

THE RESURRECTION
OF A CHURCH

RECIPES FOR
HOLIDAY BREAKFAST

KEEP CHRISTMAS
TRADITIONS WEIRD

Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2025

Texas' Tinsel Towns

The Polar Express
turns Palestine and Rusk
into Santa's villages

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16



– MAKES A –
GREAT GIFT

PERFECTLY AGED, TENDER STEAKS

ACHIEVE GIFTING GREATNESS

Eliminate guesswork by sending a mouthwatering assortment of gourmet Omaha Steaks to everyone on your gift list. The best part: every bite is guaranteed perfect!



You'll love it or
your money back!



The Ideal Gift **SAVE 61%**

- 4 Bacon-Wrapped Filet Mignons (5 oz.)
- 4 Air-Chilled Boneless Chicken Breasts (4 oz.)
- 4 Gourmet Jumbo Franks (3 oz.)
- 4 Individual Scalloped Potatoes (3.8 oz.)
- 4 Caramel Apple Tartlets (4 oz.)

8 FREE Omaha Steaks Burgers (4 oz.)

79611WHC separately \$232.95

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY PRICE

\$89⁹⁹

Limited Time
**8 FREE
BURGERS**
A \$22 value!



**ORDER
NOW!**

OmahaSteaks.com/IdealGift3528 | 1.888.652.9385

Ask for your FREE burgers with offer 79611WHC

Savings shown over aggregated single item base price. 8 free 4 oz. burgers will be sent to each shipping address that includes SKU 79611. Limit 2 on select items at these exclusive prices. While supplies last. Items may be substituted due to inventory limitations. Standard shipping rates will be applied and are subject to change. Minimum purchase and other restrictions may apply. Some products may not be available for sale in your area. Sales are subject to OmahaSteaks.com/terms-of-useOSI. Expires 02/28/26. | SRC0715

Scan Now



OmahaSteaks.com/IdealGift3528

December 2025



10

06 The More, the Merrier

Polar Express trains take riders on a magical journey from East Texas to the North Pole.

By Jan Adamson
Photos by Dave Shafer

The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition.

By Eileen Mattei
Photos by Erich Schlegel

ON THE COVER
From left, Remy and Rendon Unger and Kynlee Kampen hope to catch Santa's attention—for all the right reasons.
Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE
Friends of the Ruidosa Church carry out their rebuilding mission along the Rio Grande.
Photo by Erich Schlegel

04	Currents The latest buzz
05	TCP Talk Readers respond
16	Co-op News Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative
25	Footnotes in Texas History Turn of Fortune By W.F. Strong
26	TCP Kitchen Holiday Breakfast By Vianney Rodriguez
30	Hit the Road Slabs of Strudel By Chet Garner
33	Focus on Texas Photo Contest: Country Life
34	Observations Our Kind of Weird By Shane Torno

Live, From Austin ...



Lorne Michaels, from left, watches a sketch rehearsal featuring Madeline Kahn, Will Ferrell and Cheri Oteri.

THE LEGACY OF LORNE MICHAELS, best known as the creator and producer of the long-running TV show *Saturday Night Live*, is the focus of an exhibit at the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center in Austin.

On display are scripts, production notes, props and costumes from the iconic show that has changed pop culture since it went on the air in October 1975.

Live from New York: The Lorne Michaels Collection runs through March 20, 2026. Admission is free.



For Heaven's Sake

The Hail Mary pass unofficially turns 50 this month, though the Notre Dame football team referred to desperation plays as Hail Marys as early as 1922.

But Roger Staubach's 45-yard heave that fell into the hands of receiver Drew Pearson for the Dallas Cowboys' game-winning touchdown over the Minnesota Vikings in the 1975 NFL playoffs made the name of a Catholic prayer into a signature play.

As Staubach, left, explained, "They asked me, 'What were you thinking about when you threw the ball?' I said, 'When I closed my eyes, I said a Hail Mary.'"

TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Mom's Favorites

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Gates

RECOMMENDED READING

We think of Santa as bearing gifts. But do you know about the time he was naughty? Read *Naughty Santa* from December 2014 at TexasCoopPower.com.



ENTER ONLINE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Dear Santa,
I would like ...

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 responses to our October prompt: **The best food I've ever had at a fair is ...**

Frito pie served in a chip bag, as God intended.

ROBIN THOMPSON PERRY
VIA FACEBOOK

Fletcher's corny dog, State Fair of Texas—1953, 14 years old and new to Texas.

CAROL MERCER
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
FAIRVIEW

A burger between a split Krispy Kreme doughnut for the bun at the State Fair of Texas. Weirdly good.

KATHY WHITBY
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC
FLINT

Smoked turkey leg, Shakespearean festival, July 2021, Kalispell, Montana.

TED HENDRIX
VIA FACEBOOK

Funnel cakes drizzled with chocolate sauce, topped with fresh strawberries and lots of whipped cream.

JANICE EHLERS
GVEC
SEGUIN

Gumbo at a seafood festival in south Louisiana.

WALT HUDSON
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

Catching Up With a Friend

“We just returned after five months outside of Texas, and I’m catching up on your magazine. Interesting stories: the missile silos, goats, flour, Frisbees and grapes.”

J. BAILEY
BANDERA EC
UTOPIA



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Two Bits and a Bag of Chips

From 1956 to 1960, I worked at the G.F. Wacker variety store in Levelland [It's in the Bag, September 2025]. The Fritos chili pie was sold daily—with a Coke and candy bar, all for about 25 cents.

Genie Ballew
Lamb County EC
Levelland

A State for Horses

I moved to Texas thinking it was a state for horses but was astonished to learn there are few places to ride but the roads and private property [Mounts in the Hills, September 2025]. In Washington I helped pack families and hunters into the Cascade wilderness, where we could ride for weeks.

While I admire the Texas Equestrian Trail Riders Association for all its work, I think our state forest service should support trail riders as other states have done, for example the rails-to-trails

projects in which the state pays to convert old railroad tracks into riding trails.

Loretta Bedford
Deep East Texas EC
San Augustine

I hope the article results in increased membership in TETRA since they do such awesome and necessary work. I'm not a horse rider, but I can appreciate the importance of maintaining equestrian trails to help keep people in contact with nature.

Elena Rivera
Pedernales EC
Austin

Nature Erases

I did not know the story of the ghost town Eagle Springs [Ebb and Flow, September 2025]. The simple beauty of Martha Deering's final paragraph—"evening breeze shivers" and "whispering of voices"—took my breath away. Nature erases, and it reclaims.

Mark Troth
Bluebonnet EC
Chappell Hill



DAVE SHAEFER

TCP WRITE TO US
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

TEXAS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair Bryan Wood, San Augustine
Vice Chair Cameron Smallwood, Burleson
Secretary-Treasurer Jim Coleman, Edna
Board Members Matt Bentke, Bastrop
Kerry Kelton, Navasota • Mark McClain,
Roby • Zac Perkins, Hooker, Oklahoma

PRESIDENT/CEO Mike Williams, Austin

COMMUNICATIONS & MEMBER
SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mike Ables, Bellville • Kathi Calvert, Crockett
Tachi Hinojosa, Fredericksburg
Gary Miller, Bryan • Bryan Story, Blossom
Grace Subealdeia, Dalhart
Buff Whitten, Eldorado

MAGAZINE STAFF

Vice President, Communications & Member Services Martin Bevin
Editor Chris Burrows
Associate Editor Tom Widlowski
Production Manager Karen Nejtek
Creative Manager Andy Doughty
Advertising Manager Elaine Sproull
Communications Specialist Samantha Bryant
Digital Media Specialist Caytlyn Calhoun
Senior Designer Stacy Coale
Assistant Production Manager Alex Dal Santo
Print Production Specialist Grace Fultz
Food Editor Vianney Rodriguez
Communications Specialist Erin Sinclair
Communications Specialist Claire Stevens
Communications Specialist Kelly Tran
Proofreader Louie Bond

TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 82, Number 6 (USPS 540-560). Texas Co-op Power is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 76 electric cooperatives. Texas Co-op Power's website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS Subscription price is \$5.11 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

Co-op members: Please notify your co-op of address changes or other subscription requests.

POSTMASTER Send address changes to Texas Co-op Power (USPS 540-560), 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. Please enclose label from this copy of Texas Co-op Power showing old address and key numbers.

ADVERTISING Contact Elaine Sproull at (512) 486-6251 or espru@texas-ec.org for information about purchasing display ad space in Texas Co-op Power and/or in our 26 sister publications in other states. Advertisements in Texas Co-op Power are paid solicitations. The publisher neither endorses nor guarantees in any manner any product or company included in this publication.

COPYRIGHT All content © 2025 Texas Electric Cooperatives Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction of this issue or any portion of it is expressly prohibited without written permission. Willie Wire-hand © 2025 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Texas Electric Cooperatives
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



BY JAN ADAMSON • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

The More, the Merrier

Polar Express trains take riders on a magical journey from East Texas to the North Pole





Shhh. Listen.

It's a train whistle—low and long and lonely and romantic. It's a sound that for 150 years has permeated the Pineywoods town of Palestine.

But the whistle heard December 31, 1969, was thought to be the last. That day, Texas South-Eastern Railroad engine No. 22, a 70-ton diesel-electric locomotive, pulled into the station for the last time—the end of a century of regular freight and passenger service in Palestine.

But listen closely today along the 25-mile track between Palestine and Rusk, to the east, and you'll hear plenty of whistles and maybe even singing, laughter and bells. If you catch a glimpse into a passing train car, you'll see families in matching pajamas, dancing chefs and trays full of hot chocolate.

LEFT Santa doesn't always travel by sleigh—especially when he's in Texas.

ABOVE Remy and Rendon Unger take in the countryside on the way to the North Pole.

Ever since the Palestine-Rusk line reopened as a tourist railway called the Texas State Railroad on June 25, 1976, it has been building a corps of believers. Tens of thousands of them turn out each holiday season for the service's wildly popular Polar Express trips based on the film released in 2004 and the 1985 book by Chris Van Allsburg.

"With the popularity of the film, the Polar Express Train Ride has just grown and grown," says Amy Parady, president of the Texas State Railroad, which launched round-trip Christmas-themed excursions 20 years ago. "Many have made a tradition out of the event, so they come every year."

Like the Corley family from Magnolia.

"We meet new people and sit with different families," Kevin Corley says. "It's very interactive. We've never had a bad experience."

Long before it whisked families to the "North Pole," Palestine began its golden age after the Civil War when the International Railroad and the Houston and Great Northern Railroad opened a route between Hearne and Palestine. The transport of goods and passengers resulted in great wealth, allowing merchants and railroad executives to build massive mansions, especially in Palestine.

In 1881, when a prison was built in Rusk, the line was extended to the east. Shortly thereafter, the Palestine car shop was built to modify and repair freight cars. In 1971, not long after shipments of logging and mining equipment and passengers ceased, local banker Jack R. Stone, a member of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, and Rusk Mayor Emmett H. Whitehead led a campaign to reopen the railroad as a tourist attraction, and the Texas State Railroad was born.

A \$3 million appropriation went into refurbishing the rails, and Rusk and Palestine built support facilities such as campsites before the two depots were built. The line has been operated by private companies since 2007.

About half of the passenger cars are commuter coaches built in 1923 for other railroads; they're pulled by an assortment of vintage diesel- and steam-powered locomotives.

The railroad hosts a variety of excursions throughout the year. There's Rockin' the Rails, in which passengers attend a concert; the Rusk Turntable Run, which makes use of the 130-year-old, compressed air-powered railcar turntable in Maydelle; and Mother's Day and Father's Day trips. There are autumn- and Halloween-themed trains, dinner excursions, and trips that celebrate local beer and wine.



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Kynlee Kampen with her silver sleigh bell. The Polar Express departs from the Palestine depot.

RIGHT Engine 30, at 100 years old, comes to life in the early morning before a day's excursions.

But far and away the most popular themed ride is the Polar Express.

"We always have multiple [marriage] proposals and engagements during every season, which is always special," Parady says. "We have had grown individuals who have never seen Santa before, and just to watch the grandparents and parents see the joy in the eyes of the children creates magic every year."

The cars are festooned inside with greenery and twinkling lights, and outside, along the route to the North Pole—did you know it's in Rusk?—Christmas decorations whiz past the windows.

Passengers are encouraged to bring a copy of the book or buy one at the depot, and once aboard, they're served hot chocolate and cookies by dancing chefs who act out various scenes. On arrival at the North Pole, passengers are greeted by Santa and his elves, who bestow the first gift of Christmas: a silver sleigh bell that can only be heard by believers. The chefs lead passengers in Christmas carols on the return trip.

But the experience changes each year. Employees gather to discuss and workshop new ideas and improvements.

An adults-only railcar has club chairs. There's an open-air car with bench seats, an observation dome car, and another with tables and sofas. There's even a car that can be booked for private parties. The cars have the feel of a long-ago time because of the original fixtures retained throughout.

It all makes for a special experience.

"We have a family that started coming the first year we did the Polar Express train ride, and their son was 4 years old," Parady says. "They have never missed a year, and now their son is 22 years old."

Logistically, Polar Express season requires careful orchestration. Within a six-week time frame in November and December, there are typically 105–110 round trips with as many as five trains running a day for 60,000–70,000 passengers. Reservations open in July at texasstaterailroad.net.

"We hire typically 150 additional team members just for our Polar season," Parady says. "It is quite a feat pulling this event off with the ridership we have in such a short time frame."

Performers on the Polar Express have a reputation for the joy and professionalism they bring to the job, making it no wonder that passengers return year after year—and get into the spirit.

"About 95% of our visitors always arrive in matching pajamas," Parady says. "We have had people plan their family



On the Rails

The Texas State Railroad is a movie star, having been featured in more than 35 films, TV series, documentaries and commercials. Most recently, the train and the Palestine depot were part of the first episode of *1883*, the prequel to the *Yellowstone* series. The railroad also starred in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; *American Outlaws*; *The Great Debaters*; and *The Gambler Returns: The Luck of the Draw*.

reunions around our event. We have multigenerational attendees, meaning great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children all attending together. Families have become extremely creative with their attire, and many customize their pajamas or even make their own."

The Corley family has made the Polar Express a tradition. Kelly and Kevin Corley and their children, Piper and Carter, have been attending since 2015. "We read the book and watch the film," Kelly says. "It's such a joy to watch the kids' faces light up when they see the story play out in real life."

The Corleys prefer to take a late afternoon excursion so they can experience the sounds and smoke from the train during the daylight, and then, in the evening, they get to see the glowing Christmas lights and decorations on the return trip.

The family has dedicated a whole shelf in their home to train memorabilia. It's filled with cocoa mugs, golden train tickets and more than 20 silver bells.

"We pick out new pajamas every year," Carter says. "Me and Dad match, and Piper and Mom match."

That's an East Texas treasure worth believing in. Shhh. Just listen. ■



The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

BY EILEEN MATTEI • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition

IT'S A BREEZY, overcast 80-degree day in Marfa as a dozen or so volunteers rotate jobs in a brick-making assembly line.

Billy Joe Moore, 12, has the hardest job. He hoists small buckets of clay, sand, straw and water into a gas-powered mixer, like those used for concrete. His mother, Erin Moore, says the homeschooling, beekeeping family from Fort Davis is here to learn about adobe-making by doing it, getting into it.

It's also for a great cause: These bricks will be used in the restoration of a historic church in a remote outpost, turning a former Catholic house of worship into a community center.

"It's so neat to hear about the history of the church and the culture of the region," Erin says. "Who wouldn't want to get involved in this?"

In the ghost town of Ruidosa, 90 minutes southwest of Marfa in far West Texas, the adobe El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús (Sacred Heart of Jesus Church) is awaiting resurrection.

Completed in 1916, the church fell victim to blowing sand and rain that wore away the adobe before and after the droughts of the 1950s dried up the Rio Grande and the small agricultural community. By 1960, the church and town had been abandoned.

Native salts eroded the foundation. Huia-che branches battered the northeast tower. Attempts to restore the church, which claims the largest traditional adobe arches in Texas, faltered until the nonprofit Friends of the Ruidosa Church acquired the title to the Texas Historic Landmark from Presidio County after it was given the deed from the Diocese of El Paso in 2019.

With ownership, the Friends began work to preserve as much of the original adobe as

possible, to restore structural strength and to repair the damage done over 110 years. That meant making sun-dried adobe blocks—thousands of them, one at a time, starting in 2021.

For more than 10,000 years, adobe has been used as a building material, favored because its high thermal mass absorbs heat during the day and releases it at night.

"In recent generations, adobe-making skills have been lost, since the knowledge is rarely written down," says Joey Benton. His Marfa design and restoration company, Silla, has completed restorations of adobe buildings at Fort Davis National Historic Site and Big Bend National Park.

During the Friends' May Adobe Day, kneeling men and women scoop Billy Joe's fresh adobe mix from tilted wheelbarrows with their bare hands and tamp it into wood forms.

OPPOSITE El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús in the ghost town of Ruidosa on a September night.

BELOW From left, Terry Bishop, Martin Rivas and Claudio Nuñez load new adobe bricks onto pallets during a Friends of the Ruidosa Church workday.





"You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."



Others lift the forms off the freshly minted 10-by-18-by-3.5-inch blocks. They rinse off the forms in a large water trough and place them on black tarps, ready for the next batch.

The adobe blocks dry for a month in the sun, turned periodically like sunbathers so all

surfaces get exposed. Then the bricks are stacked and set aside. They'll eventually be used to rebuild the bell tower over the church's entrance.

"It's all about community, participating in a traditional activity," says Mike Green, a retired architect and chair of the Friends of the Ruidosa Church. "You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."

"People long for authenticity in their lives and something visible to show at the end of a day of hard work. Adobe-making gives us a deep feeling of achievement."

Hilary Raney, a Marfa resident, mud enthusiast and gardener, spent her third Adobe Day, a mostly monthly event, providing a helping hand and moral support.

"I see new faces every time," she says. "Last month a man in his 80s, whose parents got married in the church, came to Adobe Day. He was so happy to see what we were doing."

Adobe-makers come from El Paso, Houston, New Mexico and, like Steve McKeon, from Oregon. After McKeon opened a restaurant and bar in Marfa, he decided to help make bricks. "Working bubbles out of a block by hand gives you a sense of accomplishment," he says.

The Friends pays the bills for the church, power for which is provided by Rio Grande Electric Cooperative. Co-op power keeps the mortar mixer turning and the diamond saw spinning as it cuts adobe into segments.

Funds from the nonprofit's Community Day fundraiser every November in Ruidosa help pay to transport blocks to the remote site and to bring in masonry specialists to install them. Grants from the Texas Historical Commission and the Summerlee Foundation cover the costs of a historic structure report that guides its preservation.

Conversations with earthen-structure professionals, architects and archaeologists set the stage for the site work.



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A Friends of the Ruidosa Church work crew. Bishop carries a fresh brick.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT “The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques,” says retired architect Mike Green, who is leading the restoration. A view from the top of a hill looking south toward Mexico over the old church.

In 2023, Benton and his skilled crew began critical structural repairs to the church. They stabilized the foundation and installed scaffolding and support frames. They straightened a wall and saved the northeast tower from collapse by repairing adobe blocks and inserting new volunteer-made bricks as needed. In some areas the exterior was so worn that light was visible through the mortar joints.

Green praises Benton and archaeologist David Keller for their contributions to the preservation and restoration efforts.

“The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques,” Green says. “We’re on the same journey: trying to restore and save adobes of the Southwest.”

Free for the asking, the adobe recipe mixes clay, sand, silt, chopped straw and water in proportions determined by the soil used. Clay comprises 15%–30% of the mix, acting as the binder, similar to cement’s role in concrete. The majority of the mix is sand and aggregate. Straw allows the adobe to dry more evenly by letting water get out of the block. The mortar



has the same mix as the block but with finer aggregate.

This classic frontier Catholic church, with its substantial bell towers, is a time capsule for the community, says Keller, who is a Friends co-founder and preservation specialist. The church is unique in that the exterior was never plastered—rare for adobe structures, even in arid climates.

Nevertheless, while the church is being restored with historical accuracy, “the integrity of the structure and preservation guidance trumps absolute historical fidelity,” Keller says. So the exterior will be plastered to keep it from deteriorating like it did over the last 100 years. The interior, originally plastered and whitewashed, will be restored to that state.

Green hopes the bell will be restored to the entrance tower next year. In three years, he foresees the restored church telling the rich history of the area as a community center for residents of Brewster and Presidio counties as well as Ojinaga, across the Rio Grande.

Hands molding clay into architecture have built their own adobe-loving community. At the same time, they have helped restore the heart of a last-century community down a dirt road along the river.

As Green drove around the area over the years, the building often caught his eye. Eventually, his passion for architecture and history prompted him to try to save the old church. Now, the restoration work goes beyond saving the physical structure.

“The church at Ruidosa is the most peaceful place I know,” Green says. “It is so remote, so quiet, so serene. It feels like good spirits are in the air.” ■

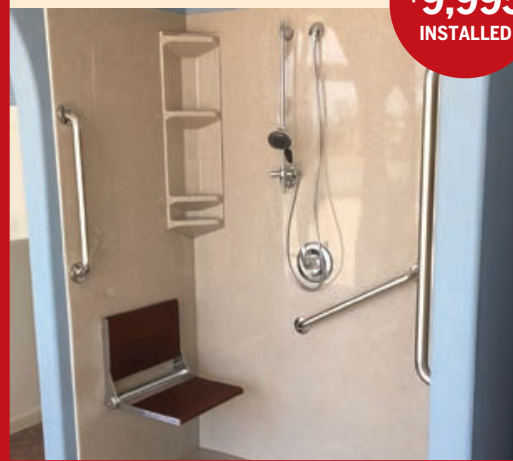


AFFORDABLE BATHROOM REMODEL

FROM **\$129** PER MONTH

Lifetime Warranty
Custom Sizes Available
100% Financing Available
A+ BBB Rating
Good Contractors List

FROM
\$9,995
INSTALLED



BEST BUY WALK-IN TUBS
FEATURING "SEALTITE" TECHNOLOGY

Trusted by Texans for Over 20 Years
Tubs and Showers Made in America

Visit Our Texas Showroom

CALL FOR MORE INFO

682-205-3532 • 888-825-2362
bestbuywalkintubs.com

Steel Mobile Home Roofing

Leaks? High energy bill? Roof rumble?

PERMA-ROOF
from Southern Builders

800.633.8969 • roofover.com

TCP Gift Shop

Shop now
TexasCoopPower.com/shop

FREE! \$2 Bill in Uncirculated Condition



Special Offer for New Customers Only Ages 18+

REQUEST MUST BE RECEIVED WITHIN 7 DAYS

☒ **YES!** Please send me the following:

QTY	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL
1	\$2 Note (limit 1)	FREE!
	Shipping	FREE!
	TOTAL	FREE!

Name _____ Please print clearly

Address _____ Apt# _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-Mail _____

Mail to: **Littleton Coin Company**
Offer Code: 46G404
1309 Mt. Eustis Rd
Serving Collectors Since 1945 Littleton NH 03561-3737



- ★ Seldom-Seen, \$2 Bills Make up Less Than 1% of All Paper Currency
- ★ Face Depicts Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of Independence
- ★ Back Features a Rendition of John Trumbull's Masterpiece Painting Declaration of Independence
- ★ **FREE Shipping!**

You'll also receive a handpicked trial selection of fascinating coins from our No-Obligation Coins-on-Approval Service, from which you may purchase any or none of the coins – return balance within 15 days – with option to cancel at any time.



Littleton Coin Company
Serving Collectors Since 1945

© 2025 LCC, Inc.

Mail Coupon Today!
For Faster Service Visit: LittletonCoin.com/Respond

Offer Code: 46G404



Praise for DiamondAura®



"So much sparkle and the play of light on DiamondAura® beats any diamond!"
— D.D. from Columbus, OH

How to Win at Love

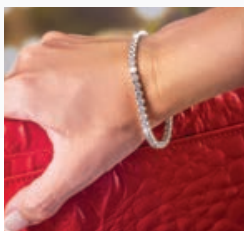
A classic tennis bracelet serves up over 10 carats of sparkle for a guaranteed win

It was the jewelry piece that made the world stop and take notice. In the middle of a long volley during the big American tennis tournament, the chic blonde athlete had to stop play because her delicate diamond bracelet had broken and she had to find it. The tennis star recovered her beloved bracelet, but the world would never be the same.

From that moment on, the tennis bracelet has been on the lips and on the wrists of women in the know. Once called eternity bracelets, these bands of diamonds were known from then on as tennis bracelets, and remain *the* hot ticket item with jewelers.

**JOIN MORE THAN 1 MILLION
THRILLED DIAMONDAURA® CUSTOMERS**

We've captured this timeless classic with over 10 total carats of DiamondAura®, our signature diamond alternative stone. This sparkling marvel rivals even the finest diamonds (D Flawless) with its transparent color and clarity, and both are so hard they can cut glass. Don't believe me? The book *"Jewelry and Gems – The Buying Guide,"* praised the technique used in our diamond alternative DiamondAura®: "The best diamond simulation to date, and even some jewelers have mistaken these stones for mined diamonds," it raved. For comparison, we found a similarly designed 10 carat tennis bracelet with



D Flawless diamonds from another company that costs \$57,000!

Want to look like a million bucks without stressing over losing or damaging something that cost you a fortune? The Love Wins Tennis Bracelet is a simple strand of glittering gems in precious sterling that epitomizes elegance.

The first time we offered this bracelet, we sold out literally in minutes. It was our fastest selling product of 2021. It took six months to get it back in stock — Get yours before we run out! And there's more... we will also include our Ultimate Diamond Alternative™ DiamondAura® stud earrings for FREE!

Jewelry Specifications:

- 10 ¾ ctw of the Ultimate Diamond Alternative®, DiamondAura®
- Rhodium-finished .925 sterling silver settings
- Bracelet: Fits wrists to 7 ½". Earrings: 1 ctw with post backs

Love Wins Tennis Bracelet (10 ¾ ctw) ~~\$399~~ \$39* + S&P
FREE stud earrings (1 ctw) with your purchase of the Love Wins Bracelet — a \$99 value!

*Special price only for customers using the offer code.

1-800-333-2045

Your Offer Code: LWB367-02



Stauer, 14091 Southcross Drive W., Dept. LWB367-02, Burnsville, MN 55337 | www.stauer.com

Stauer® | AFFORD THE EXTRAORDINARY®

FIRST RESPONDERS

of the Bluebonnet region



By Kirsten Tyler and Connie Juarez • Photos by Sarah Beal

They are the calm voices answering the 911 calls, the drivers with flashing lights that puncture the darkness and the steady hands of those who arrive to help in a crisis.

In Central Texas, where neighbors may live miles apart and hospitals could be far away, first responders are the lifelines that encircle the residents of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area.

From sheriff's officers to firefighters, dispatchers to emergency medical workers, these men and women are on our front lines, well-trained and deeply committed to the

communities they live in and serve.

There are more than 100 first responder divisions, agencies, districts and teams in the Bluebonnet region, with origins tracing back to as early as 1848. Their members undergo hours of certification training and continuing education in order to respond to the range of emergencies they face — fires, vehicle accidents, crimes and life-threatening illness.

It is not just their job: It is a calling to show up and support neighbors in what may be their greatest time of need.

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is proud to support the people who make our communities safer and stronger. They are a reflection of these places we call home.





TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY HIGHWAY PATROL Lee County

Cpl. James McCoy, left, and Sgt. Jeremy Weiser are among eight Texas state troopers in Lee County. They enforce laws on highways, investigate crashes, work with local law enforcement on emergency response and educate the community, including talking to students about safe driving practices. Weiser, who oversees daily operations from the Giddings area, says visiting schools is rewarding. Troopers visit campuses in the Lee County area. They give young children the chance to explore patrol vehicles and turn on sirens; at high schools, troopers focus on safe driving. “We want kids to see we’re approachable, that law enforcement isn’t something to be afraid of. We’re here to help,” Weiser said. He and McCoy, both Giddings High School graduates, are committed to the community and working to make Lee County safer, one mile at a time.

BRENHAM FIRE DEPARTMENT Washington County

Training happens daily for members of the Brenham Fire Department. Blane Bolcerek of Brenham, left, a firefighter for two years, watches as Coltin Whitaker of La Grange, a three-year firefighter, uses a striking tool to break a plexiglass window during a ventilation drill. The exercise, simulating fire conditions using nontoxic fog, is part of a regular rotation of drills that includes searches, forcible entry through doors and vehicle extrication. Whitaker said this drill is his favorite. The 31-person fire department responds to more than 1,200 calls a year in the city of Brenham, with an average response time of about 8 minutes. “Aside from a sports team, there’s nowhere you get the camaraderie and teamwork,” said Chief Mark Donovan, who brings more than 40 years of experience to the role. Daily training includes two hours of classroom instruction and drills, led by Assistant Chief David Cella, a fourth-generation firefighter.

More first responders on pages 18-21.

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE, SMITHVILLE TASK FORCE

Bastrop County

The firefighters of the Smithville Task Force respond to calls far beyond Smithville. The 12-member Texas A&M Forest Service crew serves 16 Texas counties and sometimes other parts of the state. When conditions allow, task force members also make themselves available to support firefighters across the nation. Collin Woodland, task force coordinator, has led responses to more than 30 calls a year. "This job is challenging. We operate in an ever-changing environment and interact with people at possibly one of the worst times of their lives," Woodland said.

"Seeing all the emotions a person can have teaches you how to handle delicate situations."

Texas A&M Forest Service members complete courses on wildland fire weather, firefighting and leadership skills, and continue their education with hands-on training. Above, Texas A&M Forest Service and Texas Parks & Wildlife team members practice connecting a hover sling, which carries and drops supplies into hard-to-reach areas.



FRELSBURG VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Colorado County

Relying on pagers, cell phones, truck radios and other handheld devices, the 24 firefighters of Frelsburg Volunteer Fire Department respond to an average of 60 calls a year, all relayed to them by Colorado County's 911 dispatchers. Those calls include brush fires, vehicle accidents, illnesses and injuries. "The most challenging part of the job is the physical and emotional toll," said Fire Chief Dennis Ricicar. "But being able to bring light to others in times of darkness makes it all worth it." Major the Dalmatian, the department's unofficial mascot, sits on Frelsburg's primary engine.

The dog was added to the family in 2025 by Ricicar's son, Tim, who is also a firefighter. Major participates in community events and poses for photos.



GONZALES COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT NO. 1

Gonzales County

In 1989, voters established the Gonzales County Emergency Services District No. 1, which financially supported the Gonzales Volunteer Ambulance corps — local citizens who provided transportation services. In 2020, the district took over emergency medical services for the county, covering a little more than 1,000 square miles. Today, Nick Medina, left, Andy Morales, center, and Will Tyler are among 30 trained employees who respond to an average of 3,400 emergency calls a year. In some instances, the first responders start a blood transfusion, use a defibrillator for an out-of-rhythm heartbeat or take patients to hospitals. “This job, for me, not only fulfills a desire to serve my community but also gives me a sense of belonging,” Morales said. “It has provided me with a community of like-minded individuals with whom I can share my achievements. I love it, truly.”



MANOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENT

Travis County

It was the self-declared best day of the school year for elementary students Paisley Paylor, left, and Cameron Morgan Jr. at Manor Rise Academy last year. That's because Manor ISD Police Chief Clarence D. Yarbrough was visiting. Yarbrough has done everything from creating coloring books to speaking to students across the district about topics like bullying and kindness. The district police serve 15 schools and 10,000 students. Its 26 officers and six civilian employees are responsible for ensuring safety at every school. They operate under Manor ISD's jurisdiction, and also work with city of Manor police. The officers conduct safety checks, help with traffic and campus access, make safety presentations and work with school leaders on campus security. Officers receive extensive training, including instruction in active-shooter and tactical operations, adolescent brain development, conflict resolution and child abuse awareness.



ONLINE

Find these and other photos with this story online at bluebonnet.coop/firstresponders

NEXT MONTH

Find out about Bluebonnet employees who are volunteer first responders in next month's magazine



INDUSTRY VOLUNTEER FIRE AND RESCUE

Austin County

One of Industry Volunteer Fire and Rescue's brush trucks sits ready on standby at the town's Fourth of July celebration earlier this year. The department, founded in 1951 and staffed by 28 volunteers, covers about 60 square miles in western Austin County. The department's four brush trucks can reach places larger vehicles can't; it also has five other trucks. Their rescue equipment, which includes a hydraulic extrication tool and air packs, was funded in part by a 2020 grant from Bluebonnet and the Lower Colorado River Authority. Ronnie Geistmann, who joined the department in 1993, has been chief since 2007. "The phone never gets turned off," he said. "I'm on call 24 hours a day."

CALDWELL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DISPATCH

Caldwell County

Leslie Garner is one of nine emergency dispatchers in Caldwell County. From a centralized hub, she and the others depend on multiple monitors to answer calls and coordinate response by fire, police, emergency medical services and Texas Department of Public Safety officers. The unit responds to about 3,000 calls a month. Garner joined the dispatch team in 2024 after a job in law enforcement. Here, she is still able to help the public while working to assist deputies, officers and other responders get home safely after their shifts. "Now, in dispatch, I handle calls that are new and different each day while still ensuring the safety of the public and other first responders."



TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

Burleson County

Jayne DeSchaaf is one of 500 game wardens across Texas who patrol public and state land and water, enforcing laws and regulations. After graduating from college at 23, he attended the state's game warden training center for eight months to get his license. DeSchaaf took over patrol in Burleson County in 2016. Receiving dispatch calls from Washington, Burleson and Lee counties, he responds to violations of hunting or fishing laws, reckless driving and incidents such as hunting, vehicle or boat accidents. "As game wardens, we are here for the people," DeSchaaf said. "Because citizens have a direct line of access to their local game warden, the relationship between a landowner and game warden is unique."



Bluebonnet awards \$64,000 to area fire departments

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors unanimously approved \$1,000 grants to 64 fire departments serving communities across the cooperative's 14-county service area. The grants were approved earlier this year and awarded in October and November.

"These departments are dedicated to serving Bluebonnet members and our communities," said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet's general manager. "Our lineworkers and control center operators rely on the partnership and quick response of firefighters and first responders during emergencies. Their work is vital to keeping our members and employees safe."

The grants will support the firefighters and first responders who devote their time, skill and courage to keeping communities safe. The grants help cover essential costs such as fuel, equipment, repairs and other critical needs identified by each department.

"Bluebonnet is honored to support our area fire departments, whose commitment to protecting and serving our communities is truly exceptional," said Ben Flencher, Chairman of Bluebonnet's Board of Directors. "The men and women who serve and volunteer with these departments deserve our deepest gratitude and continued support."

Money for the fire department grants does not come from Bluebonnet members' bill payments or rates. They are funded through unclaimed capital credit payments to former members that are returned to Bluebonnet from the State of Texas.



Representatives from 11 Washington County fire departments gathered at the Brenham Fire Department to receive \$1,000 grant checks from Bluebonnet. Pictured with representatives are Robert Mikeska, Bluebonnet Board secretary/treasurer, third from right, and Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet's Brenham-area community representative, second from right



Jo Anna Gilland, Bluebonnet's Lockhart-area community representative, far left, and Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Board member, far right, are pictured with chiefs and representatives from each of the 10 fire departments serving members in Caldwell County.

Thank you!

to the
TITLE
and
PLATINUM
SPONSORS
of the
2025
Bluebonnet
Electric
Cooperative

SCHOLARSHIP GOLF TOURNAMENT

Your generosity will allow us
to award scholarships
to deserving high school graduates
throughout the Bluebonnet service area.



TITLE SPONSORS



PLATINUM SPONSORS

BURLIN POWER LINE LLC

LAMBDA
CONSTRUCTION CO.

THE NITSCHKE GROUP

PIKE CORP.

PRIME POWER LINE
UTILITIES LLC

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Thursday, Dec. 25 and Friday, Dec. 26 for the Christmas holiday, and Thursday, Jan. 1, 2026 for the New Year's Day holiday. 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).

Help us find you faster.

If your power goes out, having your correct phone number on file can be the key to locating you — and the outage.

UPDATE YOUR PHONE NUMBER

1. ONLINE VIA YOUR MYBLUEBONNET ACCOUNT

Log in at bluebonnet.coop and navigate to Settings. Click Contact Methods to update your details.

2. THROUGH THE MYBLUEBONNET MOBILE APP

Click on the three-dot icon. Then select Settings and Contact Methods.

3. OVER THE PHONE WITH A MEMBER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE

Call Bluebonnet at 800-842-7708 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

4. VISIT A MEMBER SERVICE CENTER

Located in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor

5. BY EMAIL

Email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop to request an update.



Step into leadership.

STEP INTO D.C.

The **Government-in-Action Youth Tour** includes a multiday, all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., and a \$1,000 scholarship.

Application deadline: **Jan. 16, 2026**

Tour dates: **June 14-22, 2026**

OPEN TO HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS OR SENIORS RESIDING IN BLUEBONNET'S SERVICE AREA

Applications at bluebonnet.coop/scholarships

Spirituality Meets Artistry



"I never expected it to be so beautiful that it takes your breath away."

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals

In a quaint village, nestled between rolling hills, lived a young woman with a deep appreciation for gemstones. Her grandmother gifted her a delicate cross pendant adorned with opals. The opals shimmered with a mesmerizing play of colors, reflecting hues of blues, greens, and fiery oranges. Her grandmother shared the legend of the opals, believed to bring hope, purity, and luck to those who wore them.

Using this story as inspiration, Stauer brings you the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant**. With over 2 total carats of Kyocera lab-created opals set in .925 sterling silver encased in yellow gold, this pendant is a radiant celebration of beauty and craftsmanship. Each opal captivates with a kaleidoscopic dance of fiery oranges blending into oceanic blues, streaked with flashes of vibrant green that seem to come alive with every movement. The shimmering opals are skillfully arranged to create an enchanting, otherworldly glow, embodying the spirit of hope and harmony.

This breathtaking combination of color and craftsmanship is available as a limited availability of only 930 pieces, making it a rare and treasured addition

to your jewelry collection. Plus, when you order today, you'll receive the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant** at an impossible price of just \$59 normally ~~\$149~~!

Don't miss your chance to own this exclusive tribute to timeless elegance and meaningful symbolism.

Jewelry Specifications:

- Pendant: 2 1/2 ctw. Kyocera lab opals and DiamondAura® accents. Yellow gold-finished .925 sterling silver setting
- Chain: 18" gold-clad .925 sterling silver chain

Opal Spirit Cross Collection

- | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| A. Pendant (2 1/2 ctw) | \$149 \$59* | + S&P | Save \$90 |
| B. 18" Gold Clad Chain | \$59* | + S&P | |
| Pendant and Chain | \$208 \$79* | + S&P | Best Offer! |

*Special price only for customers using the offer code.

1-800-333-2045

Your Insider Offer Code: OCR291-02

Stauer® 14091 Southcross Drive W.
Dept. OCR291-02, Burnsville, MN 55337
www.stauer.com





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



Turn of Fortune

A family's legacy far exceeds its pilfered buried treasure

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT NEUBECKER

A LONG TIME AGO, a woman tried to sell me her home, hinting at the prospect of gold treasure long hidden and lost within.

She told me her husband had died suddenly, and his last words to her were: "There's gold coins behind the wall in the bedroom closet." She was willing to split anything found.

I didn't bite on that strange sales pitch, but it reminded me of another similar case, even more interesting, up the country a ways.

In the little Texas town of San Diego, about an hour west of Corpus Christi, there once lived a Dr. Jose García. In 1933, he was the primary doctor in town and preferred to store his wealth in the form of gold coins. He hid it in a tight crawl

space beneath a trapdoor in his kitchen.

No one knew of this treasure except García and his daughter, Gloria. He told her the coins were hers to use, for taking care of her disabled brother later in life.

When the good doctor eventually died, Gloria asked her husband, Hector López, to find the coins. After Hector's repeated determined explorations into the tight crawl space—even with a metal detector—he couldn't find the coins.

Since García had suffered from dementia late in life, Gloria and Hector began thinking the gold coins had been the invention of an imaginative mind or a mind that forgot he had moved the coins.

Years later, Gloria and Hector sold the house. Then, more than 20 years after

that, a plumbing leak sprang up underneath it.

A plumber went through that old trapdoor the doctor had created almost 100 years before. While laying in a new line through the muddy soil, the plumber saw a flicker of something shiny.

He brushed away the mud and discovered a very old gold coin. He dug deeper and found a gold mine: some 500 coins in various sizes and denominations.

He was elated, of course, but he didn't alert the homeowner. He calmly asked his assistant to get him an empty coffee can and absconded with the coins—worth about \$500,000 at the time.

But the plumber didn't handle it well. He went around paying for things with gold coins within the little community. The gossip erupted immediately, and Hector and Gloria soon got word.

They sued the plumber, saying the coins belonged to Gloria.

The new homeowner, too, sued for ownership, but after a long legal battle, a jury in Duval County decided that the coins belonged to Gloria.

Next, something even more unexpected and beautiful happened: Gloria and Hector gave the coins to the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg.

As it turned out, the coins were a small part of Gloria and Hector López's wealth. They both graduated from the University of Texas in the 1940s, and then Hector earned a law degree and amassed a \$275 million portfolio while working in the oil and gas industry.

Since they had no children, the Lópezes left their fortune to the children of Texas in the form of the Hector and Gloria López Foundation, which provides college tuition—especially for Hispanic and first-generation students, known proudly as López Scholars. ■

Holiday Breakfast

Be warned: Santa might stick around for these dishes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Making chilaquiles is a treasured tradition for my family. Chilaquiles are fried corn tortillas simmered in a creamy salsa verde and topped with eggs. Our girls love them; I love prepping everything in advance; and my husband loves a heaping plate of hearty goodness after the piles of wrapping paper.

Chilaquiles Verdes

¼ cup vegetable oil, or more as needed
12 corn tortillas, cut into 4 wedges each
2 teaspoons salt, or more to taste
4 cups salsa verde, plus more for serving
1 cup heavy cream
4 eggs
Diced red onion
Cilantro
Queso fresco, crumbled

1. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat oil until shimmering. Add about a quarter of the tortilla wedges and cook, flipping once, until lightly brown and crisp.
2. Drain the freshly fried tortilla chips on a paper towel-lined baking sheet. Sprinkle lightly with salt. Repeat this process until all tortillas are fried, adding more oil as needed.
3. Drain oil and wipe skillet. Heat 4 cups salsa verde and heavy cream in the skillet over medium-high heat until warmed through. Add chips and gently stir to coat chips in sauce. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 2 minutes.
4. In another skillet, scramble or fry eggs to your preference.
5. Divide the chilaquiles between four plates and top with eggs. Sprinkle with red onion, cilantro and queso fresco. Serve with additional salsa verde.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Christmas Eve Rice Salad.



Artichoke-Cheese Frittata

WILLIAM P. LOYD
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

I feel strongly that Christmas mornings should be laid-back, meaning coffee, family time, gifts and a delicious breakfast that was prepped in advance.

- 1 tablespoon (1/8 stick) butter, melted
- 6 green onions, diced
- 1/2 cup diced green bell pepper
- 5 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 3–4 slices bread, cubed, divided use
- 3/4 cup shredded cheese (cheddar, Monterey Jack, pepper jack or a combination works well), divided use
- 1 jar marinated artichoke hearts (12 ounces), drained and chopped into bite-size pieces, divided use
- 1 jar diced pimientos (4 ounces), drained, divided use

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 1 1/2-quart baking dish.
2. In a skillet over medium-high heat, cook butter, green onions and bell pepper, stirring occasionally until tender, about 2–3 minutes.
3. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, mustard, salt and onion powder.
4. In the prepared baking dish, layer half the bread, half the onion-pepper mixture, half the cheese, half the artichokes and half the pimientos. Pour half the egg mixture over first layer.
5. Repeat layering with the remaining bread, onion-pepper mixture, cheese,



\$500 WINNER

Cranberry Orange White Chocolate Baked Oatmeal

MELISSA TURLEY
BANDERA EC



Looking for a cozy Christmas breakfast to feed a crowd? This is it. Imagine a holiday buffet table filled with baked oatmeal, bacon, sausage, scrambled eggs and fruit. And invite me because I would drive for hours for this baked oatmeal. The oatmeal can be prepped the day before, refrigerated overnight and baked the next morning.

- 6 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup white chocolate chips
- 2 cups orange juice
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 4 eggs

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a large bowl or stand mixer, combine oats, sugar, baking powder, salt, dried cranberries and white chocolate chips.
3. In another bowl, whisk together orange juice, oil, vanilla and eggs.
4. While mixing on low, slowly add wet ingredients to dry ingredients until thoroughly mixed.
5. Pour into prepared pan and bake 35–40 minutes or until golden brown.

SERVES 10–12

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

MOM'S FAVORITES DUE DEC 10

Everything is better when it's made with love by Mom. What recipe do you remember your mother by? Send us your favorite for a shot at \$500 and a spot in our May issue.

UPCOMING: THE ART OF THE SANDWICH DUE JAN 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPES CONTINUED

artichokes, pimientos and egg mixture.

6. If making in advance, cover and refrigerate. Allow to come to room temperature before baking.

7. Bake 30–40 minutes, until eggs are set and frittata is firm.

SERVES 6

French Toast Bake
With Caramel Banana
Cream Topping

MARIAN EVONIUK
PEDERNALES EC

Brioche coated in a creamy eggy mixture, baked until golden and topped with whipped cream, bananas and caramel is the only gift I want this holiday season.

FRENCH TOAST BAKE

- 6 eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup



- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 loaf brioche, sliced and cubed

TOPPING

- 2 cups heavy cream
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 large bananas, sliced
- Caramel sauce

1. FRENCH TOAST BAKE Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with butter or cooking spray and set aside.

2. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, 1 cup heavy cream, maple syrup, 1 teaspoon vanilla, lemon juice, cinnamon and salt. Add brioche and stir to coat. Pour into prepared baking dish.

3. Place baking dish on center rack of oven and bake 30–40 minutes, until mixture is set, puffy and light golden brown on top. Tent loosely with foil if top is browning too quickly. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.

4. TOPPING In a large bowl, combine 2 cups heavy cream, powdered sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Beat at medium-high until soft peaks form. Set aside.

5. To serve, cut the bake into squares and top with a large dollop of whipped cream, banana slices and a drizzle of caramel sauce.

SERVES 4–6

FINALLY ... LIFE INSURANCE YOU CAN AFFORD

TOTAL OFFER

DETAILS

BUY \$100,000 LIFE INSURANCE

FREE INFORMATION

GLOBE LIFE AND ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY



Non-Negotiable

7460

PAY THE
AMOUNT OF

One Hundred Thousand Dollars

\$100,000.00

MONTHLY RATES AS LOW AS:

- ADULTS: \$3.49
- CHILDREN AND
GRANDCHILDREN: \$2.17

EASY TO BUY

- NO MEDICAL EXAM - SIMPLE APPLICATION
- NO WAITING PERIOD
- BUY DIRECT
- SCAN QR CODE FOR A FREE QUOTE



SCAN TO
VISIT US
ONLINE

For Immediate Service Call 1-855-766-4181 Or Visit ForGlobeLife.com

\$100,000 Adult Life Insurance

- Rate schedule is based on your current age and is guaranteed for the life of the policy.
- Monthly rates as low as \$3.49.
- Coverage is also available for your spouse and other family members.
- Benefits will NEVER be canceled or reduced for the life of the policy if premiums are paid on time.

Policy Form #SRTC/SRTC R13 or R17, or #SRTC90MA in MA

\$30,000 Children's Life Insurance

- Rates are based on your children's or grandchildren's present age and never increase for any reason.
- Monthly rates as low as \$2.17.
- Benefits will NEVER be reduced or canceled if premiums are paid on time.
- Give your children a financial head start right now. Your policy builds CASH VALUE for your family's needs.

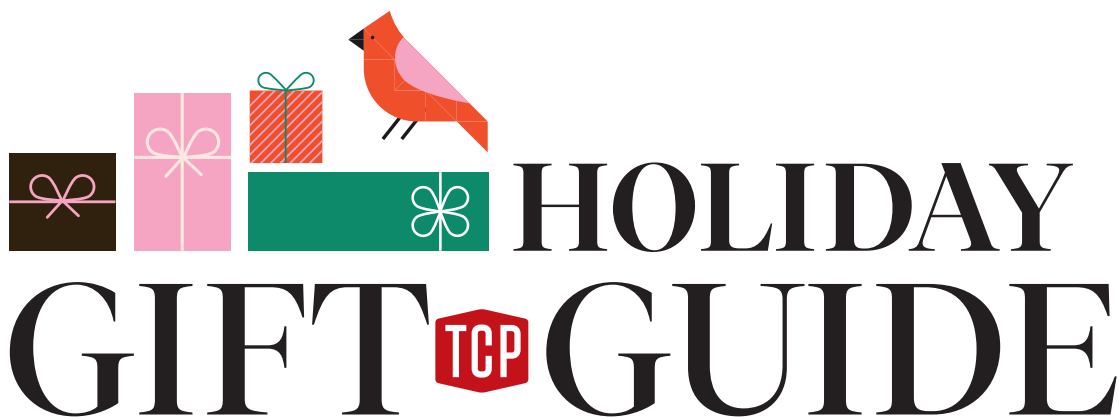
Policy Form #GWL2001 or GWLA001

(Offer may vary, \$100,000 coverage not available in all states.)

CHOOSE \$5,000, \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 OR UP TO \$100,000 COVERAGE

PERSONAL OFFER CODE:

XCCX15XY



HOLIDAY GIFT **TCP** GUIDE

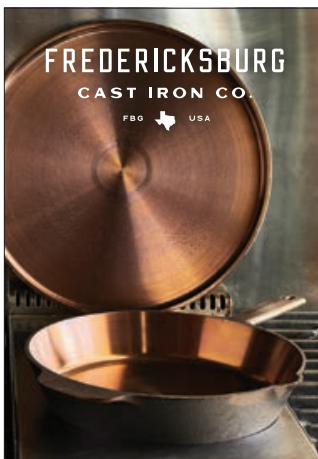
In the magazine and on [TexasCoopPower.com](https://www.texascooppower.com), we make it easy to shop for friends and family.



Texas Bluebonnet Calendar

Large 20-by-15-inch calendar with 12 watercolor scenes. Enjoy nature's beauty year-round with this 2026 calendar by Texas State Artist George Boutwell. \$20 plus tax and \$4.50 shipping. See website for quantity pricing.

1-800-243-4316
[gboutwell.com](https://www.gboutwell.com)



Made in Texas, Y'all

Cast-iron cookware with a smooth cooking surface. Our durable, heirloom-quality cast-iron cookware made in Fredericksburg, Texas, is a great gift that can be shared with family and friends for generations.

fbgcastiron.com
[instagram.com/fbg_castiron](https://www.instagram.com/fbg_castiron)



Ideal Arm Protection for Any Activity

Helps Prevent Bruising and Protects Those With Thin Skin! Soft leather protective sleeves help protect you from 100's of injury-prone chores you do at work, home, farm, or ranch. Even has adjustable airflow!

(651) 492-4830
[armchaps.com](https://www.armchaps.com)



The Perfect Taste of Texas

Looking for a gift that's always remembered? Berdoll's has been handcrafting pecan pies, honey glazed pecans, and chocolate favorites for 45 years. Stop by our store or let us ship Texas pecan goodness right to your door.

800-518-3870
[berdoll.com](https://www.berdoll.com)



Fudge and Divinity for the Holidays

The Best Fudge in Texas. The Best Divinity in the World. Bring back those childhood memories of Christmas with the sweet gift of fudge and divinity from Holiday Farms.

[holidayfarmscandy.com](https://www.holidayfarmscandy.com)
[divinitybydave.etsy.com](https://www.divinitybydave.etsy.com)



Texas Red Grapefruit and Avocados

Always a gift in good taste. Orchard-fresh grapefruit and other Texas products are all hand-selected, carefully packed and shipped to be delivered just in time for the holidays.

1-800-580-1900
[crockettfarms.com](https://www.crockettfarms.com)



COURTESY TODD WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY

Slabs of Strudel

The oldest bakery in Texas came from humble beginnings

BY CHET GARNER

I DIDN'T KNOW what to expect from the oldest bakery in Texas, but it certainly wasn't a giant slab of cherry strudel bigger than a roof shingle. And yet that's exactly what I found at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels—along with a line out the door, a heavenly yeasty smell that could lead a blindfolded squirrel to town and a friendly cashier who was happy to explain the unfamiliar pastries laid out before me.

Founded in 1868, the bakery was started by a man named Edouard Naegelin who emigrated from eastern France, arriving in town with a sack of flour and less than a dollar in his pocket.

For more than 155 years, it has kept the town outside San Antonio well-supplied with loaves of fresh bread, cakes and an assortment of European cookies I could barely pronounce. Pfeffernüse, anyone? But the undeniable star of the show was their homemade strudel, coming in apple, cherry and peach with buttery layers so soft you could use it as a pillow.

Inside, the décor is a delightful cross between a German Alpine lodge and grandma's kitchen circa 1952. In the name of "research," I ordered almost everything: kolache (both fruit and sausage), cinnamon rolls, danishes, lebkuchen, springerle, and each flavor of strudel.

I sat at one of the small tables outside and proceeded to make every one of my fingers sticky with icing and every thread of my shirt dusted with powdered sugar. It was a badge of honor earned in a pastry-filled battle of the bulge. In the end, the strudel won, but it was worth it.

Whether you're a hungry local, a curious traveler or an overambitious pastry juggler, Naegelin's is here to welcome you with open arms just like it has for generations. ■

ABOVE Chet's eyes are bigger than his stomach at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's Explorations 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.

DECEMBER

7

San Antonio Cowboy Christmas, (210) 299-4499, briscoemuseum.org

Waxahachie [7, 12-14] Bethlehem Revisited, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

Port Lavaca [7, 12-14, 19-21, 26-28] Nativity Exhibit, (361) 935-8032, bit.ly/nativityexhibit

9

Lufkin The Texas Tenors: Deep in the Heart of Christmas, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

11

El Paso Los Murales de Segundo Barrio, (915) 533-0048, tomlea.com

Marshall [11, 19] Fireside Feast: Cooking Up History at Maplecroft, (903) 935-3044, visitstarrfamilyhome.com

12

Kyle [12-14] A Night in Bethlehem, (512) 268-7044, f-pc.org

Smithville [12-14, 19-22] Dinah 4 Christmas, (512) 304-0666, dinah4.com

13

Bastrop Historic Homes Tour, (512) 303-0904, bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Burnet Christmas on the Square, (512) 756-4297, burnetchamber.org

Chappell Hill Teddy Bear Parade, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

Kerrville Christmas Concert, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

Waxahachie [13-14] Historic Waxahachie Christmas Tour of Homes, historicwaxahachie.com

Corsicana CelloVoci, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

Richardson Rocky Mountain High Experience: A John Denver Christmas, (972) 744-4650, eisemanncenter.com

Levelland [19-21] Christmas Cash Classic, (806) 786-8683, facebook.com/christmascashclassic

Brenham Top of the World, A Carpenters Christmas, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Fairfield Jingle All the Way, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Grapevine The Nuttier Cracker, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

Eastland New Year's Eve Casino Night, (254) 631-0437, eastlandcountymuseum.com

Palestine Dash & Splash 5K, (903) 729-3139, palestineymca.org

TCP Submit Your Event

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



**RENEWAL
by ANDERSEN**
FULL-SERVICE WINDOW & DOOR REPLACEMENT

WINDOW AND DOOR SAVINGS EVENT

Save big on replacement windows and doors!

Buy One, Get One **40% OFF**
Windows and Doors¹

Minimum purchase of 4

PLUS \$200 OFF
Your Entire Purchase¹

Minimum purchase of 4

PLUS SPECIAL FINANCING

Call for your **FREE** consultation. Offer Ends 1/31/2026

877-591-9026 FINDYOURWINDOW.COM

¹DETAILS OF OFFER: Offer expires 1/31/2026. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Buy one (1) window or entry/patio door, get one (1) window or entry/patio door 40% off when you purchase four (4) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 11/24/2025 and 1/31/2026. 40% off windows and entry/patio doors are less than or equal to lowest cost window or entry/patio door in the order. Additional \$200 off your entire purchase, minimum purchase of 4 required, taken after initial discount(s), when you purchase by 1/31/2026. Call for financing details. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. License numbers available at renewalbyandersen.com/license. Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are trademarks of Andersen Corporation. ©2025 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. RBA14201



TCP E-news

Fast and Direct

Get our best content delivered to your inbox every month!

We bring you everything Texas: its culture, people, food, history and travel, plus our monthly contest winners and more.

TCP Sign up now
TexasCoopPower.com/join

Bank C.D.'s Due? CALL US NOW

1-800-359-4940 TEXAS TOLL-FREE
www.mattsonfinancialservices.com

BLAKE MATTSO, CFP™
Signal Securities, Inc., 5400 Bosque, 4th Floor, Waco, TX 76710
Serving Customers All Over Texas

All C.D.'s are insured to \$250,000 per institution by the F.D.I.C. All C.D.'s are subject to availability. Securities offered thru Signal Securities, Inc., Member FINRA/SIPC 700 Throckmorton, Ft. Worth, TX 76102. (817) 877-4256.

BRUSH SHARK

SKID STEER MOUNTED SHEAR

- 1/2" to 6" diameter trees and brush.
- Perfect for cedar, shin oak, persimmon, mesquite.

(512) 263-6830 • www.brushshark.com

Hit the Road

TCP Plan now
TexasCoopPower.com/events

★★★★★
"It's a beautiful
ring with incredible
brilliance!"

J. A., Ft Lauderdale, FL

Stauer
Impossible Price
Was \$499, Now
\$59

Hundreds of
★★★★★
Reviews

We're Bringing You Some Star Power

Nobel Prize Winner Brings Us Perfection From Deep Space

The story begins in 1893 when Nobel Prize-winning French scientist Henri Moissan discovered an extraordinary gem while studying rock samples from a meteor in Canyon Diablo, Arizona. Extremely rare in nature, moissanite is the **cosmic treasure that has been perfected by scientists** right here on Earth, offering an unrivaled brilliance that outshines even diamonds.

According to the Gemological Institute of America, moissanite **surpasses all other gems in brilliance, fire, and luster.** Its unique "**double refraction**" means that light enters the stone and exits not once but twice—something **no diamond can achieve.**

Now, for an **extremely limited time**, you can own this celestial beauty at an unheard-of price! The Star Power Moissanite Ring features a stunning 1-½ carat moissanite set in yellow gold-finished .925 sterling silver—normally \$499 but all yours for

just \$59! Why such a spectacular price? Because we want you as a long term client. This carat weight of moissanite is sold for \$1,700 at a major national retailer, but that is ridiculous. **Only 1,000 563 available** for this offer. So don't wait—once this deal is gone, it's gone!

Jewelry Specifications:

- Moissanite in gold-finished .925 sterling silver settings
- Ring: Available in whole sizes 5-10

Star Power Moissanite Ring

1-½ carat moissanite solitaire ~~\$499~~ \$59* + S&P **Save \$440**

**Special price only for customers using the offer code.*

1-800-333-2045

Your Insider Offer Code: SPM158-01

Stauer, 14091 Southcross Drive W., Dept. SPM158-01, Burnsville, MN 55337 | www.stauer.com

Stauer® | AFFORD THE EXTRAORDINARY®

Country Life

With wide open spaces and the freedom to live life as one pleases, there's a lot to love about the country. But it's not all porch swings and lemonade. Those who chose this life are made of stronger stuff. They carve a living from the land and hand that legacy down to the next generation.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 SCOTT BOWMAN
PEDERNALES EC

"Young mini-Nubian goats enjoy breakfast in the barn."

2 AMY BOGS
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

"One of our calves got a little too excited about the new hay and wedged himself between two bales."

3 KYLE BIGGERSTAFF
LIGHTHOUSE EC

"Hayden Biggerstaff and Jude the cow dog finish pushing cattle to a new pasture at sunset in Crosby County."

4 CAROLYN GULLY
PEDERNALES EC

"My great-granddaughter, Leighton Gully, and her friend, Annabelle, take a break on the farm."



Upcoming Contests

GATES DUE DEC 10

CAUGHT NAPPING DUE JAN 10

MAKING A SPLASH DUE FEB 10



ENTER
ONLINE

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



Our Kind of Weird

The best Christmas mornings include a one-of-a-kind family dish

BY SHANE TORNO
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KACHIK

I SUPPOSE EVERY FAMILY has a favorite dish—a meal with special significance. In my family’s case, we had a special meal that my mom, the one who did the cooking in our house, didn’t care for. I wonder if this is common.

The meal was a breakfast dish known to us as biscuits and pudding. In my youth, I believed that this was unique to my family since everyone I ever asked about it had never heard of such a thing.

However, just recently I learned that the meal is actually known in the rural south as biscuits and chocolate gravy.

To be sure, the chocolate pudding we used was stove-cooked and served hot, so calling it chocolate gravy makes sense. My online research tells me that the dish has its origins in the Great Depression, when powdered cocoa

became readily available as a baking product. There are origin stories associated with Appalachia, the Tennessee Valley, western Oklahoma and Arkansas.

I have no idea how it could have come into contact with a German family settling in Dime Box in Central Texas and then relocating to deep South Texas.

Ignorant of any of this history, I enjoyed this breakfast whenever my father could convince my mom to get up early and prepare it.

A few tips if you decide to try this yourself on a cold morning. The biscuits need to be buttermilk with a consistent texture all the way through, not the canned biscuits that produce lots of flaky individual layers. Those flaky layers make eating the pudding-covered biscuits a messy and unappealing operation. Also, the meal is best when both the biscuits and the pudding are served hot.

Grab a couple (or three) biscuits and cut them in half so you have the biscuits lying open-faced. Add a pat of butter to each biscuit half and then douse with the pudding. As the butter melts under the hot pudding, it liquefies and seeps through the pudding to create some beautiful yellow puddles.

If you have a sweet tooth, this will beat the best biscuits and gravy meal you have ever had.

As I said, my mom didn’t care for the meal, possibly because it was passed down from my father’s family. Or maybe because she didn’t like getting up early to bake on Christmas morning. To her credit, she made them well (as did her mom, my dad’s mom and my Aunt Joy).

On those special mornings when they were available, we all made big plates of it while Mom stood back and ate her biscuit with jelly like a normal human. If you listened carefully above the racket of forks on plates, you might even hear her mutter something about a bunch of weirdos. ■

GRAB YOUR PIECE OF AMERICA'S SILVER LEGACY

99.9%
Fine Silver
Bars

Actual size is
30.6 x 50.4 mm

FILL YOUR VAULT WITH MORGAN SILVER BARS



Not only are these hefty bars one full Troy ounce of real, .999 precious silver, they're also beautiful, featuring the crisp image of a Morgan Silver Dollar struck onto the surface. That collectible image adds interest and makes these Silver Bars even more desirable. Minted in the U.S.A. from shimmering American silver, these one-ounce 99.9% fine silver bars are a great alternative to one-ounce silver coins or rounds. Plus, they offer great savings compared to other bullion options like one-ounce sovereign silver coins. Take advantage of our special offer for new customers only and save \$10.00 off our regular prices.

Morgan Silver Dollars Are Among the Most Iconic Coins in U.S. History

What makes them iconic? The Morgan Silver Dollar is the legendary coin that built the Wild West. It exemplifies the American spirit like few other coins, and was created using silver mined from the famous Comstock Lode in Nevada. In fact, when travelers approached the mountains around the boomtown of Virginia City, Nevada in the 1850s, they were startled to see the hills shining in the sunlight like a mirror. A mirage

caused by weary eyes? No, rather the effect came from tiny flecks of silver glinting in the sun.

A Special Way For You to Stock Up On Precious Silver

While no one can predict the future value of silver in an uncertain economy, many Americans are rushing to get their hands on as much silver as possible, putting it away for themselves and their loved ones. You'll enjoy owning these Silver Bars. They're tangible. They feel good when you hold them, You'll relish the design and thinking about all it represents. These Morgan Design One-Ounce Bars make appreciated gifts for birthdays, anniversaries and graduations, creating a legacy sure to be cherished for a lifetime.

Order More and SAVE

You can save \$10.00 off our regular price when you buy now. There is a limit of 25 Bars per customer, which means with this special offer, you can save up to \$250.

Hurry—Secure Yours Now

Call right now to secure your .999 fine silver Morgan Design One-Ounce Silver Bars. You'll be glad you did.

One-Ounce Silver Morgan Design Bar
\$69.95 ea.

Special offer - \$59.95 ea. +s/h **BUY MORE
SAVE MORE!**

SAVE \$10 - \$250

Limit of 25 bars per customer

**Free 1-oz Silver Bullet –
.45 Caliber Pistol Round Replica
with every order over \$299
(A \$79.95 value!)**



FREE SHIPPING over \$99!

Limited time only. Product total over \$99 before taxes (if any). Standard domestic shipping only. Not valid on previous purchases.

SPECIAL CALL-IN ONLY OFFER
1-888-201-7144

Offer Code MSB357-32
Please mention this code when you call.

GOVMINT

GOVMINT • 1300 Corporate Center Curve, Dept. MSB357-32, Eagan, MN 55121

GOVMINT® is a brand of Asset Marketing Services, LLC (AMS). AMS is a retail distributor of coin and currency issues and is not affiliated with the U.S. government. The collectible coin market is unregulated, highly speculative and involves risk. Prices, facts, figures and populations deemed accurate as of the date of publication but may change significantly over time. All purchases are expressly conditioned upon your acceptance of our Terms and Conditions (www.amsi-corp.com/terms-conditions); to decline, return your purchase pursuant to our 30 day Return Policy (www.amsi-corp.com/product-return-policy). ©2025 Asset Marketing Services, LLC.



**Helping All Families
Facing Dementia**

Alzheimer's | Vascular | Lewy Body | FTD | CTE & More



1-800-DEMENTIA®
DementiaSociety.org
501(c)(3) Nonprofit Charity
Awareness | Research | Enrichment™