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NOVEMBER 2025

Bowl of Red, World of Pink

The chili competition that adds
hospitality to a pot of spice

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

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November 2025



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Story and photos by Julia Robinson

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ON THE COVER
Terry Foresman seeks the taste of success.
Photo by Julia Robinson

ABOVE
The Gray family's ancestral house in the community of Nameless.
Courtesy Mary Cameron



Hit the Brakes

TEXAS IS APPROACHING a distressing milestone this month: 25 years during which not a day has gone by without at least one traffic fatality.

Since the streak began November 7, 2000, more than 88,000 people have died on Texas roads. The Texas Department of Transportation's End the Streak campaign strives to change that.

The streak nearly ended one day in January 2024, when there was just one fatality—caused by a driver running a stop sign.

“More drivers are choosing to engage in more than one risky driving behavior,” says April Ramos of the National Safety Council. “This includes impaired driving, drowsy driving, aggressive driving, and seat belt misuse and nonuse.”

The Pedernales Electric Cooperative member is OK with the fact that her 17-year-old son is in no hurry to get his driver's license. And when he does?

“My biggest advice to him, aside from following all the rules of the road, is to not be in a rush, avoid aggressive drivers and put your phone away.”



Hinterland Healing

National Rural Health Day, November 20 this year, didn't exist when Dr. James Lee Dickey went about healing folks and saving lives in 1920s Williamson County.

Dickey was the only Black physician in the county, and he worked to expand facilities so African Americans could get proper health care. His focus included expectant mothers and a vigorous vaccination program to curb a typhoid fever epidemic.

TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Five-Ingredient Dinners

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Still Life

RECOMMENDED READING

We shared *A Bowl of Red* with readers in October 2008. Time to dig in again. Read the story at [TexasCoopPower.com](https://www.texascooppower.com).



ENTER ONLINE



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Changing our clocks twice a year is ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some of the responses to our September prompt: **My favorite football team is ...**

The 2020 Texas School for the Deaf Rangers, who won the state championship after 164 years.

ROSS SCHUMANN
PEDERNALES EC
DRIPPING SPRINGS

Any team that beats Alabama.

JAMES FAMBRO
COSERV
MCKINNEY

The one my grandson is playing on right now.

EDITH HUFFMAN
GVEC
HALLETTSVILLE

Any Texas team in the game.

STEVE BAILEY
PENTEX ENERGY
GAINESVILLE

My son's YMCA flag football team with his elementary school friends.

NADALYNN HAMILTON
HILCO EC
GLENN HEIGHTS

Visit our website to see more responses.

SEPTEMBER 2025 It's in the Bag

"I grew up in the '50s eating Fritos. My favorite was adding them to my bologna, mustard and mayonnaise sandwiches. It added a crunch."

MICHAEL RANGE
WISE EC
DECATUR



GISELA GOPPEL

Tooting Fritos' Horn

When we lived in San Antonio, kids loved to visit the concession stand when it was our daughter's high school band's turn to serve because we started a tradition of yelling "Frito pie!" when anyone ordered one [*It's in the Bag*, September 2025].

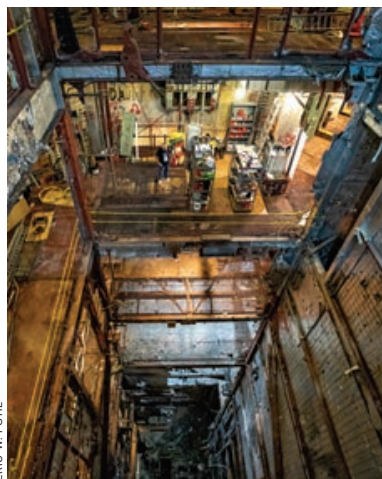
Sarah Nichols
Central Texas EC
Cherry Spring

As a mid-1950s preteenager, I vacationed with my San Antonio cousins. One supper my aunt Ruth Hooper served my first Frito pie. Even now, I remember it as the most exotic dish I had ever eaten.

R. Helmer III
Central Texas EC
Austin

Cold War Remnants

As a young man I worked on silos as an ironworker during the summers



ERIC W. POHL

between college semesters [*Counting Down*, September 2025]. A friend and I worked in southern Arizona, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota.

I have often wondered what was done with the decommissioned silos. There are many of them.

Sheridan Duncan
Southwest Texas EC
Menard

Trail Rides

Mounts in the Hills [September 2025] is a great resource to save and use as a guide to ride in Texas. The trails I use the most are at Ray Roberts Lake State Park, which are maintained by the Lake Ray Roberts Equestrian Trails Association.

With the loss of so much open space due to development, it is great we have so many trails available. We would love to have more.

Gabrielle Gordon
Tri-County EC
Tarrant County

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letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

Please include your electric co-op and town. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

 Texas Co-op Power

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Spice—And Everything Nice

A chili competition born of spite becomes one based around community

Texans know: Chili is so much more than just a bowl of red.

That wasn't always the case for Teena Friedel—not many years ago, when she worked for the city of Irving and was tasked with spicing up a city festival.

"I started trying to think of ways to make a festival more fun," she says, "and one of the things I found was something called a chili cook-off, not knowing what that entails."

Friedel joined her local pod of the Chili Appreciation Society International to learn the rules and process of a sanctioned competition. After her 2006 event, she remained part of the chapter but was reluctant to get more involved. "They asked me if I wanted to cook, and I did not want to do it," she says.

After much cajoling and a crash course in cooking chili, she was finally persuaded to compete.

"I made the final table that first day and placed second in showmanship," Friedel says. She was hooked. "I said, 'Oh, honey, if I'm cooking chili, I'm going all in.'"

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT From left, René Chapa, Beth Baxter and Teena Friedel mix laughter with chili-making, a process that can take three hours. Competition chili typically includes several chili powders. Final-round entries at the 2025 Texas Ladies' State Chili Championship Cook-Off in Seguin.

ABOVE Donna Dodgen—Seguin mayor and a contest judge—takes a taste.



TOP An entry in the junior competition gets loving attention from an adult.

ABOVE Paisley Banks brings her chili to the judges. The 7-year-old from La Grange won the junior competition.

OPPOSITE Reese Satsky, wearing her crown from the 2024 junior championship, dishes up her chili.

The community embraced her.

“If I needed anything, somebody gave it to me, and seeing how much fun everybody had, and part of your entry fee went to charity, and that feels really good.”

In the birthplace of chili, the official state dish comes with a storied history that represents Texas’ bold, rich culture. CASI, one of three standard-bearers for chili cook-offs in the state, hosts hundreds of competitions annually across the continent, raising \$729,000 for charity during the last full fiscal year. But none of those events have the vibrance, camaraderie and history of the Texas Ladies’ State Chili Championship Cook-Off.

It’s as much about Texas hospitality as it is secret spice mixtures, and it’s a testament to the power of women in a traditionally male-dominated domain and the close-knit bonds that good food fosters.

The TLSCCO holds a unique place in chili history. The event was created in direct response to the 1970 formation of the Chilympiad, a famous San Marcos cook-off that barred women. In response, legendary rancher and humorist Hondo Crouch offered up Luckenbach, the town he owned near Fredericksburg, for a separate cook-off in 1971 called Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned. It was for women only. And it was an instant hit.

The event evolved over the years to support more entrants and found its footing in Seguin, about 35 miles east of San Antonio, in 1991 as the second-largest chili cook-off in Texas, just behind the distinguished Terlingua International Chili Championship. While it’s no longer the second-largest, the women’s competition is still a qualifier for Terlingua, meaning winners gain immediate entry to the most prestigious cook-off of the year.

Heating Up

On a warm April day at Max Starcke Park in Seguin, there's a huge spread of cars, campers and tents, all in residence for the TLSSCO weekend. A flag with the CASI logo flies above the proceedings, centered around a covered pavilion in a grove of pecan and sycamore trees along the Guadalupe River.

With 135 cooks, the competition is fierce but also clearly fun. Tents, tablecloths, T-shirts and décor are in bright pinks, purples and yellows. Previous champions stroll around wearing tiaras and bright sashes. Men, working behind the scenes, wear pink polos. Everywhere is the sound of women laughing.

Under the pavilion, the junior competition is already underway, with four girls ages 7–15 tending their pots in front of the main stage. Last year's junior champion, Reese Satsky of Friendswood, is back, wearing her crown.

At the appointed hour, they parade their chili through a glitter-speckled purple arch to the turn-in table, reminiscent of a beauty pageant victory lap.

Outside the pavilion, the adult competition is just getting started. Cooks can begin their chili anytime but most plan a three-hour cook for the 1 p.m. turn-in time, when all competitors must present their chili to judges in 32-ounce plastic foam cups, marked only with ID numbers for anonymity. The visiting and socializing quiet down as the burners are lit.

"A lot of people think if you go to a cook-off, it's just, you know, a free-for-all," says Beverly Maricle, the cook-off's board president. "We do party. We do have a good time but take what we do very seriously. After chili is turned in, or during the resting period, then you walk around and you visit with everybody, but when you're cooking, you're cooking. It *is* a competition."

René Chapa of Grand Prairie, the 2023 chili world champion and 2014 ladies state champion, is among this year's top competitors, browning her meat on a custom-painted camping stove under a purple awning with six other cooks, including her mom, Beth Baxter. All are dressed in pink shirts that read, "Spread Kindness."

"Everybody does their own things a little bit differently," Chapa says. "And so, you know, I'll tweak it here and there. She tweaks hers here and there."

While traditional Texas chili consists of beef (usually cuts of stew meat) cooked low and slow with a blend of peppers, garlic and onions, competition chili is more concentrated.

"This chili is not like a Wolf Brand Chili. You're not going to sit there and eat a whole bowl; it's very spicy," Chapa says. "We've got five, six chili powders in here."

Stew meat is left behind in favor of chili ground beef, and any vegetables are blended to create a gravy. Judges taste a single spoonful of each chili before recording a score, so each bite needs to pack a consistent punch.

"Competition chili is a little bit stronger, a little saltier, a little spicier," says Maricle, a member of GVEC. "You want a little back bite, but if the tears are running down your face, your pot's too hot."



“You want a little back bite, but if the tears are running down your face, your pot’s too hot.”

Each entry is judged based on five factors: aroma, color, consistency, taste and aftertaste. At the end of each round of judging, half the entries advance and the tasting begins anew.

Pat Krenek, 2001 and 2003 ladies state champion, has been coming to the competition since the Luckenbach days.

"You have to start out with a decent recipe," she says. "You crank it up, put it in that cup, turn it in and wish for the best. Once you cook your pot, it's out of your hands."

Krenek loves the atmosphere of the event. "This is just a relaxing time. It's not a beauty contest, so you don't have to dress up or do your hair and makeup," she says. "And the men are the ones working."

Cooking Down

Stoves get turned off during the chili's resting period as the spices work their magic. And then there's a last-minute crush of activity before the mad rush to the turn-in table.

At Chapa's tent, a band of visiting competitors brings out a tray of Jell-O shots, and everyone toasts to each other's good luck. Some go back for seconds.



LEFT Chapa coats her plastic foam cup with a spoonful of chili.

ABOVE Friedel relishes winning the 2025 cook-off.

About 10 minutes before turn-in time, Chapa primes her entry cup by pouring in a spoonful of chili and swishing it around the edges, coating the cup in a familiar red color. Precoating the cup takes some of the plastic foam smell away, giving the aroma the best chance of scoring high.

At its core, this is a competition, but it's also about the experience. For the participants, it's a chance to show off their skills and gain recognition but also to nurture the bonds of a supportive statewide community.

Jeff Bauer, a CASI board member from Pinehurst, is sitting in the shade as his daughter Madalynn Bauer, 18, is cooking in the adult division for the first time. "At barbecue cook-offs, nobody will help you. It's all about me, me, me, me, me," Jeff Bauer says. "But chili cooks, they'll help you."

He competed for years on the barbecue trail before finding the chili circuit.

"It got to the point to where I was spending almost \$800, \$900, \$1,000 a weekend at barbecue competitions," he says, "and without sponsorship, there's no way an average Joe can do that."

Bauer made the switch to chili in 2012, bringing Madalynn with him to competitions. "I mean, the chili cook world is just so much more friendly."

The kindness of the chili community is a common refrain among TLSCCO competitors, many of whom return year after year. There's an unspoken understanding that while

everyone is there to win, the real victory is the chance to support one another.

When Friedel, the reluctant cook from Irving, was diagnosed with cancer in 2011, words of encouragement poured in from CASI members from across the U.S.

"I never felt so much love from strangers in my entire life. I got cards in the mail from Minnesota, Ohio. I don't even know who these people were, but they knew me from the cook-offs," Friedel says. "It was just the most moving and precious thing to have people help you when you struggle. I have a whole chili family now."

Crowning Moment

For judging, hundreds of people—including members of the public—are divided among tasting tables.

"We like to have a minimum of 200," Maricle says. On this day, some parks employees and litter cleanup crews have been recruited. The mayor of Seguin, Donna Dodgen; city employees; and longtime chili judges line the final table to determine the winners.

The main stage features custom purple camp chairs, part of the award booty for the top 20 cooks.

After the final tastings, the pavilion overflows with competitors, their supporters and curious onlookers. The winners are announced from 20th place to first by the entry numbers on their cups. Sharp cries and shouts of excitement rise up

as winners emerge from the crowd, accept hugs from friends and then are escorted on stage.

Beth Baxter's number is called as 20th place, and she takes a seat in her camp chair. As she's handed a chilled glass of champagne, the number of her daughter, René Chapa, is called as 19th place, and the two women reunite on stage with laughter and hugs.

The camp chairs are almost full as the reserve champion's number is called. A proud Jeff Bauer lets out a whoop of joy and spins his daughter Madalynn around. As the runner-up, she will head to Terlingua after her first year of competition.

When the championship announcement comes, Friedel

looks radiant as she rises from the crowd. It takes her a few minutes to make her way to the stage, slowed down by all the hugs she receives along the way.

She's crowned by last year's winner and handed a bouquet of yellow roses and a large trophy, which she will carry around to competitions until next year's winner is declared. She dabbled in chili cooking on a lark, and now—with the help of her "chili family"—she's a state champion.

"I already knew it was going to be me," she says later. "It was really weird, I just knew I was going to go get that crown." ■

The Roots of Red

BY DENNIS RAY SCHNEIDER

Like many quintessentially American foods, chili (or more accurately chili con carne) was born from that unique amalgam of cultures found in the U.S. And like many foods rooted in home cooking, a precise origin is hard to track down.

Though some writers have suggested chili has an Aztec or New Mexican origin, Frank X. Tolbert's *A Bowl of Red*, one of the definitive books on chili, opines that most historians agree it originated in San Antonio. *A Bowl of Red*, Joe E. Cooper's *With or Without Beans*, and Robb Walsh's *The Chili Cookbook* write that the dish was seldom found in Mexican restaurants or homes until the 20th century.

It was, however, found in Texas in the 1800s.

You had in San Antonio during that time the influx of Spanish culture along with the meat animals of the Old World—sheep, goats, pigs and above all, cattle—present in abundance by the beginning of the 1800s.

Tolbert, Cooper and Walsh have suggested that immigrants from the

Canary Islands brought to San Antonio on the order of the Spanish king in the 1700s were the originators of chili. There is a line of evidence in the red mojo sauces that Canarian foods are known for, composed of ground chiles of varying degrees of hotness, cumin, garlic and other spices. These base sauces are remarkably similar to those used in most chili recipes.

Chili appeared most prominently in San Antonio in the 1880s when it became a market staple supplied by Tejana women who became known as chili queens. In the city's open-air markets, above, these family cooks fed workers and visitors in what was becoming a major cattle center of the Southwest.

More cultural fusion spread chili across Texas. In 1894, Charles Geb-

hardt, a German immigrant who lived in New Braunfels, developed a method for turning dried chiles into a powder that could be sold to restaurants burgeoning in new railway towns. That meant a quick bowl of red could be prepared without the long cooking and processing required for the intact dried chile. His chili powder remains a staple.

In the 20th century, canned chili and chili powders powered the spread of the dish across the U.S. and beyond, setting the stage for the final (so far) evolution of the dish—the cook-off.

While the first chili cook-off may have taken place at the 1952 State Fair of Texas, the much publicized 1967 competition in Terlingua, which Tolbert helped organize, created the chili cook-off phenomenon. ■



COURTESY UTSA SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

A ghost town called Nameless rallies to be remembered

NAME DROPPING

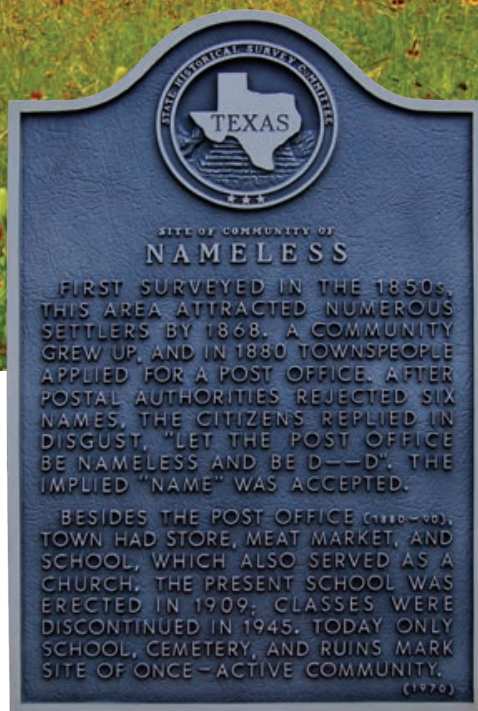
BY ANNA MAZUREK

IN 1880, as the story goes, a growing community northwest of Austin applied for a post office under the name of Fairview. That name was rejected by the federal government along with five subsequent applications because the names were already in use. After the sixth rejection, the disgusted townspeople replied, “Let the post office be nameless and be damned.”

That iconic line, now inscribed on the town’s historical marker, is how the community officially became Nameless (though it was often referred to as Fairview locally).

A century and a half later, few remnants of the town remain. But on April 12, nearly 300 people gathered around a 1909 one-room schoolhouse on Nameless Road in what is now Leander to celebrate the historic addition of an 1876 homestead that had been relocated to the property.

The town’s post office operated for a decade during its heyday, accompanied by a meat market, general store and the



school that doubled as a church. The white board and batten Nameless School operated for 36 years, from 1909 to 1945.

“Anything happening was happening at the school,” says Mary Cameron, president of the nonprofit Friends of Nameless School. “It was the center of life,

especially out here in the sticks.”

The school closed when the outlying individual schools consolidated into the Leander school district, says Cameron, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative.

She grew up in East Texas but often visited her grandfather, who lived down the street from the school. After raising her children in nearby West Lake Hills, she and her husband moved into her grandfather’s house in 2007 and later



STACY COALE

COURTESY FRIENDS OF NAMELESS SCHOOL

WANT TO VISIT?

Contact the Friends of Nameless School Facebook page or email friends.of.nameless.school@gmail.com.

became involved in the Friends of Nameless School.

The organization started in the 1950s, a century after Nameless was originally surveyed, and became an official nonprofit in 1992 as part of an effort to restore the school, which sits on property owned by Travis County. The building's extensive restoration, including a new concrete foundation made to resemble the original cedar poles, was completed in 2009 to celebrate the structure's centennial.

"Every board in the floor was pulled up, sanded, scraped, reshellacked and put back down," Cameron says. "The members were painting the inside and the outside." Ceiling fans, heat, air conditioning and a bathroom also were added.

And with that, it seemed that the only remnant of Nameless was preserved.

But in 2023, when land across from the school was being cleared for a subdivision, two historic discoveries were made.

The first was a small wrought-iron fenced cemetery, the resting place of Eliza Gray, wife of Hubbard Gray, who was a teacher and election judge. Hubbard is believed to be buried next to her in an unmarked grave. In 2024, the site was preserved and designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery.

Further construction efforts clearing a cedar brake revealed another surprise—the ruins of a home. "We didn't discover it until the bulldozer had taken out a lot of the cedar trees," Cameron says. "We never knew it was there."

Research revealed it was the homestead of the Grays, who were among the area's early settlers. They had donated an acre and a half of their property for a different school, believed to be the area's first free public school.

The cedar dog-run style house has two rooms separated by a central open area. Based on lumber markings, the structure dates to 1876.

Cameron helped lead efforts to relocate the structure, moving it across the street to the Nameless School. Taylor Morrison, the homebuilder and developer who uncovered the building, donated \$15,000 to help cover the cost.

Period reenactors were on hand for the Friends of the Nameless School's April celebration of the completion of the first phase of restructuring efforts for the Gray house—including roof repairs, reconstruction of the stone fireplace and chimney, and the addition of two porches.

A wheelchair-accessible ramp and new windows, doors and floors are slotted for the next phase. The organization is currently raising money through grants, donations and proceeds from holiday sales. At the annual Christmas in November fundraiser at the Catholic church in nearby Lago Vista, members of the nonprofit will sell handmade crafts, jams and a forthcoming cookbook.



PHOTOS THIS PAGE STACY COALE



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP The relocated and refurbished Nameless School in springtime. The ghost town's historic marker. Mary Cameron has led efforts to restore Nameless' structures.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Historian and educator Chris Twing demonstrates hand-sewing and a classic marbles game. John Nabors shows weaving techniques in front of the Gray house.

While Cameron worries about the site's future and Friends members aging out, she hopes it will continue to be a gathering space. Another community celebration is scheduled for April 2026.

"So many of us are so wrapped up in schedules and deadlines [with] no time to really slow down," Cameron says. "I would like it to continue being used by the community to take a step back in time to simpler times." ■



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VOICES *of*

Veterans from the Bluebonnet region share memories of service, sacrifice and returning to Texas

Story by Sara Abrego
Photos by Sarah Beal

Their stories continue long after their time in uniform.

On Veterans Day, Nov. 11, we honor the men and women of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area who served their country. They are neighbors, business owners, volunteers and mentors who carry their experiences from faraway posts into Central Texas life.

There are more than 1.5 million veterans living in Texas, more than any other state, according to a 2023 statement from the Texas Veterans Commission. They make up about 5% of the state's adult population. More than 10,000 veterans live in the Bluebonnet service area, according to Census Bureau data.

To honor their service, we asked six veterans from the region to share their memories of decades in the military and how they continue to strengthen Bluebonnet's communities today.

— Kirsten Tyler contributed to this story.



David Simmons at Fort Bragg, N.C., in 1981, left, and Doretta Simmons in 1990 as she prepared for a pass in review ceremony for the post commander at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. A pass in review is a military tradition in which troops march past a reviewing stand for inspection by commanders or distinguished guests.

VETERANS



David Simmons

U.S. Army Specialist 1978-1982

Doretta Simmons

U.S. Army Captain 1983-1991

David and Doretta Simmons each had distinguished, demanding and fascinating Army careers — but they didn't meet until after their military service.

Married since 2019, they now live on family land in the small community of Lincoln in Lee County. They are active members of the nearby American Legion post in Giddings and give back to veterans every chance they get. Their military service, at different times and in different places, gave them shared experiences and mutual goals that shaped their life together.

DAVID SIMMONS

David's is the classic soldier's story: A young man from small-town America, steeped in love of country and a sense of duty, pushes himself to become a paratrooper in the Army's storied 82nd Airborne Division.

As a kid in Granite City, Ill., David was a junior firefighter and a fan of John Wayne movies. "Growing up in a small and poor town, I knew that the opportunities for success after high school were limited," he said.

He graduated from high school early and celebrated his 18th birthday in winter's icy grip during boot camp at Fort Knox, Ky.

He wanted to excel and was willing to work hard. That led him to become a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division, also known as the All Americans, based at Fort Bragg, N.C. The division is renowned for its rapid deployment capabilities, airborne assaults, historic battles and role as the military's Global Response Force.

Among David's most vivid memories are the tense days after the start of the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, a 444-day ordeal when 52 Americans were held captive at the American Embassy in Tehran. "Just before President Ronald Reagan's inauguration in January 1981, we suited up with parachutes and full equipment and were sitting on the runway at Pope Air Force Base, ready to go to Iran," he said. "I was thinking that this was really it. We are going."

Suddenly, the mission was called off. Iran had released the hostages during Reagan's inaugural address.

Even without seeing battle, life in the 82nd Airborne was grueling with constant field duty and on-call status. Expectations were high, and the pace was relentless. "We always had to work at a high level. Your normal vacation leaves and regular weekends off were a fleeting notion," David said.

Airborne jumps were his most memorable experiences. "The airplane doors would swing open, the wind would be scream-

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Follow Bluebonnet on social media on Nov. 11, Veterans Day, for posts honoring our area's veterans.

Orlanda Valka

U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer 1989-2009

At 70, Orlanda Valka still carries the energy and determination that propelled her through two decades of military service.

She joined the Navy at 34, after working in Victoria as a payroll supervisor for a nursing home operator. Her father, a World War II Army veteran, inspired her to join the Navy. "I asked my parents for permission before enlisting," she said. "I respected their blessing."

She wanted to provide a better life for herself and her children. "I wanted to be an inspiration to other women, too," she said.

Valka's first stop was boot camp in Orlando, Fla. "I was an older lady joining, but I was a bodybuilder before I came in, so I was outdoing all the 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds."

She trained for six months to be an aviation electrician before being stationed in Maine with a patrol squadron at the time of the Gulf War in the Middle East. Her first overseas deployment was to the naval air base in Sicily, Italy, during 1991's Desert Storm military operation.

At first, though, Valka was assigned to work at a snack bar nicknamed "The Gedunk" for the sound coins made in its vending machines.

"I saw all these young service members working 12-hour days who didn't have time to go to the galley to eat," she said.

"So I started making food for them by cooking on hot plates." That kindness earned her a commendation from the fleet admiral.

After six months, Valka began doing the work she was trained for: repairing aircraft electrical systems, starting with P-3 Orion reconnaissance and surveillance airplanes. She kept moving — to Jacksonville, Fla., to work with an aircraft training squadron, then to Norfolk, Va., to work on Sea Dragon mine-hunting helicopters.

In the middle of that, Valka changed her career path to become a Navy career counselor, helping guide others' futures in the Navy and beyond. She was the first career counselor at the Naval Technical Training Unit in Biloxi, Miss.

"I helped everyone in the command get orders, change career directions, plan re-enlistments and retirements. I even organized retirement ceremonies," she said.

Her first duty station as a career counselor was on the storied USS Enterprise aircraft carrier, a prominent setting for "Top Gun," the 1986 movie that was another inspiration for Valka to join the Navy.



Above: Orlanda Valka beside a lighthouse-shaped display that was custom built to hold her service medals.



Valka, at left, during Navy recruit training in Orlando, Fla., in January 1990.

She was the first female petty officer to join the ship's ranks and the first woman to earn the wings of an aviation warfare specialist, she said.

Valka retired from the Navy at 54 with 20 years of service. Today she lives in Bastrop, staying active as a volunteer for the city's visitor center and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Navy is still close to her heart. "If I could go back out to sea, I would do it in a heartbeat," Valka said.

Continued from Page 17

ing, and the jumpmaster would yell, 'Hook up!' " David said. In that moment, just before they leap, every paratrooper on board finds something to believe in, he said.

The Army forged David into a deliberate man. "I know that I am a tougher, more resilient, disciplined and respectful person due to my time in service," he said.

DORETTA SIMMONS

"Even as a teenager, I never had a doubt that one day I would enlist in the military," Doretta said.

Inspired by her father, James Williamson, a chief master sergeant who served 34 years in the Air Force, and her mother, Patsy, who encouraged her ambition, Doretta's path was one of purpose and passion.

After graduating from Lexington High School in Lee County, Doretta enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve for military intelligence reconnaissance. She completed basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., and advanced training at Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

"My father proudly pinned the lieutenant bars on my uniform and gave me my first salute," Doretta said. "It was one of the most memorable moments in my life."

She went on to earn a second lieutenant's commission and then held several leadership roles at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland, where thousands of military and civilian workers research, develop and test materials and technology for battle. She led a "special reaction team," a highly trained unit of military police officers called into high-risk situations.

"Challenges were a way of life in the military," she said. As a young female officer in the 1980s, Doretta faced the responsibilities of both leading by example and caring for soldiers in her command. "I always did my utmost to ensure that

George House

U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel 1973-1998

As a child, George House was a member of 4-H. That's when he first learned the importance of responsibility and character. Throughout school, then in the military and even now, he lives by the motto of that youth development organization: "To make the best better."

House graduated from New Braunfels High School in 1968, then attended Texas A&M University, where he majored in business management. He was a member of the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band and Corps of Cadets.

Between his junior and senior years at A&M, House completed Army basic training at Fort Riley, Kan. "The training breaks you down as a person, emotionally and physically," House said. "But it built me right back up along with the rest of those at boot camp."

The A&M Corps gave him many opportunities: eight semesters of military science courses, completion of boot camp and, on his 22nd birthday, a commission as an Army second lieutenant.

In 1973, House attended Officer Basic School in Fort Knox, Ky., then started in the 2nd Armored Division at Fort Hood. There, he was an armor platoon leader, guiding 45 men through training exercises with battle tanks. He remained at Fort Hood for about 12 years, doing operations planning and coordinating services and supplies.

His first deployment was to Panama as a major in civil affairs in 1989. For more than five months, he helped civilians move to safety away from battles between the U.S. military and fighters led by the country's military ruler, Manuel Noriega.

A year later, House returned to the U.S. on reserve. He married Stephanie Rainosek in 1993, and the couple moved to Lockhart. House did contingency training until he was deployed to Bosnia in southeast Europe in 1994, a year before the end of the war that began there after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

House, then a lieutenant colonel, worked with NATO as both an agriculture officer and the point of contact for about 20 nations that had sent troops to the area. Their focus was to keep fighting forces apart and to improve the country's agriculture practices. While there, House developed a curriculum for two Bosnian universities to improve agriculture programs.

He also helped overturn an antiquated law that required veterinarians to artificially inseminate cattle rather than allow ranchers to grow their herds through natural conception.

After six months in Bosnia, House retired in 1998 with 25 years of service in the Army. He returned to Texas at age 48.

House and his wife continue to live in Lockhart. Since retiring from the military, he enjoys remodeling antique cars and has



George House, left, during his freshman year at Texas A&M University in College Station in 1968. On his lapel, the band lyres identify him as an Aggie Band member.

become a member of the Lockhart Volunteer Fire Department and American Legion Post 41.

"We are commanded to serve others," he said. "Community service is important, and you have to serve before you can lead." Although his service looks different now than it did in the military, he still finds value in being part of something bigger than himself.

their concerns were addressed, and my soldiers received the best treatment possible," she said.

AFTER THE MILITARY

David and Doretta met in September of 2018. After their military discharges, they began careers in law enforcement — but on different paths.

David joined the Houston Police Department Academy in 1982 at 21 and retired 40 years later as a lieutenant. Doretta left the Army as a captain at 37 and landed a job she'd always dreamed of: FBI special agent. She began her FBI career in 1983,

working in Bryan and Houston.

After the 9/11 attacks, Doretta helped establish Bryan's Joint Terrorism Task Force. She later became a squad supervisor in Houston and a member of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force. She retired after 32 years, in 2022. David retired the same year.

"I met the love of my life while on the job," Doretta said. "All I can say is the man upstairs is watching over me, and I thank him every day for bringing David into my life."

The Simmonses moved to Lincoln, the area where Doretta grew up, in 2024. "We live in her old stomping ground," David

said. He returned to law enforcement work this year as chief deputy in Burleson County's Sheriff's Office.

Their respect for fellow service members led them to the Giddings American Legion York Post 276, where they volunteer at events, attend meetings and provide transportation for other veterans.

"Our local chapter is comprised of a wonderful group of characters," David said.

Veterans Day holds special meaning for the couple. "It's a day for all who have served to be proud of themselves and proud of others who served," Doretta said. ■

Davie Coker

U.S. Marine Lance Corporal 1968-1971

Davie Coker doesn't seek attention or accolades. At 76, he speaks with soft conviction. When he shares his story, it's with the weight of experience and the humility of someone who has seen the best and worst of humanity.

Born and raised in Roby, a community about two hours southeast of Lubbock, Coker enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1968 at 19. Initially assigned to work as a military electrician with the 5th Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Coker quickly requested a change. "I went to my sergeants and said, 'I joined the Marine Corps to go to Vietnam,'" he said. That determination led Coker to work in motor transportation, which would place him on the front lines.

After completing rigorous training in guerrilla warfare and jungle survival, Coker was deployed with Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, to Vietnam in early 1970. "When we landed in Da Nang, the flight we were on never shut off the engines," Coker said. "They just told us to get out here, get off the plane." It was a stark and sudden introduction to war.

His training suggested he would drive and maintain vehicles, but Coker's primary role became that of a Marine rifleman.

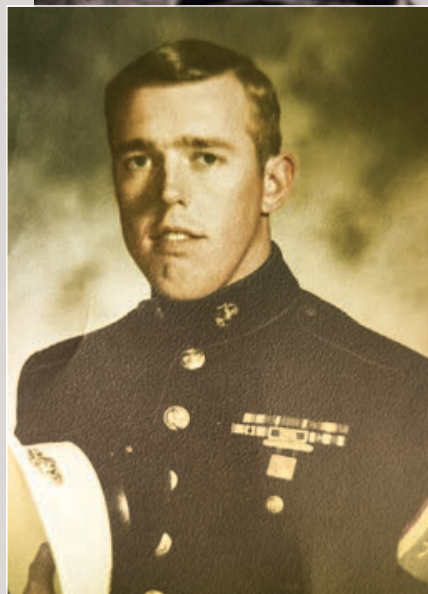
He conducted convoy missions, constructed defensive positions and worked alongside K-9 units trained in detection of both enemy troops and explosives in the jungles northwest of Da Nang. The work was dangerous, but camaraderie and humor helped the Marines endure.

"Vietnam — it was full of tragedy. You just dealt with it, you know?" Coker said.

During his time in Vietnam, he worked with Civil Affairs for about six months with villagers during the night, helping them set up perimeters to protect themselves. He also worked with Delta Company to get K-9 units into operation in the hills.

Coker's more than 10 months in Vietnam left physical and emotional scars. He was unknowingly exposed to white phosphorus, a chemical used in artillery shells that ignites when exposed to oxygen. He gradually lost vision in his right eye. Despite multiple surgeries, the damage was irreversible. "You don't always know what's happening to you in the moment," Coker said. "But you carry it with you."

He recalled the intensity of his time in Vietnam — where survival often depended on instinct, quick decisions and the strength of his fellow Marines, he said.



Coker returned to Texas in February 1971 and installed irrigation systems for farms near Lubbock. Later he worked in electrical and mechanical maintenance, and moved to Kansas. "When we got back from the war, service members would sit inside the VFW in Lawrence, Kansas, maybe order a pitcher of beer and talk about our time there. But only the funny stuff. We made a rule: no talking about the bad stuff, just the moments that made us laugh."



Davie Coker in his Marine Corps dress blues in 1970, when he was 21. After training in guerrilla warfare and jungle survival, he was deployed with Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, to Vietnam early that year, where he served for 10 months.

Coker remained steadfast in his commitment to service. He settled in the Tahitian Village area of Bastrop in 2007 and became an active member of American Legion Post 533, holding several leadership roles there. "You can't slow down," Coker said. "That's when you fall."

The American Legion gives Coker a way to help veterans stay connected, supported and understood. "It's about being there for each other," he said. "We've all been through something, and we understand in a way that others might not."

Coker doesn't dwell on the past, but he does honor it. He moves forward and supports those walking a similar path.

Fifty-five years after he served in Vietnam, Coker holds fast to his belief in America's military. "I served because I believed in something bigger than myself," he said. "And I'd do it again."

Don Holley

U.S. Air Force Captain 1970-1980

Don Holley was only 22 when he left Alabama to chase a dream that would take him higher and faster than most people would ever dare. “I wanted to fly fast things,” Holley said, recalling the moment he chose the U.S. Air Force over a family legacy rooted in the Army.

His father and three uncles, all World War II veterans, had secured him an appointment to the Army’s prestigious West Point military academy — without telling Holley. When he chose not to accept their offer, Holley had to pay for college on his own.

By the time Holley had earned a degree in aerospace engineering at Auburn University, his father had softened — so much so that he and an uncle pinned the lieutenant bars on Holley’s uniform at graduation, when Holley was commissioned into the Air Force.

Holley began his decade-long career in the Air Force in 1970. He flew combat missions in Southeast Asia and test flights that pushed the limits of aviation. He served a little over a year at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base, flying missions over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. “In combat, you do things you would not normally do,” he said. “And you experience things you’re never going to experience anywhere else.”

His most harrowing experience came in 1977, he said, during a test flight of an F-111 fighter-bomber over the Pacific Ocean. Tasked with pushing the aircraft to Mach 2.5, he reached Mach 2.42 when both engines exploded. “A fireball engulfed the canopy,” he said. His flight test engineer reached for the ejection handle, but Holley grabbed his hand and the handle, stopping him.

“If you go out at Mach 2, you’re not going to make it,” Holley told him.

Instead, Holley pulled the aircraft into a steep climb, up past 70,000 feet — high enough that a lack of oxygen extinguished the fire. He managed to restart one engine and brought the damaged aircraft back to McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento. “I saved a \$17 million airplane, but I still got my butt chewed,” he said.

Holley was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross — one of the military’s highest honors for heroism or extraordinary achievement during flight — plus a Service Medal and four Air Medals.



Don Holley, an experimental test pilot, exits an aircraft at McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, Calif., in 1978. By then, he had spent eight years in the U.S. Air Force, flying F-111s and A-10s and completing supersonic test missions over the Pacific.

technology provider, in Brenham. He founded Holley Oil Co. in 1989. His firm drilled more than 30 successful wells in Texas before he retired in 2014.

Today, Holley is 77. He still lives in Brenham, staying active with the Washington County Veterans Association and Brenham VFW Post 7104. He honors the legacy of fellow airmen by helping maintain the F-111 aircraft memorial in Brenham — a tribute to 10 crew members lost during Operation Linebacker II in 1972 over Vietnam. Holley knew some of the men memorialized.

Holley has advice for veterans who struggle with their past: “God has a way of getting us through everything,” he said. “He won’t ever give you more than you can handle.”

After 10 years of service, he left the Air Force. He married his wife, Lois, two weeks after his last test flight.

Five months after leaving the Air Force, he started work for Schlumberger, the global oil and gas service and

Honoring Bluebonnet's veterans

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative honors Veterans Day, Nov. 11, with gratitude for the men and women who have worn the uniforms of our nation. This year, we recognize 25 employees who served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Army National Guard. Their call to duty took them across the U.S. and overseas, and today they continue that commitment by providing safe, reliable electricity to more than 105,000 Bluebonnet members in 14 Central Texas counties.



MICHAEL BLAND
U.S. Army, Specialist;
Army National Guard,
Command Sergeant Major



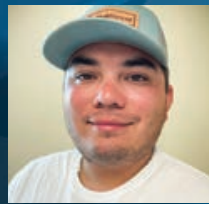
JEFFREY BOLDING
U.S. Marines,
Lance Corporal



ERIC COBB
U.S. Army, Sergeant



THOMAS ELLIS
U.S. Air Force,
Airman 1st Class



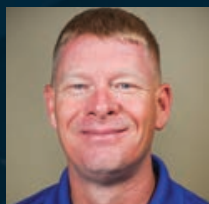
IZAAC ESTRADA
U.S. Army Reserve,
Private 1st Class



MICHAEL GUAJARDO
U.S. Army Reserve,
Sergeant 1st Class



COLTON HARRIS
U.S. Army, Corporal



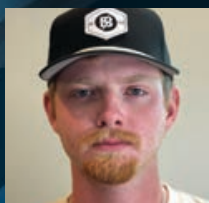
BRANDON JOHNSON
U.S. Army, Specialist;
Army National Guard,
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LANCE KAY
U.S. Army, Sergeant



KEITH KNOBLOCH
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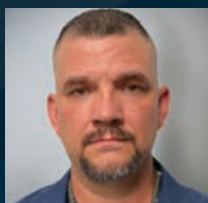
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HOLIDAY UTILITY SCAMS

Be on alert for phone, email and door-to-door fraud



SCAMMERS ARE MORE likely to take advantage of you by stealing money or personal information during the holidays, when you are more likely to be distracted. While you are busy shopping, traveling and preparing for celebrations, be aware of these common scams:

- **Demands for immediate payment.** Scammers may claim your electricity will be shut off unless you pay immediately, often demanding payment via wire transfer or reloadable card.
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- **Email phishing.** Scammers may send emails posing as Bluebonnet, requesting that you send money, provide passwords or share other personal information.
- **Door-to-door impostors.** Some scammers might show up unannounced, posing as Bluebonnet employees and offering a free energy audit or other service.

Bluebonnet will never threaten to disconnect service over the phone, request payment by prepaid card or cash, ask for account passwords, call from an out-of-state number, direct you to call an unofficial number or sell products or services door-to-door.

If you suspect a scam, call law enforcement and Bluebonnet at 800-842-7708.

For more ways to spot and stop scams, visit bluebonnet.coop/scams.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Tuesday, Nov. 11, for Veterans Day and Thursday, Nov. 27 through Friday, Nov. 28, for Thanksgiving. If your power goes out, you can report it by texting OUT to 44141, online at

bluebonnet.coop, on the MyBluebonnet mobile app or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay your bills anytime online, on the mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (select Option 2 when prompted).

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TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



Taking Texico

How a Panhandle town ‘stole’ its rowdy New Mexico neighbors overnight

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY JONATHAN CARLSON

THIS IS A TALE of two towns established just a few years apart along the Texas-New Mexico border.

Texico, on the New Mexico side, sprang up first as a shanty along the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway in the early 1900s. It had a reputation as one of the wildest towns in the West. Its gambling halls, bars and brothels were built on an untitled parcel of property one writer called “the unsurveyed strip.”

Then, a few years later, came Farwell, just across the border. It was better built on titled lands and far more orderly.

The lore of the period claimed that Farwell stole the town of Texico, almost overnight. It’s a large claim but not without merit. Here’s how it happened.

Texico was a town of squatters and

wooden shacks that sprang up quickly and haphazardly. The shacks were about the size of today’s average backyard shed. They had dirt floors and could be picked up and moved easily with just a few people walking them down the dusty street to a better location and a better view.

Imagine a squatter going to sleep in his home one night, dreaming of the garden he would plant—and the next morning waking up to greet a new neighbor whose shack was sitting where the dreamed-of garden was supposed to go. But with no surveyed lots and no titles, it was difficult to claim ownership of anything.

A writer for *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Eleanor Gates, went to visit these most unc cosmopolitan twin towns at the turn of the last century. She listed the

businesses along one side of the street in Texico like so: “gambling-hell, restaurant, saloon, gambling-hell, billiard-parlor, jewelry-shop, livery stable, saloon.”

The buildings were made of poor wood, showed their rafters inside and had roofs of corrugated iron. These businesses were full of unsavory characters and poor souls looking for work on the railroad.

In contrast to this rootless world was Farwell, a planned community of sorts, named for the Farwell brothers of XIT Ranch fame.

There was money behind the Texas town. Buildings of fine brick rose above the prairie: a bank, two churches, a school, laundry, drugstore, lumberyard and icehouse. Little white markers that identified titled lots could be plainly seen by the squatters over in Texico.

There was a permanence to the town—and no gambling halls, dance halls or saloons. It was a place for raising a family.

It wasn’t long until the men of Texico started getting their buddies to help them walk their shacks over to newly acquired titled lots in Farwell. A grand exodus happened quickly, with Texico citizens moving to Farwell, a land of promise.

Farwell’s town manager increased the pressure on Texico by publicizing plans for a landscaped courthouse and a \$30,000 hotel. The locals saw that Texico might soon be dust in the wind.

And though Texico did shrink substantially, it did not disappear.

People in Farwell didn’t forget the good times they once enjoyed across the border. Some of them stepped across that line often, when they wished to cut loose and drink, dance and gamble. Perhaps there was even a saying back then, “What happens in Texico stays in Texico.” ■

Turkey Time

The many encores for Thanksgiving leftovers

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Every Thanksgiving I'm left with loads of mashed potatoes, so I love finding ways to transform them. Enter the croquette, a delightful little bite of creamy potatoes with a crispy coating. The traditional version has ham, but today I'm adding turkey to the mix.

Thanksgiving Croquettes

2 cups mashed potatoes
1 cup finely diced cooked turkey
1 teaspoon garlic salt
1 teaspoon onion salt
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 egg
1 tablespoon water
2 cups panko breadcrumbs
Vegetable oil, for frying
1 cup cranberry sauce
¼–½ cup orange juice

1. In a bowl, combine mashed potatoes, turkey, garlic salt and onion salt. Cover and refrigerate 2 hours.
2. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Scoop 2 rounded tablespoons mashed potatoes mixture, form into a ball and place on baking sheet. Continue this process until all croquettes are formed. Refrigerate 30 minutes.
3. In a bowl, stir together flour, salt and pepper. In another bowl, whisk together egg and water. Place panko breadcrumbs in a third bowl.
4. Roll each croquette in flour, shake off excess flour, dip in egg wash, then roll in breadcrumbs to coat.
5. Add 2 inches of oil to a large skillet over medium-high heat. Preheat oven to 200 degrees to keep croquettes warm after frying.
6. Fry croquettes in heated oil in batches, until golden brown on all sides, turning as needed. Drain on paper towels. Keep warm in oven.
7. In a small saucepan over low heat, combine cranberry sauce and ¼ cup orange juice. Cook until warm and thinned to desired consistency. Add additional orange juice if needed.
8. Serve warm sauce over croquettes.

MAKES 12–14 CROQUETTES

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Turkey Tostadas With Pineapple Salsa.



Turkey Tetrazzini

LENICE BLAIR
TRI-COUNTY EC

When you have leftover turkey, nothing beats an extra-comforting baked spaghetti casserole. It has it all—tender turkey, fresh veggies, creamy sauce and grated Parmesan. Blair has been cooking this recipe from her sister for years.

12 ounces uncooked spaghetti
2 slices bacon
¼ cup diced onion
½ cup diced green bell pepper
1 cup sliced mushrooms
2 tablespoons flour
½ cup chicken broth
1 cup heavy cream
¼ cup diced pimiento peppers
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 cups diced cooked turkey
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cook spaghetti according to package directions. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. In a large skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Remove from skillet, allow to cool and crumble. Leave bacon drippings.
3. Add onion, bell pepper and mushrooms to skillet. Cook until tender. Stir in flour, chicken broth, cream and pimientos.
4. Reduce heat to simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce thickens. Season with salt and black pepper. Stir in spaghetti, bacon and turkey.
5. Pour into prepared baking dish. Sprinkle with Parmesan. Bake 30 minutes.

SERVES 6

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Stretch-a-Turkey Salad

KAY BELL
HEART OF TEXAS EC



After I have cooked, stirred, mashed and baked an entire feast, all I crave is something I don't have to cook. Bring on Bell's salad in a sandwich with a heaping pile of chips because—let's be honest—the best part of Thanksgiving dinner is the lunch on Friday.

2 celery stalks, trimmed and chopped into chunks
2 sweet gherkin pickles, chopped

½ cup pecan halves
1 Red Delicious apple, cored, peeled and sliced
2 cups chopped cooked turkey
½ cup halved black grapes
¾ cup mayonnaise, plus more for sandwich assembly
¾ cup rice Chex, slightly crushed
Sliced bread for sandwiches (optional)

1. In a large food processor, combine celery, pickles, pecan halves and apple. Pulse until finely chopped and transfer to a large bowl.
2. Place turkey in food processor. Pulse until turkey is finely chopped.
3. Add turkey, grapes and mayonnaise to the large bowl. Stir to combine. Stir in crushed rice Chex.
4. Cover and refrigerate in airtight container until ready to serve.
5. To make a sandwich, spread a little mayonnaise on each slice of bread. Add a scoop of turkey salad and spread to edges.

SERVES 8

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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UPCOMING: MOM'S FAVORITES DUE DEC 10



ENTER
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Jammin' Quesadilla

BEVERLY NUBER
COSERV

I'm not sure Thanksgiving leftovers have ever tasted better than as part of a quesadilla topped with cranberry bacon jam. This one is a family favorite in Nuber's household, and the jam is "always a hit, even for the most defiant cranberry haters," she says.

CRANBERRY BACON JAM

8 slices bacon
2 cups diced onion
2 cups cranberry sauce
Juice of 1 lemon

QUESADILLA

2 cups shredded colby jack cheese, divided use
2 9-inch flour tortillas
1 cup chopped cooked turkey
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 jalapeño pepper, finely diced
½ cup coarsely chopped cilantro, divided use
½ cup cranberry bacon jam (recipe below)
½ cup sour cream

1. **CRANBERRY BACON JAM** In a skillet over medium heat, fry bacon until crispy. Remove and drain bacon drippings, leaving behind 2 tablespoons.

2. Reduce heat to low. Add onion to bacon drippings and cook, stirring occasionally, until caramelized, about 15–20 minutes.

3. Crumble cooked bacon and add to skillet. Stir in cranberry sauce and cook until mixture slightly thickens, about 10 minutes.

4. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice. Recipe makes 2–3 cups, and bacon jam can be made ahead and refrigerated up to a week or frozen up to 6 months.

5. **QUESADILLA** Sprinkle 1 cup cheese over 1 tortilla, then top with turkey, cumin, jalapeño and ¼ cup cilantro. Sprinkle the remaining cup of cheese over cilantro and top with second tortilla.

6. In a skillet over medium-low heat, cook quesadilla 3–4 minutes. Flip and cook an additional 3–4 minutes or until slightly crisp. Remove from skillet and slice into wedges.

7. Spread sour cream over top of quesadilla. Spread cranberry bacon jam over sour cream and top with remaining ¼ cup cilantro.

SERVES 1–2

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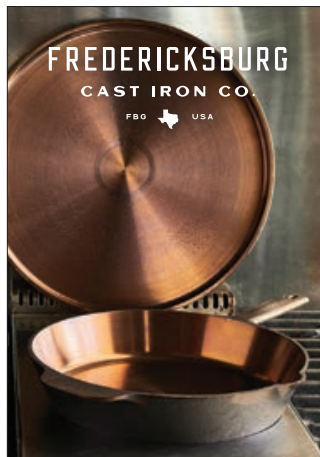
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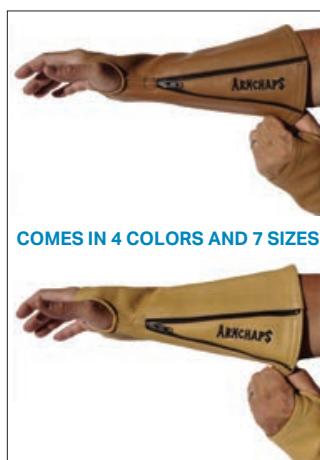
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Saving Grapes

The humble house where a Texan rescued the French wine industry

BY CHET GARNER

I STOOD IN THE MIDDLE of a quiet North Texas neighborhood, staring at a quaint Victorian home with lace curtains and a porch that looked perfect for sipping sweet tea. This is Vinita, the 1887 home of the man who arguably saved the world's wine industry—Thomas Volney Munson.

No giant tasting room. No vineyard views. Just a humble house with a Texas-sized story.

Inside I met up with a docent from Grayson College, the stewards of Vinita. They explained how a tiny insect named phylloxera wreaked havoc on Europe's vineyards starting around 1863, destroying 40% of French grapevines and sending the wine world into panic.

Enter T.V. Munson, a Denison horticulturist with an eye for resilient roots. Munson had spent decades trekking Texas, cataloging native grapes that had evolved to survive in tough, pest-filled soil. French winemakers knew of Munson's expertise, and they requested he send some of his grape hybrid rootstock to France, where it was grafted onto French vines.

The new hybrids flourished and ended the epidemic. To this day, nearly every grapevine in France sits atop American roots. For this, Munson was awarded the Legion of Honor, France's highest distinction. Not bad for a small-town Texan.

The Vinita home, tours of which can be arranged through the college, displays artifacts from Munson's life, including detailed grape illustrations and the tools he used to work the vineyards that once surrounded the historic home in Denison, along the Red River north of Dallas.

If you want to taste Munson's legacy, you can toast a glass of wine at nearby Homestead Winery or visit Ironroot Republic Distillery, which makes French-style brandy. After all, Munson's feat saved cognac, too.

Denison, better known as the birthplace of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, is off the beaten path, but for wine lovers and history buffs, it's a must-sip experience. ■

ABOVE Chet stands in front of Thomas Volney Munson's historic home, the Vinita House, in Denison.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

NOVEMBER

7

Oakville **Dobie Dichos**, (361) 319-3067, dobiedichos.com

Brenham [7-9] Christmas at the Mansion, (979) 836-1690, giddingsstonemansion.com

8

Mabank Honoring Our Veterans Daughters of the American Revolution, (972) 978-5126, sarahmaplesinfo@gmail.com

Mansfield Veterans Day Parade, (817) 728-3390, visitmansfieldtexas.com

San Marcos Veterans Day Hangar Dinner Dance, (737) 285-0015, hangardance.org

Smithville Tour of Homes, (512) 237-2313, business.smithvilletx.org

Sunrise Beach Village Sip & Stroll Art Show & Sale, ccaasunrisebeach@gmail.com, ccaasunrisebeach.com

9

Lufkin Lightwire Theater's Dino-Light, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

14

Palestine [14-December 28] The Polar Express, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

15

Bluff Dale The Front Porch Christmas Market, (817) 946-0141, thefrontporchbluffdale.com

Hempstead Knights of Columbus Benefit Quilt Show, (713) 816-1923, kcbenefitquiltshow.com

22

Bastrop Baron de Bastrop's Birthday, (512) 303-0904, bastropcountyhistorical society.com

29

Mineral Wells Merry Wells—A Candy Cane Christmas, (940) 325-2557, visitmineralwells.org

DECEMBER

2

Columbus Lighted Christmas Parade, (979) 732-8385, columbus-texas.org

Waxahachie Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

4

Corsicana [4-7] White Christmas, (903) 872-5421, thew-lac.com

5

Grapevine Big Band Holiday Swing Thing, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

Luling Cookies & Carols, (830) 875-5058, lulingmainstreet.org

Brenham [5-6] Christmas Stroll & Lighted Parade, (979) 337-7580, jingle.cityofbrenham.org

Huntsville [5-6] Journey Through Bethlehem, (615) 975-1334, journeythroughbethlehem.com

6

Castroville Castroville Conservation Society Candlelight Home Tour, (830) 708-5680, castrovilleconservationsociety.org

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We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your February event by December 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.



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Karen Nejtcek, Production Manager October 1, 2025

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Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest—but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

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Abstract

Light, when used as a painter's brush, can create something new and interesting. Objects around us can take on new appearances through the lens of another. Readers sure found abstract beauty.

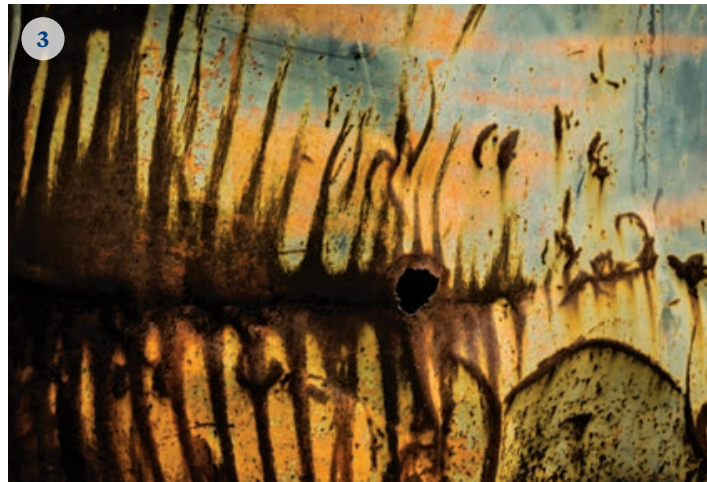
CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 NARENDRA MORUM
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
Grand Teton National Park.



2 DUSTIN JOHNSON
PEDERNALES EC
"Flower still life shot on a rainy day."



3 RAY LITTLE
KARNES EC
"I love rusty metal—the patterns, the colors, and none of them are the same. This rust was from a horse trailer."



4 JACOB SAUNDERS
PEDERNALES EC
"Hand-held zooming shot looking south on Red River Street in Austin."

Upcoming Contests

STILL LIFE DUE NOV 10
GATES DUE DEC 10
CAUGHT NAPPING DUE JAN 10



ENTER
ONLINE

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Abstract photos from readers.



Giving Thanks

When the floods took so much, helpers delivered some hope

BY CLAUDIA SULLIVAN
ILLUSTRATION BY
ERIC KITTELBERGER

IN THE EARLY-MORNING hours of July 4, the Hill Country experienced a devastating flood of unimaginable proportions that took the lives of more than 135 people.

The losses are beyond comprehension. Everyone experienced, even if indirectly, the pain of loss and the ache of failed hope.

Among the victims are 24 little girls who were having the time of their lives at summer camp. I know because I was a little girl at Camp Mystic in 1964, and I returned each summer as a counselor and program director until 1979.

In those hills and along the Guadalupe River, I learned, as many have, of the love of God and the preciousness of friendship. I learned a reverence for nature and about who I was as a person. We played, prayed,

grew and learned without a thought of the outside world.

The beautiful landscape came to feel like an extension of my body, one that feels now like an amputation.

As I gather with loved ones this month, my mind will be with the friends I lost in the flood, but I'll also be thinking of the countless stories of survival, selflessness, courage, bravery and resilience that give us all cause to be thankful.

In the days and hours following the 34-foot rise on the Guadalupe River, thousands of emergency responders from at least 26 states and Mexico, including some as far away as North Dakota and Minnesota, rushed to assist in search and rescue operations. More than 850 survivors were rescued from trees, rooftops and fast-moving floodwaters.

Of course, locals also heeded the call to action, and soon anyone with a bulldozer, tractor, backhoe, excavator or horse trailer headed to the flood zone.

The temperamental nature of the river made heroes out of ordinary people who struggled to survive.

One woman, caught in the attic of a once-peaceful riverside hotel, was forced out through a small window onto the roof. From there, she caught sight of a woman and her dog being swept away. She reached out, grabbed the woman by the arm and brought them to safety.

Not far downriver, Camp Mystic's teenage counselors walked scared campers through rushing water toward safety.

Long after the media and the searchers have left, we're still living with and among the horrors of this tragedy and its effects on our community.

So many Thanksgiving gatherings will never be the same. There will be empty chairs, empty tables.

Hold close the people around you. And cherish the stories of those willing to assist in restoring and rebuilding and mending the brokenhearted. For them, I'm thankful. ■

1920s Style for a 1920s Price

It was a warm summer afternoon and my wife and I were mingling with the best of them. The occasion was a 1920s-themed party, and everyone was dressed to the nines. Parked on the manse's circular driveway was a beautiful classic convertible. It was here that I got the idea for our new 1920s Retrograde Watch.

Never ones to miss an opportunity, we carefully steadied our glasses of bubbly and climbed into the car's long front seat. Among the many opulent features on display was a series of dashboard dials that accentuated the car's lavish aura. One of those dials inspired our 1920s Retrograde Watch, a genuinely unique timepiece that marries timeless style with modern technology.

With its remarkable retrograde hour and minute indicators, sunburst guilloché face and precision movement, this design is truly one of a kind. What does retrograde mean? Instead of displaying the hands rotating on an axis like most watches, the hands sweep in a semicircle, then return to their starting point and begin all over again.

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