

PHOTOS AND REFLECTIONS
FROM STARS OF 'DANCING'
P. 34

A CHAT WITH WACO'S
'UNDERCOVER BOSS'
P. 50



SPECIAL SECTION
HOME
P. 57

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March magic

With fire and finesse, Baylor coaches forge basketball excellence



Bricker Bruner, a Baylor University student, poses amid some of the artwork hanging at Art Center Waco. The Vanguard College Preparatory School graduate is in charge of this year's Table Toppers event, the organization's signature fundraiser.

BU student transforms Table Toppers

By Jessica Chia / Photos by Duane A. Laverty

Art Center Waco's signature Table Toppers fundraiser in March is going in a new direction, thanks to the efforts of a 21-year-old Waco native.

Bricker Bruner, a Vanguard College Preparatory School graduate and current Baylor University junior, was selected to bring "a new, fresh concept to Table Toppers, changing the entire event to a fun event for all ages," he said.

Bruner, who attended Art Center Waco summer camps as a youth, has long been familiar with the nonprofit's annual fundraiser. The event started 17 years ago to raise money for the organization's educational endeavors. It invites local vendors and organizations to create unique, elaborate centerpieces that showcase their wares or services.

Last year, Bruner expressed his interest in revitalizing Table Toppers' traditional "ladies luncheon" format and was selected by Art Center Waco to chair the event.

"The reason we chose him is the enthusiasm he had. He had some great ideas," said Mark Arnold, Art Center Waco executive director.

One of the biggest changes to the fundraiser's format is the move from a weekday luncheon to a Friday evening event on March 23.

"We moved it to nighttime so a whole variety of people can come, and we're going to have live entertainment with great food," Bruner said. "You can bring spouses, friends. It opens the door to a whole new crowd to help promote the Art Center."

Arnold echoed Bruner's sentiment.

"For many years it's been on a Tuesday afternoon, and not everybody could get away then," he said.

This year, in addition to bidding on products, jewelry and original art, and perusing tables topped with arrangements, ticket-holders can enjoy a cocktail hour, buffets and live music.

Table Toppers may be Bruner's first major event to chair, but it's not his first experience in the event-planning business.

He has been working for the Woodway-based event-planning and rental company Pendley Party Productions for nearly four years as an assistant and designer.

Owner Paulette Pendley hired him while he was attending Vanguard. Bruner said he's had a lifelong love of planning.



Bruner has worked at Pendley Party Productions for nearly four years, helping design and coordinate events in Waco. He says the right entertainment is crucial to a party's success.

"I've always been the child that plans everything out," he said. "Since I was 6, I had my future planned out. All through high school I was always the person who planned everything for dances: where we were going to dinner, what we were going to ride in, the preordering of the food."

Bruner said he knew event planning was something he would enjoy, from simply running errands to his current responsibilities, which include creating bids for events, working with clients, helping with creative design elements and managing Pendley's valet service.

"I love my job so much, I don't think of it as a job. It's a creative outlet," he said.

He spends his free time browsing the Internet or magazines to find new trends and styles. He keeps a notepad by his bed just in case he wakes up thinking of a creative idea to implement for an upcoming event.

"You always have to be on the cutting edge of ideas," he said.

Bruner may be naturally creative, but he credits his event-planning knowledge to the guidance of his boss, owner Paulette Pendley, and many of his co-workers.

He offered several tips for putting on a great event.

"To make your event better, you really honestly have to look at a couple things," he said. "One is, if you don't have a big budget, look at different ways to get a

certain feel. Candles are a great way to do that. Candles, energy, good food. Without good food and a good environment, you're not going to have a very successful event."

Bruner added that the right entertainment is vital to providing good memories that guests will take away.

"There's nothing better than having an overcrowded dance floor," he said. "That's one thing that we want at Table Toppers. I just want fun music that all ages are going to enjoy, and everyone's just going to get up and have a good time."

In the event that something does go wrong, Bruner's strategy is to take it in stride.

"There's never a dull moment at work," he said. "Every moment is a new twist or turn. One year when we were decorating for an event in April, a storm came through and we decorated by flashlight. You have to be prepared for anything and everything to go wrong."

For Bruner, a successful event always comes down to good teamwork, whether it be the supportive Table Toppers committee or his colleagues at Pendley Party Productions.

"Your committee is really what makes it go seamlessly," he said. "Organization and a great committee that works together well. It really is a team effort in order for it to go smoothly and to get the best ideas."

With decisions to be made regarding food, entertainment, wine, soft drinks, liquors, floral arrangements, décor, photography and more, event planning can be a difficult balancing act, Bruner said.

But it's an act he handles every day, balancing his studies as a full-time student with his job at Pendley and responsibilities as Table Toppers chair.

Bruner's classes are all before noon; he works in the afternoons, and does homework in the evenings.

"Time management is the key," he said, although a supportive work environment helps, too. "Paulette has been the most amazing person to work for, very understanding about being a student. If I do have a test or something, she lets me take off."

To coordinate his responsibilities, Bruner relies heavily on technology.

"My life revolves around my iPad," he said. "This thing is my lifeline: agenda, notes, homework, fundraiser stuff, work stuff, I can do bids on it, have people sign off on contracts. Of course, it has my music, calendar and my reminders and tasks for my checklist. My calendar connects with my Baylor email and all the calendars coordinate, so it will tell me if there's a conflict there."

As overwhelming as it may sound, Bruner said he enjoys having a full schedule.

"If I don't have something to do, I find something to do," he said. "I can't just sit at home. I love my job."



Table Toppers

When: 7 p.m. to midnight, March 23

Where: Phoenix Ballroom, 401 S. Third St.

Tickets: \$75 per person

More information: Call Art Center Waco at 752-4371 or go online at artcenterwaco.org

