it arrives at your door to check out the latest info and use it as a tool for staying connected.

Better still, I hope you will consider joining and becoming an active member of your neighborhood association. As you may know, neighborhood associations are now integral partners in the City's land use planning efforts. So, to the extent that you have broad and active participation in your neighborhood association, you help the City do a better job of developing the plans that will shape the quality of life of your area for years to come.

In the late 1990s Austin kicked off a new way of doing long range planning, taking a bottom-up approach of working directly with citizens to develop Neighborhood Plans for the areas in which they live and work. All stakeholders of the neighborhood are invited to participate – homeowners, renters, business owners and various community organizations and institutions.

Working together with City staff, stakeholders do research and outreach, conduct neighborhood surveys, hold community meetings, and develop a specific plan to guide future development. The plan is then taken to City boards and commissions and on to City Council for adoption, where it becomes a formal part of the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan.

So far, the Council has adopted 21 neighborhood plans encompassing 36 individual planning areas. This year we are scheduled to adopt four more plans representing 10 neighborhood planning areas. The North Shoal Creek Neighborhood is among those staff is currently evaluating for future adoption.

As the time nears for North Shoal Creek to enter the planning process, it is important for folks in your neighborhood to start a dialogue with each other. The sooner this starts, the better sense you will have of common goals and shared concerns; and the neighborhood association is the obvious best venue for this dialogue. So again, I would encourage you to join and actively participate. Our neighborhoods are the lifeblood of our urban fabric – and with your help, North Shoal Creek can remain a great place to live for current neighbors and those yet to come.

– Mayor Will Wynn



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## Wondering What is Happening at the NSCNA?

### The End of an Era, the Beginning of a New One

In most civic organizations, dedicated and creative volunteers are sometimes a scarce commodity. For the past four years, NSCNA has greatly benefited from the efforts of Alyssa Hedge. She generously gave of her time to publish the newsletter, maintain the distributor network and raise the money for the entire effort to boot! We salute Alyssa for her love of this neighborhood and hope she can now, at long last, sit back and enjoy being on the receiving end of this latest edition of the NSCNA news.

Incoming editor is Sandy Perkins, a 33 year resident of our neighborhood (10 year homeowner). Sandy is a graduate of UT Art School and in her 17 years as real estate agent, she is well known as a great promoter of the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood. She is bringing her special style of creativity, marketing skills and energy to the task at hand.

Thanks to the generous support of the surrounding business community, our newsletter will now be mailed to all households. The goal of this newsletter will be increased awareness and revitalization of our neighborhood association and to provide timely communication of events, relevant issues and resources. Your comments and questions are welcomed and can be directed to [sandyperkins@earthlink.net](mailto:sandyperkins@earthlink.net). Enjoy!

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Welcome to the 2007 NSCNA Board!

• Malcolm St. Romain, Jr. -President (419-9982, [malcolm.jr@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.jr@gmail.com))

• Jeff Russell - Vice President (415-9809, [jeffry@austin.rr.com](mailto:jeffry@austin.rr.com))

• Helene Maham - Treasurer (452-3673)

• Claudell Migl - Secretary ([cmigl@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cmigl@sbcglobal.net))

• Board Members

• Mary Arnett ([mossrock3209@yahoo.com](mailto:mossrock3209@yahoo.com))

• Liz Haltom (450-0033, [eahaltom@yahoo.com](mailto:eahaltom@yahoo.com))

• Sandy Perkins (797-7375, [sandyperkins@earthlink.net](mailto:sandyperkins@earthlink.net))

• Roger Wines (dig. pgr 307-8251, [ro-jer@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ro-jer@sbcglobal.net))

• Trey Hamilton

• Meredith Highsmith

• Mary Jane Wier

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### NSCNA Committee Volunteers

If you are interested in volunteering for a NSCNA Committee (Safety, Social Events, Traffic, Beautification, Tech/Communications) please contact a committee member at [www.ncsna.org](http://www.ncsna.org)

Want to submit an article of interest? If you would like to contribute to the NSCNA newsletter, please send your article to: [sandyperkins@earthlink.net](mailto:sandyperkins@earthlink.net).

The deadline is the 1st of the month - ( April, July, October, January )

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## Spotlight on our Neighbors

Our neighborhood is graced with many longtime neighbors. They provide us with a sense of place, rich in history and experience. In 1971, Claudell and John Migl did not know where life would lead them, or that they would still be here in 2007 – almost 36 years later! They moved to Melshire Drive into a brand new house in a brand new neighborhood. This part of Austin looked very different then...183 was a four lane highway, Mopac as we know it was not built yet. Rockwood ended at Primrose Lane and the section beyond to Burnet Road was an empty field. John was continuing his career as a lawyer and Claudell was busy raising their two sons.

They were near about 20 undeveloped acres, which bloomed thick with wildflowers during spring and summer. They also raised as many as 100 rabbits in their backyard for their sons to show at the 4H Livestock Show. Their sons attended Pillow, Lucy Read 6th Grade Center, Burnet Middle School and Anderson High School.

Around 1978, there was an issue with a proposed hotel on 183 that would have brought about a change in that part of our neighborhood. Residents banded together to form the first neighborhood association and John Migl was elected as our first neighborhood President.

The hotel located elsewhere, but there were other battles fought throughout the years by this neighborhood – a proposed “gentleman’s club” on 183, a car dealership with many test drive trips through the streets of our neighborhood, a developer who wanted to extend Thrushwood out to



Mossrock, inviting more traffic. All these controversies were resolved by the hard work of individuals who gave of their time for the good of their neighbors. The Migl’s are still active in our neighborhood. In fact, last year, Claudell organized our neighborhood garage sale.



Many years later, the Migls are happy they chose to live here, where they have made many friends and have great memories of times gone by.

John and Claudell encourage everyone to be a part of the NSCNA organization. And if you want to know more about our neighborhood back then - our neighborhood now referred to as “Central Austin” by many - just ask them. They will be happy to tell you how it was to live in one of the new neighborhoods near the edge of town.

## Beautification Committee

### Yard of the Month Winners!

Congratulations to our neighbors who have received the Yard of the Month award in the past months. We applaud all the time and hard work that helps to contribute to the beauty of our community. Each month the sign will be displayed in the yard and the recipient will receive a written certificate. To nominate your neighbor for the award, contact us at [beautification@nscna.org](mailto:beautification@nscna.org).

July 2006 - 2704 Benbrook  
Dale and Eyvonne Williams

August 2006 - 8516 Rockwood  
Eleanor Foley

September 2006 - 8107 Briarwood  
Jean Slater Armstrong

October 2006 - 8104 Vinewood  
Barbara Landberg

November 2006 - 8706 Millway  
Sandy Perkins

December 2006 - 8704 Millway  
Joe & Sharon Cayton

January 2007 - 8300 Stillwood  
Sonja Shaw

Volunteers wanted to help re-vitalize the Allandale sign at Daleview and Steck. We would like to add landscaping and update the brick wall and signage. Any, and all, ideas are welcome. If you are interested in helping or have ideas, please send an e-mail to [beautification@nscna.org](mailto:beautification@nscna.org).

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## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q:** When will our new Library be built?

**A:** Bids were accepted as of December 2006 on the new North Village Branch Library on Steck Avenue. Planners are in the process of selecting a general contractor and expect the project to be approved by council in February 2007. A groundbreaking ceremony will be held in April 2007 and Grand Opening is scheduled to be held on Saturday, October 25th, 2008. Below is an aerial photo rendering of the project. For more information, visit [www.ci.austin.tx.us](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us) and choose Library. (Per John Gillum, Facilities Planning Manager for the Austin Public Libraries.)



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**Q:** After the 1981 Memorial Day flooding of Shoal Creek (where 13 people lost their lives and 600 homes were damaged), we were told that the City of Austin spent millions to build detention ponds up stream, north of 183 along Mopac. With the new 2006 development north of 183 and alongside Mopac, what has the City done to make up for this loss of retention ponds?

**A:** An existing detention pond located beside the 183 turnaround access road overflows into a second detention pond that serves as a soccer field. Both ponds were enlarged to maximum capacity prior to the Arbor Walk Development as a City of Austin Capital Improvement Project.

Where the development is now, an existing pond was enlarged and retrofitted as a "wet pond" (i.e., it always has water in it). No pond was removed with the construction of the mall site. This pond now serves to collect runoff not only from the increased impervious cover from the stores, but also from the entire upstream contributing drainage area at full build-out condition.

There were existing detention ponds to the north of Home Depot and also on the west side of Mopac and these are still intact. TxDOT also constructed ponds for its highway segment and interchange at 183 and MOPAC. (Per Jose Guerrero, P.E., [jose.guerrero@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:jose.guerrero@ci.austin.tx.us) or 974-3386, Watershed Protection and Development Review Department, City of Austin, Texas.)

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**Q:** The Neighborhood Crime Watch sign on my street needs replacing. Who is responsible for this?

**A:** Your neighborhood association can help you get these installed. As of January 2006, the NSCNA Block Captains identified this as a priority issue. An anonymous donor stepped forward and offered some funding to purchase the signs, but the project did not progress during last year. If you would like to make this happen for our neighborhood, please contact one of the NSCNA Board Members. The signs must be sourced, funding identified, and perhaps an "installation party" can be held. Please tap into the Yahoo Group to find others who might like to help you. Replacing these signs will bring a much needed face-lift to some of our main thoroughfares and show some pride in how we take care of our neighborhood.

FAQs continued on page 10

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### Neighborhood News That's Never Old

Until the next North Shoal Creek Neighborhood newsletter in spring, you can keep up with neighborhood news on the NSCNA website: [WWW.NSCNA.ORG](http://WWW.NSCNA.ORG)

Back issues of our newsletter are also available on this site. There are three avenues of communication for our neighborhood: the newsletter you are reading, the NSCNA yahoo group which allows for notices, discussions and forums, and the NSCNA website. Of course, attending the general meetings will keep you updated as well. You may have a block captain who distributes flyer notifications. If you would like to be a block captain, please contact one of our Board Members.

To become a member of the NSCNA yahoo group, go to Yahoo and click on GROUPS. Search for the group name NSCNA. Click on the link at the top of that page that says New User? Sign up. This should give you access to the yahoo group messages. Please remember that unless you want every member in the group to receive your message, address your emails to individuals in the group. This is especially important to remember when you hit the reply button.

If you do not wish to receive emails from the yahoo group, go to the home page for the NSCNA Yahoo Group and find the link "edit membership".

If you have any concerns about the website, or would like to post a notice, please contact our Webmaster, Chris Jones, at [cejones1@gmail.com](mailto:cejones1@gmail.com)

### Classified Ads - Looking for advertisers!

Personal ads are free for NSCNA Residents. Limit 30 words. Business classified are \$45. Limit 40 words.

If you have an item to sell or home based business to advertise in the upcoming quarterly newsletter please notify Sandy Perkins at 452-6860 or email [sandyperkins@earthlink.net](mailto:sandyperkins@earthlink.net)

Next newsletters will come out the end of April, the end of July and the end of October.

## Why a Community Association?

In a book by Robert Putman called Bowling Alone, the author speaks about the increasing isolation of people in our society. This is evident from the decreasing participation in such organizations as the Boy and Girl Scouts all the way to country club memberships. Men are especially prone to becoming non-relational. He says that most men have only two close relationships in their lives and one of those is with their spouse. I know this may sound self-serving coming from the Pastor of a church, but the only two organizations that come to mind with increasing participation - that also allows for relationship building with others: Church organizations and Recovery Groups. Now the reason I state all this is to simply say that there is a profound need for connection in our communities - people connecting with people in a meaningful way.

A neighborhood association is one way you can connect in a meaningful and serving way. Our church came into this neighborhood last April. One of the first things I did was to connect with Pillow Elementary where we have been allowed to gather for our Sunday services until our facility is finished to be located at 8500 Shoal Creek Boulevard. My initial question to Principal Linda Webb was "How might we serve your school?" We began by participating in their mentoring program. This involves meeting with a student one day a week for about 30 minutes and befriending that young person. By consistently meeting with them and engaging them in activities like throwing a football or helping them with their reading skills, you are building community with them. The simple act of sharing time with a child can have a very positive effect on many aspects of their lives.

The second thing I did was to come to an NSCNA meeting. I again asked, "How could we serve this community?" Well, what do you know...the next meeting I attended I found myself volunteering to be on the Board. One of the

water and free balloons to all the kids. Did you see their faces in all the photos on the NSCNA website? These kids (and their parents) will have memories of that event for a long time.

My encouragement to you reading this article and living in this wonderful community is to become a community builder. Connect with you neighbors. Do not isolate. Join your neighborhood association and see where you can serve. I do not think you will regret it. Do not bowl alone.

- Barry Galloway, Pastor, Capital Vineyard Church



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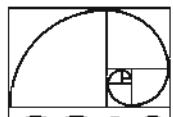
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## Mentor at Pillow:

### Make a Difference in the Life of a Child!

While Pillow has a wonderful group of dedicated mentors guiding some of our young students, we can ALWAYS use more caring adults to help children find their way. Please consider taking part in one of the most important activities on our campus. The commitment is one half hour per week, and our counselor will match you to a child. To become a mentor, you may go to [www.austinparkers.org](http://www.austinparkers.org) and follow the links to mentoring at Pillow (Click on "Volunteer", then "Mentor", then "Elementary School Mentoring: Register Now", and then to Pillow) If you would like more information, please contact Annette Hendricks-Bokne at Pillow 414-2350.

Ms. Swingle, the Pillow Art teacher, is looking for 1-3 volunteers with tile-laying experience. She needs help hanging students' hand-painted tiles on the outside of the school building. She is also looking for someone who can sew rectangular pieces of student artwork together. Contact Suzy Swingle at 841-4798.

Pillow was recently named one of the best schools in Texas by Texas Monthly Magazine. What an honor for Pillow to be one of only eight Austin elementary schools included on this list! Other north Austin schools included Hill, Doss, Summit, and Davis, as well as Murchison Middle School, and Anderson High School.

Pillow has also been named a finalist in the Urban School Transformation; Excellence in Education Award. There are 18 schools in Texas named as finalists from among all school levels, elementary through high school. The winners will be named after site visits are done in February.

We welcome our neighbors at all times. Tune in to your neighborhood resources and watch our announcement sign for future events.

—Huddie Murray, Pillow's Neighborhood Liaison, [hwmurray@yahoo.com](mailto:hwmurray@yahoo.com)



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If you are interested in advertising for free, please submit your name and information to [sandyperkins@earthlink.net](mailto:sandyperkins@earthlink.net) by the 1st of April, 1st of July and the 1st of October. We would need your age and phone number and type of work you would consider.

## APD North Central Command News

In the coming year, APD is once again planning their quarterly Commander's Forums, to be held at Barrington Elementary. The next one is scheduled for Tuesday, February 13th. Check the NSCNA website for more specifics as the date nears. These forums provide a venue for all neighborhoods in IDA Sector to meet the officers and administrators who work for our neighborhood boundaries. At the beginning of each year, Commander Al Eells provides data on crime trends for this sector and gives an overview of strategies for the coming year. If you go, it is always very informative and is also a good show of support for these officers who protect and serve us everyday.

Our District Rep is James Hellums. He has been a district rep for 7 years and recipient of numerous awards for his efforts in working with the community. His function is to act as liaison between the police department and our neighborhood. If there are any ongoing problems that need to be addressed or other questions you have for him, he can be reached by calling Kay Vargas, Administrative Assistant for APD, at 974-5722.

Officer Hellums would like to remind us all to keep our garage doors closed, keep items out of view while our vehicles are parked, and to report any suspicious activity to 311, or 911 if a crime is in progress. Our neighborhood experienced about the same number of property crimes as the year before. Graffiti is dramatically down for this area thanks to the efforts of the City of Austin Graffiti Abatement team. APD and AISD have also worked to curb truancy. If our neighborhood continues to keep eyes and ears open for ourselves and our neighbors, we are sure to have an even better 2007.

— Mary Arnett

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## FAQs continued:

**Q:** What impact has this new Domain at Arbor Walk development had for the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood?

**A:** Revised flood plains maps were made public in March of 2006. It had been more than a decade since the last revision and it was time for a much needed update.

The development north of 183 involved changing the detention pond that is in the 100 year flood plain. This pond, known as the ZK pond, is now owned and being managed by the City of Austin. Simon Properties, the current owners of the Arbor Walk, donated the land to The City of Austin and the City will maintain the Pond.

When the Domain and Arbor Walk were still in the planning stages, the developers were required to submit their own hydrologic data to the City for review. COA did review and approve their plan. But the change to the pond now requires new FEMA maps to be revised for this area again since March of 2006. These new drawings will be available sometime between April and June of 2007.

Although public notices are posted through City channels regarding flood plain map revisions and hearings for review, each homeowner is expected to determine whether they are in the flood plain or not. Here is a link that allows for checking of specific addresses with the current flood plain maps: [http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watershed/floodplain\\_newmap.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watershed/floodplain_newmap.htm) (Per Todd Pankey, CFM with the City of Austin and Flood Plain Information Officer, 974-3399.)

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**Q:** How can I get my sidewalk fixed? Shifting ground has caused it to buckle.

**A:** For many years property owners were expected to fix the sidewalk in front of their own properties. In current times, it became apparent that many property owners were not taking care of this. About 3 years ago, the council decided that the City would help with this issue to make Austin more "walkable", however, there was little funding available and so the city has been simply placing asphalt patches where requested as a stopgap measure.

The bond election last November included funding of \$8.5 million for sidewalks, of which a large portion will most likely be allocated to maintenance. The first round of sidewalk improvements will be the sidewalks which have received asphalt patches. These are scheduled to be fixed properly with concrete.

The Pedestrian Master plan serves as a tool to help City planners prioritize top sidewalk concerns throughout the City. The City is currently working with its consultant on how to best utilize the neighborhood plan information with regards to the Pedestrian Master Plan

As of right now, North Shoal Creek Neighborhood is scheduled for the Neighborhood Planning Process in 2009. This could change based on priorities and input from the neighborhood. This process will help the sidewalk situation by identifying absent sidewalk segments and sidewalk maintenance issues for the neighborhood. This information will be used by the Bicycle & Pedestrian Team planners when prioritizing projects.

So the short answer to the question is, as a matter of complete overhaul of our sidewalks, not any time soon, but it is important that our neighborhood work more closely with the city to improve our level of priority in receiving sidewalk improvements. (Per Annick Beaudet, Planner with the Public Works Dept, 974-6505, [annick.beaudet@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:annick.beaudet@ci.austin.tx.us).)

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## Wal-Mart – An Important Issue in Our Area

**A**t press time, the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Association has not taken a stance on the Wal-Mart issue. The editorial contributions below are of these individuals only and not the views of this newsletter staff. It is hoped that you may find this helpful in formulating your own opinion or find resources for additional information.

### **No Wal-Mart at Northcross:**

The proposed 225,085 square foot 24-Hour Wal-Mart Supercenter at Northcross Mall would have a negative impact on the area and the surrounding neighborhoods.

It would increase traffic and reduce safety in an already congested area. This would be detrimental to homeowners, and to children playing and going to school in the neighborhood. Eighteen-wheeler trucks would become common in the area, further increasing traffic danger, and even damaging streets not designed to handle them.

Constant noise pollution and risk of crime would also increase with a 24-hour Wal-Mart. As a result, the tranquil neighborhoods surrounding Northcross would take on a frenetic pace.

The area economy would be negatively impacted. People looking for furniture, rugs, toys, and hardware at places other than Wal-Mart, or just looking for good food at a nice restaurant, would go elsewhere to avoid the constant congestion.

Property values in the surrounding areas would decrease, because the area would become less appealing for homeowners and families. A friend of mine considering moving into the North Shoal Creek area said to me, "If Wal-Mart moves into Northcross, I'm going to avoid the area altogether."

Personally, I am proud of our neighborhood and how it's fast becoming the center of Austin, and you can still see people walking dogs, running, playing, and biking in the area. Parents walk their kids down the street to Pillow Elementary, and take them to play soccer there on Saturdays. The locally owned businesses and restaurants add so much character, culture, and diversity to the area. My fear is that a 24-Hour Wal-Mart Supercenter would cause the neighborhoods, as I see them, to vanish beneath the shadow of a 2-story behemoth monopoly. There are better choices for Northcross that would let us maintain the quality and character of our neighborhood.

- Jason Franz is a mechanical engineer and also a 7 month resident of the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood and a member of Responsible Growth for Northcross. For more information, see [www.RG4N.com](http://www.RG4N.com)

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## Northcross Development is a Great Thing:

Looking past the sometimes emotional rhetoric and hyperbole, here is a summary at what will happen when Wal-Mart-Mart is operating at Northcross.

It will bring needed customers to a declining retail neighborhood. Wal-Mart will bring a complete line of groceries at reasonable prices and a full selection of low priced drugs and clothing.

Contrary to claims made regarding low wages and benefits, Wal-Mart pays a starting salary "well above minimum wage" according to an area resident who is also a 19 year employee of Wal-Mart.

According to a 30 year neighbor who is also an experienced professional real estate appraiser, home values increase when a full service grocery is easily accessible.

Well managed local stores will increase their business due to extra customers in the area.

Very few anti-Wal-Mart signs can be seen in the area. Drive any area street and see a very small percentage of yard signs.


Wal-Mart will not draw customers from "all over Austin". Customers won't drive past another Wal-Mart to shop at Northcross.

According to City Council member Dunberly, an appropriate zoning and site plan are already in place. Therefore, the threatened lawsuit, in my opinion, seems frivolous and will cost ALL Austinites money to defeat it.

Traffic impact on NSCNA area will be minimal. Common sense tells us that customer traffic patterns will utilize Anderson Lane, Burnet Road, Mopac and Shoal Creek. We should work with Wal-Mart to ensure that the few large trucks accessing their site would use Mopac and Anderson Lane.

We should expend our energy on working with APD to enforce traffic speed limits, stop signs and traffic lights instead of working against this popular business coming in to our area. I believe there is a silent majority on this issue in our neighborhood. To make your voice heard, please contact City Council members and your NSCNA Board Members.

- Dallas Mahan is a retired real estate agent and 30 year resident of the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood.



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As always we encourage you to  
support the area businesses!

## Recipe

Most commercially prepared soups are extremely high in sodium and fat. Here is a recipe that will warm your heart without the excesses. Lighten up and save with this wonderful soup.

### Tomato Basil Soup (Makes four servings)

By Alexa Sparkman, M.A., R.D., L.D.

Ingredients	Cost	Instructions:
1 cup vegetable stock	\$1.21	Combine all ingredients and heat in a saucepan over medium heat until soup just begins to boil. Reduce heat and continue to simmer for 15 to 20 minutes. Garnish with fresh basil leaves if desired and serve hot.
1 cup Pomi chopped tomatoes	\$1.31	
1/2 cup fat-free milk	\$0.25	
1/4 cup dry white wine	\$0.38	
2 tablespoons Texafrance Basil Pesto or (Central Market basil pesto from the fresh bar)	\$0.67	
1 large ripe tomato, diced	\$0.69	
1/2 teaspoon sea salt	\$0.10	<b>Nutrition Facts per serving:</b>
At-Home Total (4 servings)	\$4.60	Calories 32
Restaurant Cost (1 serving)	\$5.95	Protein 2g
		Carbohydrates 6g
		Fat 0g
		Sodium 363 mg
		Fiber 1g

*This recipe was reprinted with permission from Alexa Sparkman, M.A., R.D., L.D. Alexa is a registered dietitian who has had a nutrition counseling business in Austin for the past 18 years and specializes in all aspects of nutrition care. For more information, call Alexa at 257-0898.*

## The NSCNA Newsletter staff would like to thank the following contributors to this issue:

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David Dettmer, Expertunity  
Huddie Murray, Pillow Neighborhood Liaison  
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## Healthy, Lean and Happy Families

Most adults feel they could be healthier and should lose weight. Childhood obesity is an alarming epidemic. Exercise is essential in a successful weight loss effort. And parents are always on the lookout for ways to spend quality time with their children. Keeping all of this in mind, families who are physically active together are more likely to become and stay healthy, lean and happy.

So what does a good family fitness program consist of? Most children will tend to quickly lose interest in a structured exercise program, yet they will rarely turn down an opportunity to play and they love to play with their parents. Try a game of catch, kick a soccer ball back and forth, volley a tennis ball on the driveway or drag out the old badminton net that is hidden in the garage. You will be surprised at how much fun it is and both you and your child will benefit from this increased activity!

Find more ways to fit movement into your family's day. An after dinner walk is a wonderful way to connect with your kids and move at the same time. When was the last time you tired to hula hoop, jump rope or play kick ball? All these activities not only burn calories, but they also increase coordination. Instead of going to the movies or the mall on weekends, why not go for a hike in one of our many greenbelt areas or head on down to Town Lake and rent a kayak or a rowboat for an hour. A bike ride that includes a healthy picnic is a great treat!

Younger children will be more likely to participate if you make the activity playful or silly. Pull out that game of Twister that sits in the back of the closet. Put on your favorite music and dance or play "Follow the Leader." Pop in a Yoga DVD and playfully challenge your child to do the poses alongside you. (It's okay to laugh when either or you lose your balance or fall over!)

Choose activities you can all enjoy and, most importantly, schedule and honor your family activity times as you would any other appointment on your calendar. It's essential for children to see their parents making time for healthy activities and exercise a priority. As a result, your family will be healthier and your children will model these behaviors as they mature, developing lifelong habits that include movement in each day.

Michele Melkerson-Granryd, M.Ed

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## Fruit Trees

by Steve Bridges, Texas Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association ([www.tofga.org](http://www.tofga.org))

The changing of the seasons reminds us that it is time to do this or that in our gardens. No, you can't rest over the winter! Now is the time to plant your fruit trees! There is soil to be tilled, holes to be dug, and future plans for homemade jelly or wine to be decided upon. Just where do these trees come from? Wholesale growers, located in colder climates, wait until the chilling frosts have sent their fruit tree crops into dormancy. They then dig them up and offer them to retail nurseries as bare-root fruit trees. Retail nurseries buy them from the wholesalers and then 'heel them up' in bark or sand, keeping their roots moist and alive. These dormant trees are then ready for you to purchase and plant. Bare-root trees are just as easy to grow as container grown trees when planted correctly and at the right time of year. And that time is from now until mid-Spring. The earlier you get them in the ground the better established they will be by the heat of summer. So what do you plant?

There are varieties of peaches, plums, pears, persimmons, apples, figs, and pecans that do very well here. And for those holding out for some really cold winters, followed with no late freezes, there are nectarines and apricots. There are a few things to consider when choosing the type and variety of fruit tree you will plant.

Some trees, particularly peach, plum, pear, and apple trees require a certain number of chill hours to break bud in the spring and produce fruit. A chill hour is defined as one hour between freezing and 45 degrees. Bastrop County receives, on average, 600-700 chill hours over the winter. For instance, the freestone peach 'Tropi-Berta', with chill hours of 550-600 would be a good choice most years. The cling peach 'Early Elberta', with chill hours in the 750 range would be a safer bet when we have a colder winter such as this one. The mulch

will keep it more evenly moist. Water deeply and infrequently, which will vary according to your soil type. Sometimes you take a chance on the number of chill hours to get the type of peach that you want. It's all about what'cha like!

Another consideration is whether the tree needs a pollinator to produce fruit. Some trees are self-fertile (no pollinator needed), some partially self-fertile (will produce more reliably with a second tree of another variety), and some self-sterile (needs a different variety for cross-pollination). Peaches, persimmons, figs, and nectarines are self-fertile. Apricots, pears, pecans, and plums need another variety to reliably produce fruit. Apples are self-sterile and definitely need another variety to produce fruit.

When choosing a bare-root tree, smaller is better. A 6-8 foot tree will not bear fruit any sooner than a smaller tree and smaller trees are easier to establish. Late freezes can be a problem because



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When choosing a bare-root tree, smaller is better. A 6-8 foot tree will not bear fruit any sooner than a smaller tree and smaller trees are easier to establish. Late freezes can be a problem because the freeze kills the bloom from which the fruit will grow. One answer is to delay the bloom time by keeping the ground cooler as winter turns into spring. Do this by mulching heavily or growing a winter cover crop over the root zone. Similarly, slopes that face north are ideal locations because they do not receive the direct sun in early spring (reducing soil warming). You also want to avoid low-lying 'frost pockets'. When planting, work the area as a small garden plot. Fruit trees need well-drained soil to grow vigorously. It is best to till and amend the soil around the tree and not just 'in the hole'. Work compost, rock phosphate, greensand, and vulcanite into the soil. You are creating a living soil that will not need any foreign soil added to it. After planting, drench with a seaweed solution and mulch. The seaweed acts as a rooting stimulator and the mulch will keep it more evenly moist. Water deeply and infrequently, which will vary according to your soil type.

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## Top Ten Questions to Ask When Choosing a Contractor

Choosing a contractor to work in your home for any period of time may seem unnerving and very difficult. There is no perfect way to choose a contractor in order to completely protect your investment. Your best resource in choosing a contractor is your instinct. In order to arm your instinct with the best information, you should get to know your “contractor to be” using informed questions such as the top ten below:

### Background and Stability:

1. Is your company part of the Better Business Bureau (BBB)?
2. How long have you been performing this type of work?
3. What are the names other companies have you either owned or worked for?
4. Who is your insurance provider? What is your agent’s name and phone number?
5. Can you describe any work you have done recently that is similar to the work I am asking of you?
6. Can I contact the customers for whom you performed this work?

Finding out the background and stability of the company your contractor owns or works for is very important. If the company is registered with the BBB, you can find out if there are any complaints filed against the company and how long the company has been in business. Contractors that are running from lawsuits, unhappy customers or creditors will usually change their names multiple times or will have multiple complaints with the BBB. When it comes to insurance, ask the contractor’s agent to fax you a copy of the current Certification of Insurance. General Liability and Workers Compensation are the two types of coverage that you need to see if insurance is important to you. As for references, every contractor will have their pocket customers that they refer to all possible clients. That is why you should ask about other jobs the contractor has done that are similar to your work, and then ask to speak to those customers.

### Terms of the Relationship:

1. Can I get a written quote for the work you will be doing?
2. What are your terms for payment?
3. Can you give me an example of a contract that we would be signing if I choose to use you?
4. How do you guarantee your work?
5. Will you make a materials list that I can use to purchase the materials? I would like to save as much money on materials as possible.

Depending on the level of work, documentation will help ensure that the work and price you are expecting are guaranteed. A contractor’s professionalism can be measured by the contractor’s documentation. You will find a wide variety of documentation from a dollar amount on a napkin to a detailed quote and agreement outlining start date, end date, costs, materials, timeline and warranty. When it comes to payment, a payment schedule should be clearly defined based on performance and delivery. The reason you hear horror stories of contractors never showing up for jobs after they have received payment is because the payment is usually more than the profit of the entire job. Your down payment should always be a small percentage of the total job.

Remember, your best resource is your instinct. Use these questions as a guideline to make sure that you are comfortable with the person and company you are going to hire. Try not to hire on the spot, give your instincts time to process your interaction and do your research. In the end, you will hopefully end up with work that you feel is worth the price you paid.

- David Dettmer, President and Founder of [Expertunity.com](http://Expertunity.com), an online resource for homeowners searching for remodelers, contractors and home builders.



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