

THE BIG HEARTS OF
WILDLIFE REHABBERS

THE JAZZ OF
BOOTS DOUGLAS

WHAT LOVE
LOOKS LIKE

Texas Co-op Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

FEBRUARY 2026

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of Co-op Country



**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

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This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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— J., La Crescent, MN



*"The feel of this knife
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is an incredibly fine
instrument."*

— H., Arvada, CO



BONUS! Call today and you'll also receive this genuine leather sheath!



February 2026



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Border towns sprang to life from Rio Grande fortifications that are still finding new uses.

By Eileen Mattei
Illustration by Bonnie Hofkin

10 Giving a Hoot

Texas' sick and injured critters depend on a corps of passionate volunteers.

By Martha Deeringer
Photos by Tiffany Hofeldt

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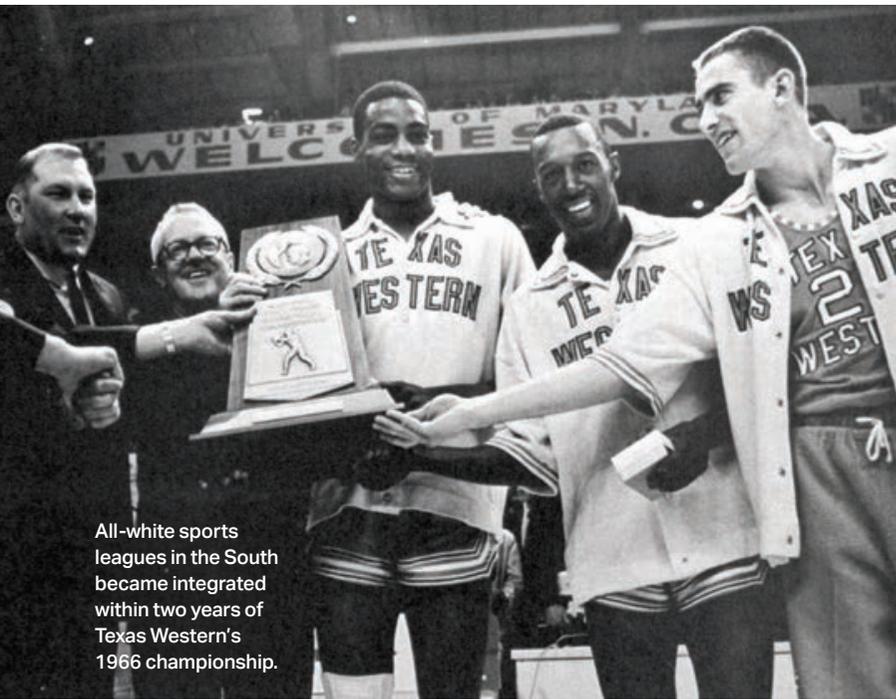
Observations
What Love Looks Like
By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

ON THE COVER

Lemon Cheesecake from the kitchen of Vianney Rodriguez, TCP's food editor.
Photo by Jason David Page

ABOVE

Bones, an opossum at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo, gets snuggles from Mariah Thompson.
Photo by Tiffany Hofeldt



All-white sports leagues in the South became integrated within two years of Texas Western's 1966 championship.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Significant Milestones

THE FIRST NEGRO HISTORY WEEK, the predecessor of Black History Month, took place 100 years ago this month, in February 1926. Its creator, Carter G. Woodson, is considered the Father of Black History.

March 19 will mark 60 years since Texas Western College (now the University of Texas at El Paso) pulled off a landmark victory over basketball powerhouse Kentucky in the NCAA national title game. The Miners were the first championship team to start five Black players.

The first African American to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps is considered to be Texan Alfred Masters of Palestine, who was sworn in June 1, 1942—after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order to desegregate the armed forces. But in 1776, John "Keto" Martin, an enslaved man in Delaware, was recruited into the Continental Marines to fight the British.



TCP *Contests and More*

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Don't Skimp on Shrimp

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Making a Splash

RECOMMENDED READING

"Caring about animals is contagious." So says an animal rescuer from the last time we wrote about these champions of the natural world. Check out *Wildlife Ambassadors* from May 2012.



ENTER ONLINE

\$3.2 Million

Total value of scholarships awarded to more than 1,400 students by Texas' electric cooperatives for the 2025–26 school year. That funding is mostly made possible by legislation allowing co-ops to use unclaimed capital credits for this purpose.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The perfect Valentine's gift 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 December prompt: **Dear Santa, I would like ...**

Every child in this world to get at least one gift from you and a warm meal.

SHERRY VEGA
BLUEBONNET EC
BASTROP

For every family to be together, safe and full of love this Christmas.

RAIHAN KHONDKER
PEDERNALES EC
LEANDER

A cheeseburger, tater tots and a frosty mug of A&W root beer from the Hi-D-Ho Drive In in Lubbock (1964).

TOMMY NOVAK
SOUTH PLAINS EC
SHALLOWATER

To be free of cancer. Can he do that?

SUSAN HOOLE DAUGHERTY
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

DECEMBER 2025 Turn of Fortune

“This has got to be my all-time favorite story. Gloria and Hector López have shown how life should be.”

MARTHA GARCIA
NUECES EC
EDINBURG



ROBERT NEUBECKER

The Serendipity of TCP

The December issue blew my mind!

After reading *The Best Food I've Ever Had at a Fair Is ...* [Currents], I told my wife about the Frito pie comment from Robin Perry. I described the Frito pie I used to buy for a quarter during school lunch as a kid in Levelland after walking to some department store. But I couldn't remember the name of the store.

Genie Ballew's letter on the next page mentioning G.F. Wacker rang that bell!

Gary Alan Henson
CoServ
Lewisville

Prayers Continue

I wonder what terrible memories these kind people have to live with after seeing what they've seen [Giving Thanks, November 2025]. I still pray for them.

Anita Frye
Via Facebook



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Brick by Brick

I spent over nine years (2013–22) traveling the state (all 254 counties) photographing over 5,000 old churches and schools. There were many that I didn't have names for, and El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús was one of those.

I photographed it in 2015 and labeled it “Ruidosa—old adobe church.” Thanks to *The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road* [December 2025], I now have a name for it.

Someday I hope to write a book, and you just made my research a bit easier. Perhaps someday I can participate in an Adobe Day.

Cheryl Schwartz
Nueces EC
Port Aransas

Breakfast Patrol

I discovered this delicacy on New Year's Day 1986 as a rookie police officer [*Our Kind of Weird*, December 2025]. Each New Year's Day, our chaplain and his wife invited officers to their house and treated us to a come-and-go breakfast. This was one of the delicious entrées we were served.

Joe Lasater
United Cooperative Services
Glen Rose

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.

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 82, Number 8 (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 \$5.53 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.
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NEW MEXICO

TEXAS

Chaparral

El Paso
Fort Bliss

Marfa

Lajitas

Rio Grande

Del Rio

MEXICO

Eagle Pass
Fort Duncan

Laredo
Fort McIntosh



Border towns sprang to life from Rio Grande fortifications that are still finding new uses

From Posts to Pillars

BY EILEEN MATTEI

ILLUSTRATION BY BONNIE HOFKIN

When Anthony Knopp first came to the campus of Texas Southmost College in 1976, his office was in an old barrack, and some faculty members lived in single-story, 100-year-old former military buildings, recalls the retired history professor.

While the old structures lacked modern amenities, Knopp made the most of teaching at a historic site. “When studying U.S. history, particularly relations with Mexico and 20th-century wars,” he says, “I was able to connect students to what was here at Fort Brown.”

Today, a former 48-bed hospital houses the college president’s offices on the campus in Brownsville, in the Rio Grande Valley. Fort Brown’s hospital annex (built in 1868), commissary (1904), guardhouse and morgue (1870) support various college departments.

Fort Brown and four other U.S. Army forts, established along the Rio Grande in the years after Texas became a state in 1845, endured for decades as military installations.

Unlike Texas frontier forts of the 1800s, such as Fort Concho in San Angelo and Fort McKavett in Menard County, which were rapidly abandoned as the frontier moved west, the border forts in Brownsville, Rio Grande City, Laredo and Eagle Pass remained defensive posts, off and on, for nearly 100 years. Fort Bliss in El Paso is still in use.

Today—178 years after the Mexican-American War—repurposed buildings from these border forts contribute to the vitality and identity of those Texas towns. Retaining their 1800s ambiance, the former Army headquarters, barracks and hospitals serve as schools, colleges, museums and parks.

The border forts had much in common, each named for veterans of the Mexican-American War, fought immediately following Texas statehood. At Rio Grande crossings, most about 100 miles apart, each fort shifted locations several times before being rebuilt as permanent posts after the Civil War.

Troops at the forts alternately dealt with Mexican bandits and rustlers and rowdy revolutionaries from both sides of the border, protected travelers and settlers from raids by Comanche and Lipan Apache tribes, and trained troops for both world wars. The garrisons shaped the cities that grew around them, as Army suppliers set up shops that also catered to local residents.





ABOVE Troops perform drills in the late 1800s at Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City.

LEFT Much of the Fort Brown site serves as the campus of Texas Southmost College in Brownsville.

Fort Brown

Count riverboat pilot Mifflin Kenedy among the early merchants who cashed in on Army contracts. He ferried troops and equipment from Fort Brown, near the Gulf Coast, up the Rio Grande during the Mexican-American War.

He later started a steamboat company, married a wealthy widow and acquired hundreds of thousands of acres. He is the namesake of the Kenedy Ranch, the town of Kenedy and Kenedy County.

Fort Brown evolved from a star-shaped earthen fort to a commanding presence after the Civil War, when 70 buildings were erected of locally made border brick. With wide arches fronting shaded breezeways, Fort Brown's 1869 hospital (said to be the most beautiful hospital in the Army) was of crucial importance during epidemics of yellow fever and cholera as the only hospital in Cameron County until 1909.

Quartermasters negotiated contracts with local businesses for goods and services such as beans, flour, coffee pots and hay for horses. Although a brick wall separated the town from Fort Brown and its palm-lined parade grounds, traffic flowed between them.

"Interactions resulted in marriages," Knopp says. "Married soldiers either stayed in the area or returned."

Fort Brown provided several forms of entertainment for the town: parades, concerts and sporting activities. Sunday afternoon polo matches, a cavalry favorite, drew locals as did concerts at the post bandstand, held twice a week.

A tree-shaded "lovers' lane" curled between the fort and the river. Troops marched in local parades and Charro Days celebrations. Off-duty troops ate at local restaurants. The officers' club hosted dances while enlisted men attended dances on the patio of El Jardin Hotel. Soldiers' sisters and daughters met and married local men, too.

Deactivated in 1944 when the last U.S.-based mounted soldiers left, Fort Brown almost immediately started a new life as part of what is now Texas Southmost College. New campus construction echoes the border brick architecture of bygone days.

Fort Brown tours, arranged by the Brownsville Historical Association, link the past to its visible remnants.

Fort Ringgold

Upriver at Rio Grande City, Fort Ringgold followed Fort Brown's trajectory. Veterans of the Mexican-American War went into business, not always successfully.

Capt. Forbes Britton and partners failed at making their Rio Grande City riverboat landing a major stop for Kenedy's steamboats. But construction booms after the Civil War and continuing through World War I boosted the local economy.

At Fort Ringgold, barracks, a jail, an arched brick hospital and officers' quarters surrounded a parade ground, which was larger than a football field.

"The parade ground gives a real picture of what Fort Ringgold looked like 150 years ago, about 1870," says Aminta Reyna Alaniz, a Rio Grande City historian and tour guide. The post bugler played reveille and taps in front of a megaphone longer than 5 feet on the parade ground, signaling the troops as well as townsfolk.

Alaniz identifies 17 fort buildings—from the guardhouse and bakery to warehouses and six barracks—that are today used by the Rio Grande City Grulla Independent School District.

The school district purchased the fort's 325 acres and buildings in 1947 with plans for an education complex and park. Along F Troop and 12th Cavalry streets, tan- and white-painted brick buildings house registration, curriculum and instruction units.

Near a two-story enlisted cavalry barracks that once housed about 100 soldiers (and later was used as an elementary school), girls played softball on a recent Sunday afternoon. The expansive parade ground hosts marching band practice and school Christmas displays.

Until recently, Alaniz says, an electronic sound system broadcast a digital bugle call morning and night. But even those echoes have ended.

Fort McIntosh

Fort McIntosh was built at a long-established Rio Grande crossing in 1849, opposite a former Spanish presidio. Laredo grew along with the fort, which held as many as 400 soldiers



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
A colorized postcard from the early 1900s shows barracks at Fort McIntosh in Laredo. An 1850s engraving of Fort Duncan near Eagle Pass. Fort Bliss in El Paso, with the Franklin Mountains in the background.

on over 400 acres with a requisite hospital, jail, barracks and cemetery.

In 1946, the International Boundary and Water Commission and the city of Laredo divided up the former fort. The city created what is now the Fort McIntosh campus of Laredo College in 1947.

Inside the Fort McIntosh Historic District, streets are named for post commanders and soldiers. The brick hospital has become Laredo College's purchasing department. The former officers' quarters houses the campus student ministry, and the old commandant's house became a museum furnished with Victorian-era pieces.

The bakery is occupied by a customs brokers association. Other refurbished McIntosh campus buildings are used for classrooms. The cemetery is empty, the remains relocated.

Fort Duncan

In Eagle Pass, Fort Duncan, constructed across from what was then a tiny Mexican village, was home for infantry troops in 1851 and a mounted rifles unit in 1856.

Buffalo soldiers, all-Black units created after the Civil War, were assigned to Fort Duncan, considered a safe stopping point for travelers on the California road. Before and during World War I, some 16,000 troops trained at Fort Duncan.



COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

The town of Eagle Pass took over the fort property in 1938, creating a public park and loaning it back to the Army during World War II. Today the post headquarters is the Fort Duncan Museum, and seven other original buildings have been restored and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Fort Bliss

In 1848, more than 400 miles up the Rio Grande, a fifth border fort was established at El Paso. It too moved locations multiple times as El Paso flourished around it.

Hoping to remain prosperous, the residents in 1890 purchased and donated land for a permanent Army post, which remains active today.

Unlike the other forts in this list, Fort Bliss grew after World War II. It now covers 1.1 million acres of Texas and New Mexico and is among America's largest Army posts, home to about 20,000 troops.

Replicas of Fort Bliss' early adobe buildings were constructed for the fort's centennial in 1948 and house a museum, which is open to the public.

But at the other four border forts, troops and time marched on. Swords were beaten into street signs. Some of those streets are named for the soldiers who shaped those towns' histories. ■



COURTESY EL PASO PUBLIC LIBRARY



BY MARTHA DEERINGER
PHOTOS BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

GIVING A HOOT

Texas' sick and injured critters depend on a corps of passionate volunteers

One night in 2024, a couple traveling a Panhandle highway couldn't avoid hitting a coyote that darted in front of them. The animal was alive but wedged in the car's grille.

After the couple called 911, the sheriff, fire department and Texas Highway Patrol all responded. They could do little more than use their vehicles to shield the car until a wildlife rehabber arrived and carefully removed the injured animal.

It had sustained a minor pelvic fracture and a broken hind leg, which required surgery. But the coyote made a full recovery and has since been released—thanks to a village of kindhearted people, including the team at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo.

We've all had our encounters with wildlife.

Maybe a bird just flew into your patio door and fell to the ground, looking dazed. Or maybe you discovered a tiny spotted fawn nestled among the zinnias in your flower bed. Did your dog bring you a gift of a baby bunny?

If so, passionate and knowledgeable people scattered around Texas know just what to do.

Wildlife rehabilitators are folks with big, soft hearts. They're volunteers who do not receive a single dime for their work and spend countless hours administering special diets and medications, most of which they pay for themselves. Wildlife rehabilitators cannot legally charge for their services, relying instead on donations and fundraising. Their reward comes when a recovered animal returns to its place in the natural world.

A recent Texas Parks and Wildlife Department study found that 40% of fawns brought in for care were actually uninjured and an even larger percentage of baby birds are "kidnapped" by animal lovers who are only trying to help.

LEFT Captain Jack, an Eastern screech owl, is a permanent resident at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo. He can't be released into the wild because of his limited vision.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Polly is a badger who refuses to return to the wild whenever staffers release her. Stephanie Brady, the director at Wild West, holds Magee, a skunk who serves as an ambassador for the facility. Stella, another ambassador, is a Virginia opossum raised by humans. A 3-month-old bobcat that was part of a litter of five abandoned by their mother and awaiting release.





LEFT A gray fox named Lincoln has bonded with Brady.

or orphaned animals find that these rescue efforts are therapeutic and beneficial to their own normal trauma responses,” DJ says. “Our entire family pitches in under my supervision to help with caring for the animals and with the rewarding moments when they spread their wings and soar again.”

Since she has children at home, DJ doesn’t rehabilitate animals at greater risk to contract rabies, such as bats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons and skunks. One of her main concerns for wild creatures is damage done by insect spray and rat poison, which

can end up killing or injuring beneficial animals, such as songbirds and owls.

Haley Caswell, general manager of Buck Wild Rescue in Ingram, has been overrun since the catastrophic flooding there in July 2025. The small clinic has outdoor enclosures, and the owner, Katie Buck, lives on the property so someone is always there.

“One of the greatest challenges we face in rehab is determining an animal’s true need for help, pertaining mostly to baby animals,” Caswell says.

Another challenge is people who hurt themselves trying to help an animal.

“The first thing someone should consider if a wild animal needs help is personal safety,” Caswell says. “Wildlife can carry zoonotic diseases and may pose a risk of injury through bites, kicks and scratches. Some general signs to look for are parasites, animals covered in bugs and symptoms of dehydration—dull/dry fur, wrinkled skin and emaciation. If a baby animal has been picked up by a dog or cat, we always recommend bringing it [baby animal] in for antibiotics.”

Buck Wild is one of few rescues licensed to take in and rehabilitate most types of wildlife. They serve several counties spanning hundreds of miles. Each year they take in hundreds of orphaned, sick and injured critters, providing them with a safe environment and around-the-clock care. They also care for surrendered pets, which are kept separate from wildlife.

All donations go directly to animal care; they have no paid employees. Buck Wild requires three shifts of volunteers

DJ (last name withheld to protect her privacy since she works out of her home) has been licensed since 1999 and owns a rehabilitation facility in North Texas. Her whole family helps out with critter care.

“I have paid my kids in popcorn and Popsicles to go out and capture grasshoppers, june bugs or moths for the insect-eating animals in our care,” DJ says with a laugh.

She cautions fellow Texans.

“If someone finds wildlife on the ground,” she says, “I tell them to observe it from a distance first. If there is obvious blood or the animal is weak, it probably needs help, but if it is sitting normally and is bright-eyed, it’s best to leave it alone.”

Some baby birds leave the nest as fledglings and hop around on the ground, where their parents continue to feed them for several days before they take flight. Fawns are stashed somewhere safe by their mothers, who will return at dusk to feed them.

In Texas, as in almost any other state, wildlife rehabilitators are required to have state or federal permits issued by the TPWD and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Applicants in Texas must complete training and submit a letter of recommendation from a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or veterinarian. The TPWD website lists 160 licensed rehabbers across the state.

DJ lives with dozens of animals she has taken in plus her children, several of them adopted. Some of these children have been through their own traumas.

“Kids who have survived trauma and then help with hurt



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

If you find a wild animal that you suspect is sick or injured, don't approach it unless you know it's safe. Most mammals in Texas can carry rabies.

Observe from a distance: Does it appear to be injured or bleeding? If not, it's probably best to leave it be. Either way, don't give it food or water. Leave that to the pros.

If the critter does appear to need help, find a list of licensed wildlife rehabbers in your county by visiting tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/rehab/list. They may be able to pick up the animal without you having to do so yourself.

each day to meet the needs of their animals. They strive for minimal human contact with wildlife to ensure successful integration back into nature.

"Every species has different milestones through our rehab program," Caswell says, "from the hand-feeding incubator stage, to an intermediate weaning enclosure, to a fully outdoor enclosure where we ensure it has met the species-specific requirements of self-sufficiency."

Wild West in Amarillo was formed after founder Stephanie Brady rehabilitated over 200 animals in five months. Her 17 years of experience as a veterinary technician led her to realize that a home-based operation would not be big enough to handle the demand.

In 2016, a donated double-wide trailer on 5 acres made it possible for her to open the first wildlife rehabilitation center in the area. The venture has grown like broomweeds in a wet Texas spring. In 2024, with the help of 51 volunteers, Wild West cared for 3,128 wild animals—porcupines, coyotes, bobcats, a marmoset, and countless other mammals and birds.

"All rehabilitators are in constant need of medications, species-specific formulas, feeding syringes and nipples, blankets, towels, and further training," Brady says.

Caring for wildlife is an endless challenge, and unlike pets, they don't necessarily show appreciation for your help or love you back. It's a one-sided labor of love with nature's wild creatures.

"Releasing wildlife is altruistic," DJ says. "Your patients bite, scratch, vomit and poop on you in thanks, but the soar, the hop, the scramble and climb away is life-giving to the world we want to gift to our children. After all, this is God's world." ■



TOP Jessica Hammonds cuddles Polly, who came to the center from Oklahoma.

ABOVE A litter of bobcats discovered in a shed that was being torn down.



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Colton Harris



Cooper Lucher



Thomas Medrano



Tanner Meuth



Darrin Ott

HARD WORK • HIGH STANDARDS

Program prepares
apprentice
lineworkers to
keep 13,000
miles of line and
144,000 meters
safe and reliable

By Connie Juarez

DURING THE LAST several years, Gunnar Schwartz learned that a lineworker's job involves more than putting up poles and stringing wire.

"You learn how the control center and substations operate, which helps you see the bigger picture of how everything connects," Schwartz said. He and 11 other Bluebonnet apprentices learned how to build overhead and underground lines, troubleshoot and restore power during outages, maintain electrical equipment and install and repair meters.

Beyond the technical skills, the program emphasizes the importance of working with a team and building on

others' experience and strengths.

Schwartz, who is based in Giddings, is proud to have finished the program, but he is also aware of the expectations that come with the job.

"Now you're the one people look to for answers," the 30-year-old graduate said. "It's a good feeling, but it comes with more responsibility."

Schwartz and the other 11 apprentice lineworkers at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative completed their training in 2025 and joined the co-op's experienced team of journeyman lineworkers. They work to ensure members have safe, reliable power across the cooperative's 3,800-square-mile service area.

Completing Bluebonnet's lineworker apprentice program requires 8,000 hours of on-the-job training and 672 hours of



Gunnar Schwartz

Ryan Smith

Terry Swonke

Brett Wellmann

Brent Westbrook

Trevor Williams

Photos by Sarah Beal

RDS • PROUD JOURNEYMEN

technical instruction, typically requiring four years. Graduates earn certification from the U.S. Department of Labor and are prepared to handle a wide range of fieldwork.

Joining Schwartz in earning journeyman certification were Huston Burgess, Colton Harris, Cooper Lucherker, Thomas Medrano, Tanner Meuth, Darrin Ott, Ryan Smith, Terry Swonke, Brett Wellmann, Brent Westbrook and Trevor Williams. Lucherker, Swonke, Wellmann and Williams began their careers as lineworker interns in 2021, completing a six-month training program before beginning the apprentice training.

Harris, who is based in Bastrop, said the apprentice program showed him the value of building on a team's strengths.

"There are things I'm not as good at as

others, and things I'm better at," he said. "It's all about working with people and understanding there are many ways to do things."

Working to restore power during ice storms gave Harris his most meaningful experiences on the job. "Seeing people's relief when the lights came back on — that's what makes it all worth it," he said.

Reaching journeyman status was important to Harris. "In my family, there's a long tradition of line work," he said. "It's exciting to reach this point, but the journey is just beginning. There is so much more to learn and accomplish."

Including the 2025 graduating class, 165 apprentices have completed Bluebonnet's lineworker program since it began in 2004.

Chad Weiss, operations superintendent in Brenham, said the apprentice

program provides a solid career path that is close to home.

"The majority of the candidates who take part in our program are from Bluebonnet's service area," Weiss said. "The program produces skilled, safety-driven, dependable lineworkers who take pride in their work. It's great to see them building a future in the same communities they're helping every day."

The Bluebonnet intern program, which started in 2018, provides six months of technical instruction in line work. To advance into the apprentice program, participants must also obtain power-pole climbing certification and a commercial driver's license.

To learn more about Bluebonnet's lineworker internship and apprenticeship programs, visit bluebonnet.coop/careers. ■

While some appliances have slimmed down, others still overindulge. Here's the truth about the current coursing through your home's devices.

APPLIANCE

HEROES

By Sharon Jayson

Chris and Michelle Birnbaum live about 6 miles outside Giddings in Lee County with two adult children in the 2,000-square-foot “barndominium” home they built in 2015. The metal barn-style buildings are known for open floor plans, affordable construction costs and energy efficiency.

When it comes to appliance purchases for their four bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom home, Chris looks closely at how much electricity each appliance will use. “I look at Energy Star labels on everything we buy,” he said, referring to the blue-and-white stickers on appliances that meet energy efficiency guidelines set by the federal government.

Most buyers look at an appliance's price, size, brand and performance before they factor in energy efficiency and features, according to Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative-area retailers and national consumer research groups.

Every appliance uses electricity. But some are energy hogs that eat more than their share of your electric bill. Others are electricity heroes that use less power or can help you cut your electric use.

Because our summers are hotter, Texas homes use at least 25% more electricity than the national average, according to a U.S. Energy Information Administration report. The biggest power hog in your house is the air-conditioning and heating, or HVAC, system. It's a pain in your wallet in the summer and a strain on the electric grid on winter's coldest days.

A typical 2,000-square-foot home uses an average of about 1,200 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per month. That amount of electricity costs about \$115 a month, or \$1,381 a year. That amount does not include additional charges that appear on the bill. Of that, an all-electric HVAC system can eat up an estimated 40% to 50% — from \$456 to \$690 — of that annual cost for electricity, according to consumer sites, state and federal sources, and other Texas utilities.

Continued on Page 22



VS. HOGS



What's the right way to load a dishwasher? When is the thermostat set too high? Experts weigh in on common household debates.

APPLIANCE ARGUMENTS



THE THERMOSTAT BATTLE

"It's too hot!"

"It's freezing in here!"

Experts say: Nobody wins completely — but you can find a middle ground.

The Department of Energy recommends 78°F when you're home in hot weather. Many homes find a compromise at 75–77°F, especially with newer HVAC systems.

Raise the thermostat gradually over a few days. Even 1–2 degrees can save noticeably on summer bills.

At night, lower the temperature only 2–3 degrees. Big drops just force the HVAC to run nonstop.

Keep the fan on Auto, not On. Running it constantly can add \$10–\$25 a month.

Smart thermostat rule: Program a schedule and resist constantly adjusting it. Used correctly, it can cut HVAC use by 10% or more.

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Dishwasher wars, dryer dust-ups, fridge fusses and more appliance arguments online at bluebonnet.coop/appliances

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO YOUR HOME'S ENERGY HOGS AND HEROES, NEXT PAGE

WHAT'S EATING

A GUIDE TO HOW MUCH ELECTRICITY

Texas homes use more electricity than any other state, and the biggest power users are often the appliances that run the longest or cycle on and off all day. Older or poorly maintained appliances, especially those made before 2006, can use 30%-50% more electricity than newer energy-efficient models. This guide compares how much electricity common household devices use and what that means in annual cost for a typical Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member.



THE BIGGEST ENERGY HOG

HVAC SYSTEM

(Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning)

On average, consumes up to **45%** of home's annual electricity use

In summer months, percent spikes to **50%-70%**



APPROXIMATE ANNUAL COST IN BLUEBONNET REGION

Old system with SEER* rating of 10: **\$691**

New system with SEER rating of 20: **\$288**

**SEER stands for Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio, the standard rating used to measure the cooling efficiency of air conditioners and heat pumps*

Higher SEER number = more efficient = lower electricity use for the same cooling output

HUNGRY, HUNGRY POWER HOGS



ELECTRIC WATER HEATER

Old: 3,300-5,000 kWh

New: 3,000-4,500 kWh

ANNUAL COST:

Old unit: **\$398**

New unit: **\$360**



POOL PUMP

Old single-speed: 1,500-6,000 kWh

New variable-speed: 600-2,500 kWh

ANNUAL COST:

Old: **\$360**

New: **\$148**



CLOTHES DRYER

Old: 600-1,200 kWh

New: 250-600 kWh

ANNUAL COST:

Old: **\$86**

New: **\$41**



WINDOW AC UNIT

Old: 600-2,000 kWh

New: 300-900 kWh

ANNUAL COST:

Old: **\$125**

New: **\$58**



REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER

Old: 450-1,400 kWh

New: 300-450 kWh

ANNUAL COST:

Old: **\$89**

New: **\$36**



CLOTHES WASHER

Old top-load: 200-400 kWh

New front-load: 50-130 kWh

ANNUAL COST:

Old: **\$29**

New: **\$9**

YOUR WATTS?

YOUR APPLIANCES USE PER YEAR

SOMEWHAT PIGGY



TELEVISION

Old plasma/LCD:
200–600 kWh
New LED/LCD:
30–450 kWh
ANNUAL COST:
Cost 75": \$36
Cost 50": \$23



DISHWASHER

Old: 50–400 kWh
New: 200 kWh
ANNUAL COST:
Old: \$25
New: \$19



COOKTOP & OVEN

Coil/radiant cooktop:
250–500 kWh
Induction cooktop:
~200 kWh
Oven: 450–675 kWh
ANNUAL COST
Old: \$65 New: \$34



DESKTOP GAMING PC

Old: 200–600 kWh
New: 60–250 kWh
ANNUAL COST:
Old: \$38
New: \$15



APPLIANCE INSIGHTS & TIPS

Appliances made in 2001 or earlier can use 40%–50% more electricity than new, more efficient models. Appliances that are more than 10 years old may use 28%–36% more electricity.

Seals, motors and insulation degrade over time, increasing electricity use.

Always-on devices continue to draw power: Refrigerators, pool pumps, desktop computers, gaming consoles, routers and digital displays.

Appliances with the greatest leaps in efficiency: HVAC systems, refrigerators, water heaters, pool pumps and dryers.

Worst in class: Old refrigerators and outdated HVAC systems (leaky ducts can cost hundreds annually).

The Department of Energy has a refrigerator-rating tool on energy.gov for year-by-year comparisons.

More tips: Texas PUC's Power to Save website, www.puc.texas.gov/waystosave.

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration; U.S. Department of Energy; Energy Star; EPA; Lawrence Berkeley National Lab; EnergySage; NRDC; appliance manufacturers; consumer product testing; Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative residential rates.

** All annual power costs are approximate averages, calculated for Bluebonnet members*

Infographic by Joe Stafford

NEW MINI-HOGS



AIR FRYER
275 kWh
\$26/yr



NUGGET ICE MAKER
200 kWh
\$19/yr



AIR PURIFIER
100–200 kWh
\$14/yr



WI-FI ROUTER
88 kWh
\$8/yr

ELECTRIC HEROES



CEILING FAN

24/7: 657 kWh
8 hrs/day: 219 kWh
ANNUAL COST:
Old: \$63
New: \$21



ROBOT VACUUM

75 kWh
ANNUAL COST: \$7



MICROWAVE

Old: 91 kWh
New: 70 kWh
ANNUAL COST:
Old: \$9
New: \$7



SMART SPEAKER

Old: 15–30 kWh
New: 5–10 kWh
ANNUAL COST:
Old: \$2
New: \$1

WHAT IS A HEAT PUMP?

Appliance heat-pump technology moves heat instead of creating it. Unlike traditional appliances that generate heat with electric coils, those with heat pumps pull heat from the surrounding air and transfer it where it's needed. That makes them far more efficient — often using 50% or less electricity than standard appliances, whether heating water, drying clothes or cooling and heating a home.

Continued from Page 18

The energy efficiency of your system and house are big factors, especially during summer's triple-digit heat. Window AC units may be worse: An older, inefficient unit could use 1,300 kWh in just three hot Texas months. A newer energy-efficient window unit could use 30% to 50% less electricity.

Next on the list of power hogs are older swimming pool pumps, your home electric water heater, refrigerator/freezer, clothes dryer, range and oven, then the dishwasher. The clothes washer is ranked last, but its power use varies depending on the type of washer and its age. How often you use most of these appliances is another variable — except for the refrigerator/freezer, which is always running.

Replacing appliances such as old water heaters, refrigerators or single-speed pool pumps with newer, more energy-efficient versions can have a significant impact on your electricity costs.

Dryers, long considered high on the energy hog list, have improved in the last decade with sensors that control heat and cycle time, as well as some that have their own heat-pump technology. How often you use a dryer and the size of the loads you toss into it also impact the electric bill.

Then there are energy heroes. Some are familiar appliances like the microwave oven, which uses less than a third of the

SALES TAX HOLIDAY

In Texas, an energy-saving incentive is the three-day Energy Star sales tax holiday — scheduled for May 23-25 in 2026 — that lets shoppers buy many types of large appliances tax-free. Learn more at bit.ly/43qLtS7.



THE FUTURE OF APPLIANCES

From fridges that know what's inside to phone apps to control them, smart tech and AI are coming to home appliances. Find out more at bluebonnet.coop/appliances.

electricity of a standard oven for small meals, or a newer dishwasher, which can use less water and electricity than washing dishes by hand. The energy-saving mini-split style air conditioner/heater can replace a window AC unit. It costs less to operate and can circulate air efficiently even when it's not cooling or heating. The trusty ceiling fan, operated at a medium speed for about six hours a day, uses 150 to

200 kWh a year (about \$17). It cools you, not your room, and can help you save 10% of the electricity your HVAC would use.

Old energy hogs have slimmed down in recent years. A newer laptop uses less power than a desktop computer, and today's gaming consoles cost pennies when in standby mode, compared with their older "always-on" counterparts.

On the smaller side, the electric kettle is faster and more efficient than heating water on the stovetop, and a multicooker (the Instant Pot is a popular one) uses much less energy than the oven or stove, cooking slowly with less electricity.

Then there are energy-saving devices: A smart thermostat can reduce HVAC consumption by as much as 15%, switching to all-LED lighting can take a big bite out of your electric bill, and smart plugs and strips let you schedule or remotely turn off electronics or groups of plugged-in devices. ■

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration (eia.gov); EIA Residential Energy Consumption Survey; energystar.gov; U.S. Department of Energy (energy.gov); federalregister.gov; bluebonnet.coop, consumerreports.org; Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory standby load studies; ecoflow.com; howstuffworks.com; energysage.com; airconditionerlab.com; consumer, manufacturer, retailer and utility websites

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Monday, Feb. 16, for Presidents Day. Report power outages 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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Bluebonnet, LCRA provide grants to expand, improve area nonprofits

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently provided grants to several community nonprofit organizations and projects within the cooperative's service area as part of LCRA's Community Grants program. Bluebonnet, one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers, partners with LCRA to support its members and communities. The next round of applications for community grants will be accepted in July 2026. For more information about this program and the application, visit lcra.org/grants.



TOP PHOTO: A \$50,000 grant will help the Rockne Community Recreation Center upgrade its community baseball field. The community grant, along with \$21,888 in matching funds from the recreation center, will be used to replace damaged wooden light poles and add energy-efficient LED lighting to increase safety. The center hosts a number of community leagues and events throughout the year. Pictured, from left, are Elizabeth Ehlers, LCRA regional affairs representative; Josh Thomas, Bluebonnet's Bastrop-area community representative; Matthew L. 'Matt' Arthur, LCRA board member; Roderick Emanuel, Bluebonnet Board Vice President/Vice Chairman; Melissa K. Blanding, LCRA board member; State Rep. Stan Gerdes; Marty Mercer Sr., recreation center president; Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; Josh Almendarez, recreation center field commissioner; Paige Cox, recreation center vice president; Mark Mayo, LCRA board member; Al Bauer, recreation center member; Stacy Kazmir, recreation center secretary; and Gabriella Almendarez, recreation center treasurer.



MIDDLE PHOTO: A \$27,690 grant will help the Delhi Volunteer Fire Department build a concrete helicopter landing pad next to its station near Rosanky. This grant, along with \$7,386 in matching funds from the VFD, will pay for a 40-by-40-foot helipad with aviation lighting. The pad will give emergency transport helicopters a safe, permanent landing location. Pictured, seated, from left are Greg Guillot, David Reininger, Betty Platt and Joyce Rodgers, VFD supporters; Joyce Smith, EMT-B; and Rachael Guillot, VFD supporter. Standing, from left, are Joe Johnson and Cheryl Reininger, VFD supporters; Ray Rodgers, firefighter; Victor Bastien, VFD supporter; Eric Bastien, assistant chief; Cindy Woolley, treasurer and firefighter; Danney Rodgers, chief and EMT; Matthew L. 'Matt' Arthur, Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter and Melissa K. Blanding, LCRA board members; Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Board Director; Mark Mayo, LCRA board member; Jo Anna Gilland, Bluebonnet's Lockhart-area community representative; Josh Thomas, Bluebonnet's Bastrop-area community representative; Elizabeth Ehlers, LCRA regional affairs representative; and Roderick Emanuel, Bluebonnet Board Vice President/Vice Chairman.



ABOVE: A \$19,869 grant will help the Heart of the Pines Volunteer Fire Department, which serves the area between Bastrop and Buescher State Parks, purchase additional protective equipment to increase the number of firefighters who can safely respond to emergencies. This grant, along with \$5,159 in matching funds from the VFD, will equip four firefighters with gear such as special jackets, helmets and boots to fight wildland, vehicle and structure fires. Pictured, from left, are Kyle Ward, Mike Santucci and John R. Ertz, firefighters; Melissa K. Blanding, LCRA board member; State Rep. Stan Gerdes; Matthew L. 'Matt' Arthur and Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board members; Debbi Goertz, Bluebonnet Board Director; Mark Mayo, LCRA board member; Elizabeth Ehlers, LCRA regional affairs representative; Roderick Emanuel, Bluebonnet Board Vice President/Vice Chairman; and Josh Thomas, Bluebonnet's Bastrop-area community representative.

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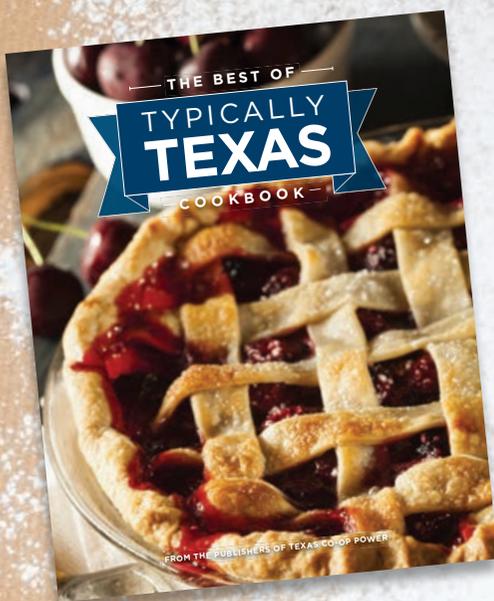
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Boots Across Texas

The best jazz musician, arranger and bandleader you've never heard of

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY KIRSTEN ULVE

MOST DISCUSSIONS OF the Temple jazz scene in the early 20th century—if indeed there are such discussions or there was a jazz scene to discuss—begin and end with Scott Joplin.

Joplin, a Texan and the acknowledged king of ragtime music, was in Temple for at least a short while in 1896 as a member of the Texas Medley Quartet and published three of his very early compositions while in the Central Texas city.

But the discussion ought to include Clifford “Boots” Douglas, who was born in Temple 12 years later. Douglas took up the drums when he was 15 and would go on to become the best jazz musician and arranger you’ve never heard of.

In 1926 he took his talents to San Antonio, where his first gig was with Millard

McNeal’s Southern Melody Boys. He formed his own band, Boots and His Buddies, soon after.

“Although born the same year as fellow San Antonio bandleader Don Albert, we know far, far less about Boots Douglas and his band than we do Albert. That’s because Boots made the mistake of being born in Temple, Texas, instead of New Orleans,” wrote a blogger for Wired for Sound. “The fact that Boots’ early Bluebird sessions were sometimes as good or better than Albert’s Vocalion session from the same time frame was of no apparent concern to jazz historians.”

The band was usually billed as Boots and His 13 Buddies, though sometimes circumstances reduced him to 11 Buddies. The name very likely came from

a popular comic strip of the day called *Boots and Her Buddies*.

Boots’ band was what’s known as a territory band—dance bands, usually consisting of a dozen or so musicians, that crisscrossed specific regions of the U.S. from the 1920s through the 1960s, performing popular songs of the day. They played one-nighters six or seven nights a week, at venues like meeting and dance halls and hotel ballrooms.

Jazz historians have called these bands the cover bands of their day and credit them with bringing popular music to places that national booking agents ignored.

In this era, San Antonio was a regular stop for the major record labels’ field trips to record regional artists and genres. Boots and His Buddies recorded 42 sides for the RCA Victor/Bluebird Records label in San Antonio between 1935 and 1938.

Texas writer and jazz scholar Dave Oliphant, who is responsible for much of what little we know about Douglas, notes that Boots and His Buddies was unlike other jazz groups or individual artists from Texas because they “never left the state for fame in Kansas City, New York, Chicago or Los Angeles.”

But the band did occasionally play outside the state. A Paris, Texas, newspaper from July 1937 noted, “The Douglas band comes to Paris from engagements at the Kit Kat Klub, St. Louis; the Grand Terrace Café, Chicago; and from recent fill-in spots in Dallas’s Chez Maurice.”

Boots and His Buddies continued to tour, almost exclusively in Texas, through the 1940s before Douglas called it quits and moved to Los Angeles in 1950.

He continued to play part time in California, until he didn’t. The Handbook of Texas notes that Social Security death records list a Clifford Douglas, who was born September 7, 1906, in Texas and died October 27, 2000, in Los Angeles. ■

Cheesecake

Massively delicious delights that are well worth the effort

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

This is everything I want in a cheesecake. I want a buttery crust, a thick filling and a pop of tartness from citrus. I topped mine with freshly whipped cream, but lemon curd, fresh berries, a jam or candied lemon would all be delicious too. Please note: Cheesecakes take a lot of time. Allow yourself a day and a half from start to serving.

Lemon Cheesecake

CRUST

- 2 cups shortbread cookie crumbs**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted**

FILLING

- 4 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened**
- 1 cup sugar**
- ½ cup heavy cream**
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest**
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice**
- 2 tablespoons flour**
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
- 1 teaspoon lemon extract**
- 8–10 drops yellow food color**
- 5 eggs, room temperature**
- 1 cup whipped cream, for topping**
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced, seeds removed, for garnish**

- 1. CRUST** Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat a 10-inch springform pan with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a medium bowl, combine cookie crumbs, sugar and butter. Press into bottom of prepared pan. Bake 10 minutes, then allow to cool.
- 3. FILLING** In a bowl, beat cream cheese and sugar on medium speed until smooth. Reduce speed to low and beat in heavy cream, lemon zest and juice, flour, and vanilla and lemon extracts. Add food color, starting with 8 drops, but adding up to 2 more to achieve desired color. Add eggs and beat on low until just combined.
- 4.** Place springform pan on a baking sheet. Carefully pour filling over crust. Bake 60–70 minutes or until center is almost set.
- 5.** Remove from oven and allow to cool completely. Refrigerate overnight.
- 6.** Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
- 7.** Top with whipped cream and lemon slices.

SERVES 12

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mexican Chocolate Cheesecake.





Cinnamon Roll Cheesecake

MARIJA DIMITROVSKA
NUECES EC

This one is for my cinnamon roll lovers. All the flavors of the delicious pastry baked into a cheesecake is simply genius. I'll be whipping this one up regularly.

CRUST

1½ cups graham cracker crumbs
¼ cup brown sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, melted

CINNAMON SWIRL

1 cup brown sugar
⅓ cup flour
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
⅓ cup (½ stick) butter, melted

FILLING

4 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1 cup brown sugar
¼ cup sugar
½ cup sour cream
4 eggs, room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon salt
Cream cheese frosting (optional)

1. CRUST Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a medium bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, brown sugar and cinnamon. Stir to combine. Stir in melted butter. Press mixture into bottom of a 9-inch springform pan.

\$500 WINNER

Lime Cheesecake With Caramelized Mangoes

ROSE M. DAILEY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC



Dailey developed this recipe when she had a surplus of mangoes, and it is a delight. I had never caramelized mangoes before—what a pop of flavor!



CRUST

1¼ cups graham cracker crumbs
2 tablespoons sugar
4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, melted

FILLING

3 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1 cup sour cream
1 can sweetened condensed milk (14 ounces)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 eggs
2 tablespoons lime zest
¼ cup lime juice

CARAMELIZED MANGOES

⅓ cup sugar
¼ cup water
1 tablespoon (½ stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
5 cups chopped mango

- 1. CRUST** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a medium bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, sugar and melted butter. Press crumb mixture evenly over bottom and up the side of prepared pan. Bake 5–6 minutes, then allow to cool.
- 3. FILLING** Reduce oven to 325 degrees. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese and sour cream on medium speed until fluffy. Gradually add sweetened condensed milk, beating until smooth. Add vanilla and eggs, and beat on low until combined, scraping down sides of bowl. Add lime zest and juice, and beat on low until combined. Pour into prepared pan.
- 4.** Bake 1 hour. Remove from oven and place pan on a cooling rack for an additional hour. Refrigerate at least 6 hours, until firm.
- 5.** Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
- 6. CARAMELIZED MANGOES** Combine sugar and water in a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Cook until sugar dissolves. Continue cooking 3 minutes or until golden; do not stir. Add butter to pan and stir to combine.
- 7.** Reduce heat to medium. Add mango to pan, gently stirring to coat. Cook 10 minutes or until mango is lightly browned, stirring frequently. Allow to cool and serve cheesecake topped with mangoes.

SERVES 12

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

DON'T SKIMP ON SHRIMP DUE FEB 10

No state produces more shrimp than Texas—2 million pounds a year. How do you like yours? Our favorite shrimp recipe will win \$500 and appear in the July issue.

UPCOMING: AFTER-SCHOOL SNACKS DUE MAR 10



ENTER ONLINE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPES CONTINUED

2. Bake 10 minutes. Allow to cool. Once cool enough to handle, wrap the bottom of the pan with a few layers of foil.
3. **CINNAMON SWIRL** In another bowl, stir together brown sugar, flour and cinnamon. Stir in melted butter. The mixture will be thick and gooey. Set aside.
4. **FILLING** Beat cream cheese on medium speed 2–3 minutes, until smooth. Add brown sugar and sugar, and continue beating an additional 2 minutes, scraping down sides as needed. Add sour cream and beat until incorporated.
5. Add eggs one at a time and beat on low until combined, scraping down sides of bowl. Gently stir in vanilla and salt.
6. Pour $\frac{1}{3}$ of filling over cooled crust. Gently spread $\frac{1}{3}$ of prepared cinnamon swirl over filling. Repeat this process until you have poured all the filling and top off with the last of the swirl.

7. Place springform pan in a large roasting pan. Add hot water to roasting pan halfway up side of springform pan to form a water bath. Carefully place in oven and bake 60–70 minutes. At this point, the cheesecake will be slightly jiggly to the touch, but the edges will be set. Turn off oven and allow cheesecake to cool in the oven 30 minutes. Then remove roasting pan from oven.
8. Allow to cool completely before removing cheesecake from water bath. Refrigerate at least 4 hours or overnight. When ready to serve, run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
9. Top with cream cheese frosting, if desired.

SERVES 12

Chocolate Amaretto Cheesecake With Raspberries

GLEND A PEIRSOL
PEDERNALES EC

Chocolate + Amaretto + Raspberries? Sign me up! This cheesecake can be enjoyed all year. It's perfect for date night, Valentine's Day, entertaining or a girls' night in.

CHEESECAKE

- 1½ cups crushed chocolate cookies or chocolate graham crackers
- 3 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
- 1½ cups sugar
- 1 cup cottage cheese
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup plus 3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 2 tablespoons flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup amaretto, or 2 teaspoons almond extract
- 2 tablespoons vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- 4 eggs, room temperature
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup semisweet chocolate chips

FROSTING

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
- $\frac{3}{8}$ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3 cups powdered sugar
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



$\frac{1}{2}$ cup raspberry jam
1 pint raspberries

1. **CHEESECAKE** Preheat oven to 315 degrees. Coat bottom and sides of a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. Sprinkle crushed cookie crumbs on bottom of pan.
2. Beat cream cheese on medium speed until smooth. Add sugar, cottage cheese, cocoa powder, flour, amaretto or almond extract, vanilla, and salt. Beat on low until smooth. Add eggs and beat on low until combined. Stir in chocolate chips.
3. Slowly pour mixture over crumbs in prepared pan. Bake on middle rack 75 minutes. Remove from oven, allow to cool on a rack and refrigerate overnight.
4. **FROSTING** In a large bowl, stir together melted butter and cocoa powder until evenly mixed. Add in powdered sugar and milk. Beat on low until smooth and easily spread. Stir in vanilla.
5. Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
6. Spread raspberry jam on top, leaving about a 1-inch border around the edge. Pipe frosting to make a border around the top and bottom of cheesecake. Top with raspberries.

SERVES 12

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190TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION!
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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.

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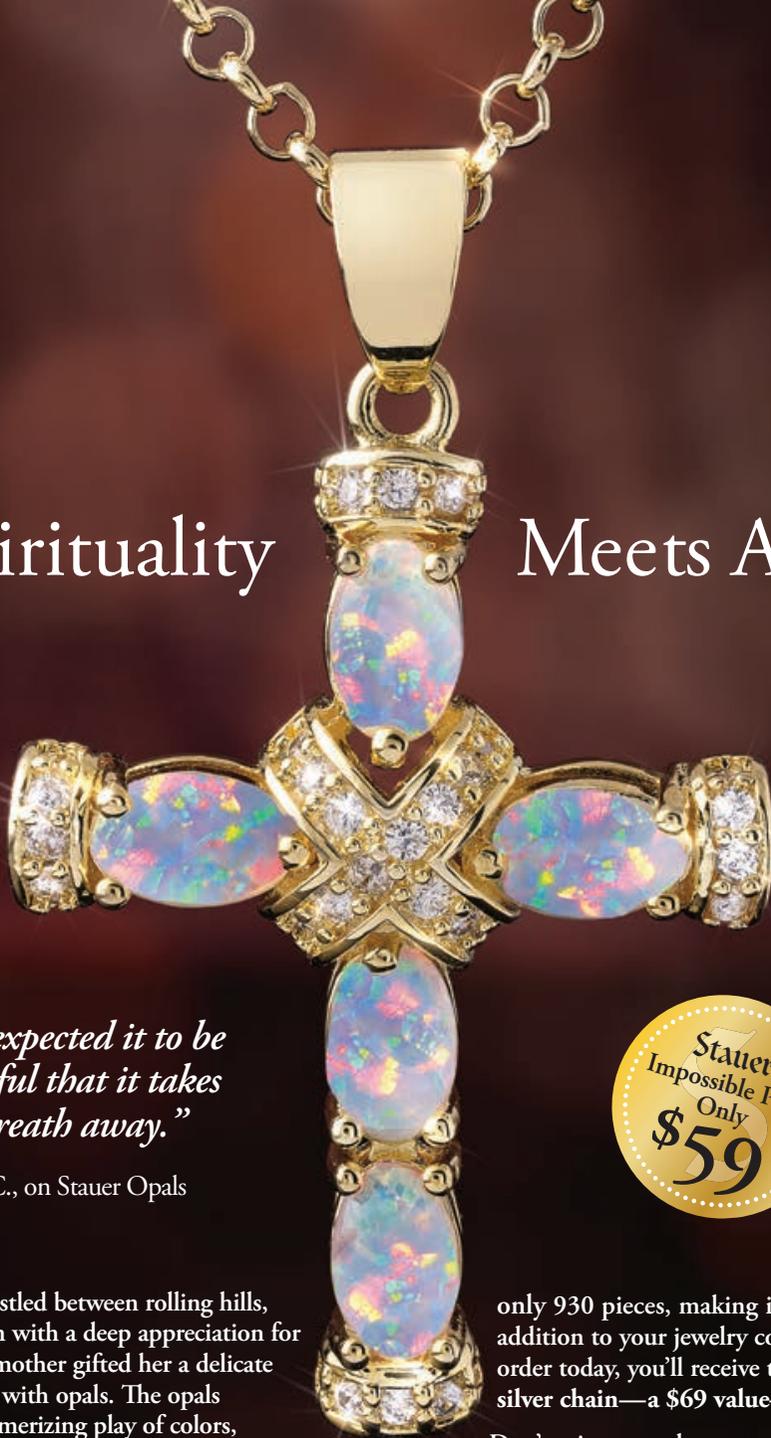
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Honky-Tonk Heaven

The humble dance hall in Helotes where legends broke in their boots

BY CHET GARNER

IF TEXAS DANCE HALLS had a Mount Rushmore, this iconic honky-tonk would be chiseled in. From the outside, it looks like the kind of roadside stop where you'd grab a cold Coke and a bag of pork rinds. But step inside, and you'll quickly realize you've entered a shrine to Texas country music that's been making boots scoot since 1942.

John T. Floore's Country Store—known to most simply as “Floore’s”—sits near the north end of the Helotes historic district just outside San Antonio. It isn't so much a “store” as a dance hall that's hosted everyone from Hank Williams to Kacey Musgraves. In fact, the legend of “Shotgun Willie” Nelson was born on this stage, where he carved out his new persona and found a lifelong following.

The walls are lined with photos that make up a who's who of country music spanning nine decades, while the boots hanging from the rafters whisper the stories of generations of Texans who've danced the night away.

When I visited, the street was filled with pickup trucks as the smell of brisket drifted on the Hill Country breeze. Inside, I ordered a plate of tamales (a Floore's specialty) and an ice-cold longneck, served just the way Texas law requires.

By the time the band struck its first chord, the dance floor was packed with folks two-stepping like they'd been practicing for years. I tried to keep up but mostly looked like a confused armadillo on roller skates.

What makes Floore's special isn't just the music or the food—it's the feeling that you're standing in the middle of Texas history that's still alive and kicking. It's a place where past and present two-step together under the same neon lights. ■

ABOVE Chet grabs a prime parking spot at John T. Floore's Country Store.

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.

FEBRUARY

6

Grand Prairie [6–8, 13–15, 21–22] Lunar New Year, (972) 975-5100, asiatimesquare.com

7

North Zulch Volunteer Fire Department Chili Cook-Off, (979) 488-9214, northzulchvfd.org

Palestine Mardi Gras Parade, 1-800-659-3484, visitpalestine.com

10

Fort Worth [10–15] Six, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

13

Boerne [13–14] Chocolate Walk, (830) 248-1635, ci.boerne.tx.us

14

Chappell Hill Wine & Chocolate Stroll, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

Grapevine Sweetheart Wine Train, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Valentine Valentine's in Valentine, valentineinvalentinex.com

15

Fredericksburg Lindsay and Jason, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

16

Brenham [16–21] Fortnightly Club Used Book Sale, (979) 525-7414, facebook.com/thefortnightlyclub

20

Brenham [20-21] Friendship Quilt Guild Quilt Show, (979) 525-1128, friendshipquiltguild.com

21

Spicewood Stars, Spurs & Illusions: The Art of Texas Magic, (512) 264-2820, spicewoodarts.org

24

Gonzales 100th Anniversary Organ Concert, (830) 672-3521, gonzalesprestexas.com

27

La Grange [27-28] Colorado Valley Quilt Guild Quilt Show, coloradovalleyyqg.com

Washington [27-28] Texas Independence Day Celebration, (936) 878-2214, wheretexasbecametexas.org

28

Boerne 1940s Night at the USO Gala, (512) 693-8382, vfw688.org

Conroe Arbor Day, (936) 539-7824, mcmga.com

MARCH

1

Corsicana Living History Event, (903) 875-7438, pearcemuseum.com

5

Corsicana Divas of Soul, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

6

Spicewood Blue Water Highway, (512) 264-2820, spicewoodarts.org

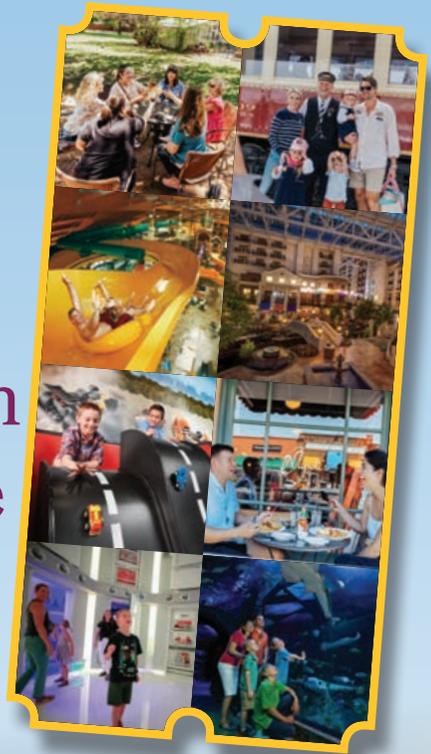
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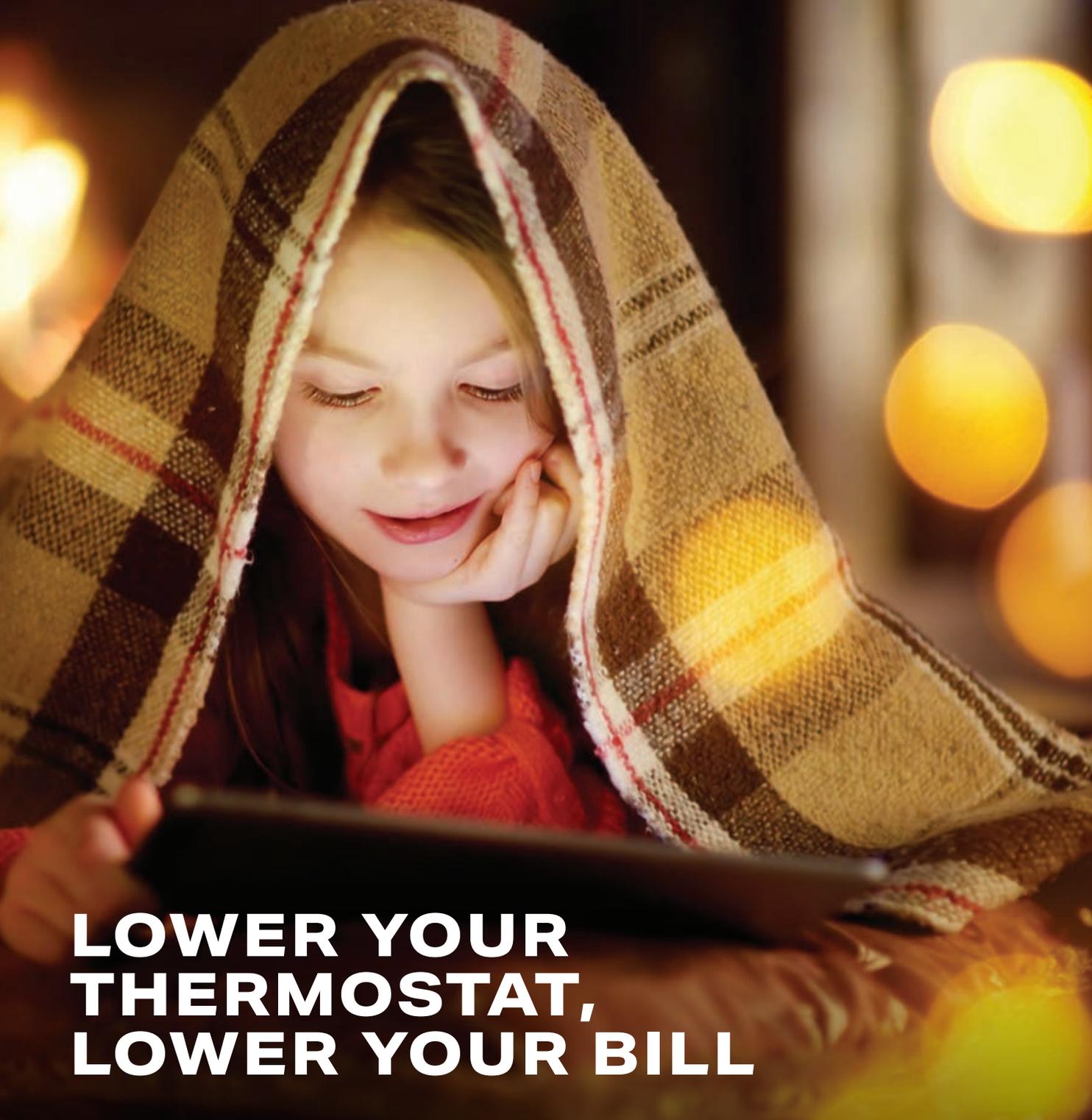
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From the Oil Fields

It's dangerous work. Those who choose this profession are bold, risking their own safety to fuel the world. Their tireless pursuit energizes homes and businesses, keeps trucks delivering goods across the country, and provides a wide variety of products. This month we salute those in search of black gold.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

1 JAMIE VAZQUEZ
PEDERNALES EC

"The sunset on a few jack-up rigs waiting for work in Galveston."

2 MIKE PALMER
FORT BELKNAP EC

"My grandfather Tobe Palmer, center, far back, pulling an oil well near Electra around 1918."

3 GARY BAKER
MIDSOUTH EC

"Looking for Texas tea in the moonlight."

4 DAFFANA GRAY
PEDERNALES EC

"My youngest brother, Eric Gray, operations supervisor for a major oil and gas operations company."



4



2



3

Upcoming Contests

DUE FEB 10 Making a Splash

DUE MAR 10 Seasoned Snaps

DUE APR 10 Underwater Life



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more From the Oil Fields photos from readers.



What Love Looks Like

In sickness and in health—
in a tiny Hill Country cabin

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS
ILLUSTRATION BY PETE LLOYD

FOR MANY OF THEIR nearly seven decades together, Cicero and Olla Rust lived in a comfortable home on their Blanco County ranch.

But when Olla became sick in her last years, caring for both her and a large house became too much. So Cicero sold the house and moved a one-room cabin onto their land.

“That’s one good woman!” Cicero exclaimed after I arrived for an afternoon visit. In bed lay his wife, a mere shadow of the strong woman she’d once been. A woman who had chopped cedar, corralled cattle and worked their land as good as any ranch hand.

Now she lay on her side, knees drawn, arms across her stomach, her head on a pillow. A cotton sheet lay tousled to one side.

Cicero and Olla met in 1935 in the Hill Country. Her father forbade the romance, but a year later, Olla told Cicero that she wanted to get married.

Secretly, they agreed to meet in Johnson City on a stormy night in May 1936. But Olla’s father kept her after dark doing chores. By the time the couple finally arrived at the judge’s home, it was 11:30 p.m. So Cicero had to “run the JP out of bed” to perform the ceremony.

During their first nine years together, the couple lived in a run-down, one-room sharecropper’s cabin. To make money, they chopped cedar and sold three stacked cords for \$5. Determined to do better, they saved their money, bought two milk cows and sold cream.

“That Depression learned me a lot,” said Cicero, 90, dressed in his trademark denim overalls, his white hair bare of the usual gimme cap. “It learned me that you can live without some things.”

In 1947, the Rusts bought 160 acres in Blanco County. Two years later, they purchased 117 more. In 1950, Olla bore their only child, C.A. Rust III.

While we visited, I glanced now and then at Olla, 91, who lay staring at the wall. Three times a week, a home health care worker bathed and fed her. A physical therapist came, too. But it’s Cicero—her devoted partner in life—who tended to all her needs.

For a while, Olla lived in a nursing home. But when staff used restraints to keep her in bed, Cicero brought his wife back home to the one-room cabin. He learned the correct way to lift her, bathe her, what to feed her and when.

“I can take care of her myself,” Cicero said. “And I still ranch, too.”

As I drove away, my eyes teared up as I thought about Olla and Cicero—about the vastness and strength of a love that endures and refuses to give up. That tenderly cares and nurtures, even when the caring can’t be returned. That selflessly trades the luxuries of a spacious home for a simple cabin.

Now *that’s* true love straight from the heart. ■

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