

# She!

A Guide for All Women | February 2011

Westlake/Lake Travis

ALSO INSIDE

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HOW WE'VE CHANGED, ONE WOMAN'S VIEW

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## Women of Influence

Four local women who are leading by example, page 3

# Westbank and Lake Travis women are a force to be reckoned with

These women of influence are leading the way in the arts, science, government and business

continued on page 4



Susan Combs,  
Texas comptroller



Dr. Barbara Bergin,  
orthopedic surgeon  
and author



Carol de Cardenas, director of the  
School for Visual and Performing  
Arts in Austin



Jerri Ward, attorney  
with Garlo Ward.

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## Comptroller meets challenges with grace and humor



Susan Combs

Susan Combs has a great sense of humor.

To make it as long and as far as she has in Texas politics, it's a must.

The Lost Creek resident once had a pair of high heels over-nighted so that she could stand eye-to-eye with then Mexican President Vicente Fox, who is 6 feet, 5 inches tall (Combs is 6 feet, 2 inches).

While she laughs in the face of some challenges, others have terrified her.

When she worked with Dallas prosecutor's office in the juvenile division, she was in charge of prosecuting juvenile delinquents, but also preparing cases to remove children from abusive homes.

"I had a kid's life in my hands, and I was terrified that I would let something slip," Combs said.

So, she prepared obsessively for every case and never lost a jury trial in abuse cases. That training served her well when she was elected to the Texas House of Representatives and had to prepare legislation.

"I think the biggest moment of terror for me was when I realized I had won state [representative]," Combs said. "It's like the dog chasing the car and catching the bumper. I had just caught the bumper."

She went on to serve as agriculture commissioner and then comptroller, where she serves as the state's tax collector, chief accountant, revenue estimator, treasurer and steward of the state's finances during one of the most difficult economic periods in recent memory.

During her tenure she has championed transparency in the Comptroller's Office and was the first to make the agency's information available online to the pub-

lic. She has made tackling childhood obesity a focus of her efforts and has pushed for family-friendly policies at the agencies she has led.

A mother of three, she related a story when her young son came to her one night after work and asked to discuss his upcoming birthday. She told him not tonight. He asked about the next night, but that wasn't a good time either. When he asked if he could make an appointment, she decided to make a change and told her law office that she would be out the door every day by 3 p.m.

"That transformed my view," Combs said. "Family is first, and that is the policy at all of my agencies. In the '60s you had to be pounding on the glass ceiling with a hammer, and now people get that our children are important."

By Esther Robards-Forbes

## Multitalented doctor finds passion in advocacy, writing, music and horses



Barbara Bergin

Barbara Bergin is one of those women that makes people ask, "Where does she get the energy?"

In addition to being one of the few female orthopedic surgeons in the area, she also helps run her practice, Texas Orthopedics, has published a book, writes a medical blog, has raised two children and is an accomplished equestrian. In her spare time, she writes country-western songs and plays the guitar.

She, along with her family, helped change state and local laws to require external defibrillators in public and private schools and at school sporting events after her son, Matt, suffered a cardiac arrest at a Westlake High School football game five years ago and was revived by one of the machines.

Bergin, 56, began her career like most surgeons, with an interest in science and medicine, but it was the patients that drew her to orthopedics, a field with almost no women when she applied and one where only 2-3 percent of doctors today are women.

While she encountered some challenges being a woman in a male dominated field, she worked hard to overcome the hurdles and moved on.

She credits the low number of women in her field with a perception that it is male dominated and is demanding at a time in women's lives when they begin to think about having a family. She points out to medical schools that she was able to have a career, her family and host of outside accomplishments.

She gave birth to her daughter, Wallis, while still in her residency, a move many doctors would call professional suicide. With the help of her husband, who is also a physician, childcare and help from family, they

*"My most important accomplishments are my wonderful kids. I'm Barbara Bergin, the author; I'm Dr. Bergin, the surgeon; but most important thing is I'm Barbara, Matt and Wallis's mom."*

*"You'll find that there is never a good time to have children. If you say, for a woman with a career, there's never a good time, then you have to say that any time is a good time. If you keep saying it's not a good time, you'll never have kids."*

were able to make it work, even in the days before federally mandated maternity leave. "I was even on call the night I had her," Bergin said, and she was back to work 15 days later. She said she was inspired by a female

attending physician with five children who started her family in medical school.

"She said, 'You'll find that there is never a good time to have children,'" Bergin said. "If you say, for a woman with a career, there's never a good time, then you have to say that any time is a good time. If you keep saying it's not a good time, you'll never have kids." Bergin has taken that approach with many of her other endeavors, including getting her first novel, "Endings," published and making a run at, and placing third and fifth in the non-pro division of the world championships in reigning, an equestrian event. Even with all of her accomplishments, Bergin points to her family as her most challenging and rewarding experience.

"My most important accomplishments are my wonderful kids. I'm Barbara Bergin, the author; I'm Dr. Bergin, the surgeon; but most important thing is I'm Barbara, Matt and Wallis's mom."

By Esther Robards-Forbes

## Arts school director shines spotlight on young talent

The birth of Austin School for Visual and Performing Arts didn't happen in 2006, when Lakeway resident Carol de Cardenas founded the school. It started 40 years earlier, when de Cardenas understood her future.

"At 5 years old, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I was a little stubborn about it," de Cardenas, now 46, recalled. "I absolutely loved school, loved my teachers."

She also displayed a passion for the arts, one her parents supported without question. When she wanted to take piano lessons, her parents bought a piano and hired a concert pianist who trained her for 13 years.

"They taught me to see the beauty in all things," she said. "My exposure to the arts, I think, helped groom me to be in this role that

her parents delivering her piano years ago, and her mission became clear.

"I saw the need to create a space specifically focused on honing students' artistic talents as well as their academic talents," de Cardenas said.

She traveled the country, learning the best practices from several performing arts schools and visual arts academies. The canvas became clearer to her, but the responsibility of operating the school loomed large.

"I wasn't completely convinced that I had what it would take to take on something as ambitious as this," she said. "It got to the point where I was tormenting myself. This momentum started building, and more and more people were stepping into my life [wanting me to start the school.] Then there were complete strangers who were saying, 'Do it! Do it! Do it!' And, I was saying, 'No! No! No!'"

The burden lifted when several pieces fell into place, such as the connections to world-class performers who wanted to teach in Austin and board members who brought a variety of experience to guiding the school's course.

"The pressure that I was feeling was lifted, and I knew with all my heart that I was going to have to surrender to this calling because I was never going to be able to sleep otherwise," she said.

In 2006, she spearheaded the foundation of ASPVA as a nonprofit organization. "That was our first major hurdle," she said. "The thought of having to exclude somebody because they didn't have the financial means to be able to attend a school like this was heartbreaking, so that was the reason for being a nonprofit."

ASPVA began with a community outreach program, Connections, at participating public schools and other student organizations and has served more than 1,200 students and has offered numerous scholarships. Central Christian Church of Austin offered ASPVA space at its Guadalupe location, and renovations began in 2009 to prepare for full-time college preparatory curriculum and arts and wellness education for six grades.

ASPVA held its grand opening downtown in March 2010. It offers a Texas Education Agency-accredited curriculum through collaboration with Texas Tech University serving students in grades six-12, including Gabriella, a junior.

She's blessed, having achieved her dream that allows aspiring student-artists to reach theirs. "I'm in a fortunate situation where I can do what I'm passionate about doing," de Cardenas said. "I am completely convinced that I've been groomed my entire life to do exactly this. It's been an incredible journey."

By Devin Monk



Carol de Cardenas

*"I wasn't completely convinced that I had what it would take to take on something as ambitious as this," she said. "It got to the point where I was tormenting myself."*

I find myself in now."

De Cardenas was teaching first and second grade in the Lake Travis ISD when her daughter Gabriella, then 5, discovered her own artistic passion while visiting New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. The day after seeing the ballet "Giselle" there in 1999, Gabriella said she wanted to attend a school like its Lincoln Center Institute. De Cardenas recalled

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## Medical law expert adds voice to healthcare debate

Jerri Ward



Lakeway attorney Jerri Ward loves to curl up with a good book. But lately, she's been trying to wrap her mind around the new healthcare laws passed by Congress, filtering through the thousands of pages of legalese. While it sounds like a difficult read, it is essential information for her law firm's clients. Garlo-Ward specializes in helping medical professionals successfully navigate the challenges

*"There is a part of me that is a leader, but there is another side of me that likes solitude — that wants to think and observe. I think it is that ability to observe that allows me to think outside the box."*

of the industry and its oversight agencies, and there are more than enough bureaucratic and oversight agencies to navigate.

"We guide providers in contracting with vendors and represent them when they have problems with those vendors through negotiation or litigation," Ward said. "It is essential that we help [our clients] stay in compliance with regard to employment laws and defend them

in actions against them taken by government agencies and the employees themselves." Ward has clients across Texas that rely on her expertise, particularly now that new medical laws are being implemented. The world of medicine is changing, but change is a familiar friend to Ward.

As a child, her family moved often as her father followed the fortunes of the oil business. Her father worked for George William Strake, a pioneer oilman and philanthropist who remains a legendary figure in the annals of the great Texas oil boom.

The upward mobility of her family "seemed normal," Ward said. But on reflection, she realizes that her upbringing helped her become a leader.

"There is a part of me that is a leader, but there is another side of me that likes solitude — that wants to think and observe. I think it is that ability to observe that allows me to think outside the box."

Her outside-the-box thinking is currently displayed on "I Object! Justice Examined," a popular, twice-monthly show which, airs on Right Talk Radio and can be seen on YouTube. The show explores the American Justice system, Constitutional issues and the state of individual rights. It comes from a right-of-center Libertar-

ian position.

Her show also stems from her love of reading because, as they say, the devil is in the details. On the show and in her practice, it's clear that Ward is concerned with the new health laws and how they will impact the medical industry. It is the foremost concern of her clients.

Ward believes the medical industry already labors under excessive and cumbersome policies. Now her clients are fearful of government oversight morphing into a dictatorial mandate, especially with the development of accountable-care organizations.

An ACO is a type of managed care organization found within the country's healthcare system. Several health care providers form an ACO, which then provides care to a group of patients. The ACO may use either the capitation or fee-for-service payment scheme. ACO's receive reimbursement for reducing costs and meeting quality-improvement markers.

"The physicians will be sold the idea of entering into ACO in order to enhance their power to negotiate with insurance companies," Ward said. "Obamacare is accelerating this because of perverse incentives within the law. Because a goal of Obamacare is to coercively drive down costs — which have exploded due to government in the first place — it incentivizes

providers to gather in these ACO's in order to control costs and maximize the amounts going to physicians."

"Moreover, one goal of already existing ACO's has been to drive down Medicare Part A costs," she noted. "Thus, the specter of physicians organizing to drive down hospital costs, so they can have more profit, is galvanizing hospitals to preemptively form the ACO's with selected doctors in defense."

From Ward's perspective, none of this helps patients, and she's concerned about the way the new laws will handle enforcement, and that's just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. It's up to her to make sure her clients don't become the Titanic.

By Charles McClure

GarloWard, P.C.

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