

BUILT FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Across the Bluebonnet service area, this year's scholarship recipients are leading teams, serving communities and chasing ambitious goals far beyond the classroom.

By Connie Juarez and Kirsten Tyler

Across Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area, the co-op's 213 scholarship recipients this year are proof that achievement is about more than grades alone. These recent graduates supported teammates, led student organizations and gave back to their communities, all while preparing for their futures.

The students, from 39 high schools in 11 counties, demonstrate that leadership and service take many forms, from classrooms and competition fields to service projects and youth mentoring.

Take, for example, Brenham High School graduate Sadaf Shireen. She expanded her interest in medicine through Healthcare Occupations Students of America, an organization that prepares students for healthcare careers through competitions and connections with medical professionals. Sadaf has served as the group's chapter president while becoming a multiyear state qualifier in events such as healthcare issues and creative problem solving. Through the healthcare organization, known as HOSA, as well as internships and opportunities to shadow professionals, she got firsthand exposure to the medical field. "One of the



Sadaf Shireen, a Brenham High School graduate, also earned an associate degree in arts from Blinn College through dual-credit coursework. The Healthcare Occupations Students of America chapter president will attend Brown University in Rhode Island this fall.

Sarah Beal photo

most impactful experiences I had was shadowing Dr. Rema Malik, a vascular surgeon. I was able to observe procedures in the catheterization lab and follow her throughout her day, from surgeries to patient interactions."

Sadaf said this experience gave her a deeper understanding of the medical profession and strengthened her interest in pursuing medicine. She plans to study biochemistry on a pre-med track at Brown University before attending medical school, with cardiology as her top interest.



KALEIGH MEDINA, Luling High School
Nicole Smith photo, Luling Newsboy Signal



BRAXTON BOWDEN, Bastrop High School
Bella Rice photo, Bella Photography

Other scholarship recipients built leadership and confidence through athletics. Kaleigh Medina, a graduate of Luling High School, played softball and was a basketball team captain. She was named all-district as a junior and senior and helped lead the Eagles to their first playoff appearance in several years.

Sports helped shape both her career goals and her mindset when facing challenges. After spending time with family members in hospital intensive care units, Kaleigh plans to major in nursing at Texas State University.

"I've learned to be comfortable being uncomfortable and having confidence to trust yourself and go for it," she said.

Sports also taught Braxton Bowden lessons that extend beyond the football field. The four-year football player at Bastrop High School helped lead his team and anchor the offensive line from the center position, where he read defenses and communicated with teammates. He participated in team community efforts, including mentoring younger athletes through Bear Camp, which emphasizes accountability and a strong work ethic.

"I've always loved the leadership, the competition and the bond you build with your teammates on and off the field. It's something special," Braxton said.

He will attend Texas State Technical College to study process operations and cybersecurity.

These students' accomplishments reflect a larger story among all the Scholarship of Excellence recipients across Bluebonnet's service area. They are building leadership through organizations focused on responsibility, teamwork and service.

Bios of additional scholarship recipients, pages 18-19

BY THE NUMBERS 2026 RECIPIENTS

213

Scholarships awarded

7

Average number
of extracurricular activities
among recipients

\$2,500

Awarded per scholarship

3.61

Average GPA
among recipients

Nearly \$2 million

Awarded
to 766 students
since 2020

Top career interests

Health and medical fields
Business
Agriculture
Welding

Top school choices

Texas A&M University
Blinn College
Texas State University
Texas State Technical College

Organizations most frequently cited

Athletics
National Honor Society
Student council

GUNNER CHOVANEC

Bellville High School, Austin County
The National FFA Organization

Among this year's Bluebonnet scholarship recipients, 59 students were involved in FFA, making it one of the most popular organizations in the group. Founded nationally in 1928 as Future Farmers of America, the organization has had a home in Texas since 1929. Today, FFA prepares middle and high school students for leadership and careers in agriculture, food and natural resources through hands-on learning, classroom instruction and community involvement.

Scholarship recipient Gunner Chovanec, a Bellville High School graduate, spent four years in FFA after starting in 4-H when he was 8. Gunner, who has shown broiler chickens at both county and major livestock shows, earned first-place senior showmanship honors at the Austin County Fair this year. Showmanship competitions evaluate students on presentation, confidence and their understanding of the project.

Raising livestock taught Gunner discipline through the daily demands of animal care. "Showing animals takes a lot of responsibility — waking up to feed them, making sure the temperature and fans in the barn are right, getting the feed mixed to the right ratio and keeping everything clean," he said.



Sarah Beal photo

Bellville FFA members also participate in community service projects, including organizing canned food drives, creating cards for breast cancer patients and assembling care packages for military personnel.

Gunner plans to attend Texas A&M University and study to become a mechanical engineer. He said his experience in FFA — along with working on tractors and equipment at his grandfather's cattle business — helped inspire his career ambitions.

CASSANDRA BAUGH

Elgin High School, Bastrop County
Dance

Cassandra Baugh, an Elgin High School graduate, auditioned for the Elgin Purple Diamonds dance team as a sophomore and remained on the team throughout high school.

Cassandra, who began dancing at 2 years old at the Dancin' Jazz Dance Studio in the Austin-Manor area, participated in camps, training and classes during the summers throughout high school to maintain her skills and stamina. "I learned discipline and time management," she said. "It takes a certain amount of exercising, including cardiovascular and light- and bodyweight exercises, and dedication, to be part of the team."

Cassandra was the 19-member team's social officer for the 2025-2026 school year. She worked with other officers to host team-bonding events and build floats for community parades, all while encouraging and coaching other team members.

She is headed to the University of Texas at Austin to study kinesiology. Although Cassandra does not plan to include dance in her courses at UT, she said "the work ethic and motivation I learned while dancing will help me succeed in my classes. I know it won't be easy, but in the end it will be worth it." After college, she plans to attend graduate school to obtain a physician assistant license and specialize in orthopedics.



Sarah Beal photo

CALVIN WUNDERLICH

Brenham High School, Washington County
Fishing clubs

Student fishing clubs across Texas compete primarily through the Texas High School Bass Fishing Association, established in 2013. The association organizes bass-fishing tournaments for students, educates them on conservation and responsible angling, and sets rigorous academic standards. Calvin Wunderlich of Brenham competed through the Brenham High School Anglers Club.

The Brenham club has about 20 members. During tournaments, teams of two student anglers are paired with an adult captain who operates a boat. Teams participate in five tournaments each year, and Calvin traveled to area lakes including Conroe and Limestone to compete. He joined the club as a freshman, drawn to the opportunity to spend more time outdoors.

"I've learned how to read underwater topography using sonar, understand fish behavior and figure out where to fish based on conditions," Calvin said. The organization also emphasizes responsibility and conservation awareness, including size limits and regulations, and the reasoning behind them, he said.

As vice president of the Brenham club this past school year, Calvin helped coordinate tournament logistics, including organizing meeting times, managing communication and making sure team members knew where to go.

Calvin plans to attend Texas A&M University to study animal science, driven by a passion for livestock production and the lessons he learned growing up in a family dedicated to agriculture.



Calvin Wunderlich photo



CAYDEN ZBORIL

Caldwell High School, Burleson County
Basketball

Of the 213 Scholarship of Excellence recipients, 154 were involved in athletics during high school, including Caldwell High School graduate Cayden Zboril. His passion for basketball started when he was 3. "Basketball, like any sport, is fun. It can be hard, though," Cayden said. "When you step on the court, you're not going to make every shot. You have to work for it."

Participating in athletics builds discipline, confidence, lasting relationships and community connection. For Cayden, that meant coaching younger students in the Dime Box Little Dribblers program and sharing his knowledge with students with disabilities.

Cayden will study sport management at Texas Tech University. He knows college may not be easy, but he believes he has built a strong ability to persevere through participation in athletics. After college, he hopes to attend law school and become an agent representing players and managing sponsorships.

Kim Baasen photo

MCKENZIE BURCH

Lexington High School, Lee County
Health Occupations Students of America

The global Health Occupations Students of America organization, known as HOSA, promotes and supports young leaders through education, collaboration and hands-on experience.

For McKenzie Burch, a Lexington High School graduate who joined HOSA as a sophomore, the organization helped her discover a passion for helping others live healthier lives. Hands-on work, she said, is what suits her best.

As part of the 41-member chapter, McKenzie found joy partnering with We Are Blood, a nonprofit blood bank, to host blood drives in her community. "We would let everyone know, students, teachers, friends and family, that they could come donate blood to help support the community," she said. "Most times, that was all we had to say. They would come donate."

McKenzie plans to study nursing at Texas Tech University. While she wants to focus on pediatrics because she enjoys working with children, she remains open to other areas of nursing that may interest her.



Meagan Joy photo



TRENT HAGAN

Lockhart High School, Caldwell County
Band

Making music in the high school band was on the list of 30 scholarship recipients' activities this year. Trent Hagan began participating in his school band in sixth grade and eventually played the trombone in Lockhart High School's Roaring Lion Band.

As a band section leader, Trent worked closely with younger students, helping them learn marching techniques and stay prepared during rehearsals. The role gave him early leadership experience and reinforced the importance of leading by example, he said.

Band also taught him independence and time management. "Nobody holds your hand. You have to learn your music on your own and be prepared," he said. "We

also have some crazy practice schedules, especially during marching season. We had morning practices before school at 5 a.m. and then late nights after games, so you really learn how to manage your time."

The Roaring Lion Band performed at school ceremonies and local events, including Borchert Loop Elementary's groundbreaking in 2025. "Having a band at these events brings a sense of celebration and community spirit," Trent said.

Trent plans to attend Texas A&M University to study computer engineering. Band has shaped his discipline, teamwork and appreciation for music — skills he said he plans to carry into college and beyond.

Colten Riley photo

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2026 SCHOLARSHIP OF EXCELLENCE RECIPIENTS

All 213 recipients live in Bluebonnet-served homes with a parent or guardian who is a member.

Austin

Asmaa Botielhassani
Camila Campos
Fernando Campuzano
Saul Loreda Bravo

Bastrop

Kailei Anzaldua
Braxton Bowden
Kristen Browning
Paige Burnett
Veronika Davis
Kendall Eddie
Lilly Fiore
Sophia Finke
Giselle Gallardo
Lillian Gregory
Betsy Herrera
Lesly Herrera-Fraga
Addison McCarus
Samantha McFarland
Joshua McLaughlin
Mia Neighbours
Sarah Nix
Alexis Riffett
Breanna Rosa
Loren Rosalez
Hannah Sagebiel
Olivia Wyrick

Bellville

Darcy Luedke

Bleiberville

Gunner Chovanec

Brenham

Jillian Allen
Kolbe Asmussen
Kylie Baker
Wyatt Crampton
Evan Curtis
Abigail Dowling
Hagen Frank
Braeden Gandy
Cooper Hodde
Molly Jones
Briar Kalkhake
Hailee Klekar
Nathan Knobloch
Caleb Landry
Lillie Lehrmann
Kate Martin
Paige Marth
Caleb Maurer
Madison McCain
Jase Mueller
Antonie Najera
Logan Rivas
John Rodriquez

Isabella Romero
Sadaf Shireen
Tristin Shugart
McKenzie Tiemann
Raelynn Traill
Calvin Wunderlich

Burton

Stephanie Donnell
Paige Fritsch
Aerynn Huntsman
Cadeyn Manley
Kayegan Meyer
Kolbie Parker

Caldwell

Sarah Boniol
Tanna Boykin
Cayle Canon
Chase Clark
Emma Davis
Larisa Foster
Kaylan Groce
Adeline Hicks
Tanzley Johnson
Reese McManus
Maria Alejandra Medina
Kimberli Vasquez-Ramirez
Kylie Vogler
Cayden Zboril

Carmine

Alin Soto

Cedar Creek

Brian Ayala
Isabella Contreras
Marco Cortez
Merrique Deschambault
Juan Dominguez Jr.
Kendal Farr
Paisley Faske
Sophie Hernandez
Kimberly Ibarra-Mendoza
Isabell Ortiz-Vasquez
Juan Rangel
Mackenzey Roberts
Naila Sanchez
Richard Torres Jr.

Chappell Hill

Grasyn Hinze
Avery Swierkowski
Zoe Zwerneman

Dale

Briseida Alvarado
William Freeman
Omar Marquez
Kayli Salas

Del Valle

Ximena Gutierrez
Eva Lopez

Dime Box

Kodi Hitchcock
Joseph Mikulin
Caleb Rackel
Chansidy Straughter

Flatonia

Callie Ruyle

Elgin

Erika Avila
Cassandra Baugh
Crystal Cano-Barrientos
Gabriela De la Cruz
Bianca Galindo
Macy Heine
Brynn Leschber
Cassie Rice
Camila Sandoval
Amy Simon
Lizbeth Zayago

Fayetteville

Mason Fenhaus
Jessica Rohde

Giddings

Sharron Adair
Rilynn Creek
Peyton Dees
Gunnar Fromme



Riley Greene
Emmerson Harville
Morgan Malone
Addyson Mersiovsky
Kyle Montgomery
Kylee Smith
Rylee Smolik
Kamrie Stewart

Teal Brockenbush
McKenzie Burch
Joseph Freeman
Brock Herring
Carson Jackson
Jackson Koester
Robert Kellenberger
Rebekah Madison
Landri Milligan
Jordan Muhl
William Ramsey
Brooke Scheler
Keely Schumpert
Lee Siegmund
Kirby Smith

Gavin Hinckley
Saylor Martinez
Naomi Nava
Marissa Sosa
Danica Valadez

Luling
Brandon Cunningham

Manor
Sophia Cabra-Lezama
Elian Cabrera-Gamez
Lizeth Lopez Cardona
Devin Everett
Melanie Garcia
Natasha Garza
Thang Khai
Angel Mondragon
George Nwankwo
Landon Osisiogu
Irvin Ortiz-Arellano
Jessica Perez
Jackelyn Reyes-Del Rio
Karla Salas
Nathalia Torres
Jose Bautista Zamora

Maxwell
Mackenzie Mayfield
Analia Sepulveda

McDade
Ethan Dax Colosky
Summer Jacobs
Aurelio Montoya Jr

New Ulm
Alejandra Diaz

Paige
Ariadne Andrade
Samuel Diaz-Suarez

Alaylah Martinez
Cristal Orocio
Michael Ramos
Zanaida Reyes

Red Rock
Renee Herrera
Ryan Watson

Rosanky
Avery Hammons
Brooke Wilhelm

San Marcos
Joseph Gerhart
Paris Gonzalez
Kaleigh Medina
Kant Nyi Lu
Angelina Vazquez
Lukas Wagner
Isabella Zertuche

Smithville
Kendall Bezner
Lucca D'Amico
Julieta Huerta
Red Muniz
Carter Natal
Lily Sabrsula
Emma Short

Somerville
Braxton Fritcher
Adia Ramos

Staples
Lexzura Battise

Washington
Shelbey Cross
Taylor Groce
Colin Schomburg

Lockhart
Abigail Burnett
Emory Burton
Cristian Cruz
Andrew Davis
Jaeda Eckford
Zoe Goerlitz
Trent Hagan

Ledbetter
Airion Thomas

Lexington
Emilia Bayer

APPLY FOR A 2027 SCHOLARSHIP

Students who plan to graduate in the 2026–2027 school year can apply for a Scholarship of Excellence starting in November. Applications and information will be at bluebonnet.coop/scholarships.

To be eligible for a scholarship, a student must reside with a parent or guardian who is a Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member. Applicants can attend a public or private high school, or be homeschooled.

Bluebonnet members do not pay for the scholarships through bill payments or electric rates. The Scholarships of Excellence are funded through Bluebonnet's Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament and former co-op members' unclaimed capital credit payments that are returned to the State of Texas.

Bluebonnet, LCRA award grants to support local fire departments

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently provided two grants to local fire departments 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 open in January 2027www. For more information about this program and the application, visit lcra.org/grants.

TOP PHOTO: A \$25,000 grant will help Martindale Fire & Rescue to purchase new extrication tools. This grant, along with \$8,025 in matching funds from the fire department, will help firefighters cut through metal or lift heavy materials to rescue people after vehicle collisions or other emergencies. Pictured, from left, are Brailey Bezio, firefighter and EMT-B; Josie Martinez, Caldwell County Emergency Services District No. 3 treasurer; Philip Settepani, firefighter; Laura Sanchez Fowler, city of Martindale mayor; Corey Gebert, firefighter and EMT-B; Matt Tanksley, fire and rescue lieutenant and EMT-B; Tony Garza, firefighter and EMT-B; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Director; Larry Turner, firefighter and EMT-B; Jo Anna Gililand, Bluebonnet Lockhart-area community representative; Elizabeth Ehlers, LCRA regional affairs representative; Bill Hamilton, Caldwell County ESD No. 3 president; Bill Glaze, fire and rescue president; and Joe Abatecola and Alyssa Decker, firefighters.

BOTTOM PHOTO: A \$50,000 grant will help the Industry Volunteer Fire Department build a dedicated landing zone for medical helicopters. This grant, along with \$36,951 in matching funds from the VFD, will pay for a 60-by-60-foot helipad with lighting. Pictured, from left, are Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet Brenham-area community representative; Mable Meyers, city of Industry mayor; Chasidy Nowicki,



LCRA photos

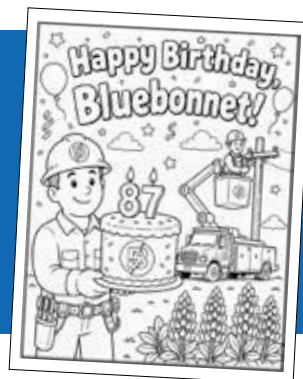
Bluebonnet intern; Caroline and Abigail Blanding and their mother, Melissa K. Blanding, LCRA board member; Kevin Gross, VFD vice president; Byron Balke, Bluebonnet Board Assistant Secretary/Treasurer; Mary Rinn, VFD grant coordinator; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; Stephen F. Cooper, LCRA board

chair; Ronnie Geistmann, VFD chief; Gregg Schubert, VFD president; Walter Morrow, Austin County EMS director; Sheila Raeke, VFD treasurer; Joan Buenger, city of Industry council member; Robert "Bobby" Rinn, Austin County commissioner, Precinct 2; and Kate Ramzinski, LCRA regional affairs representative.

Hey, kids! You can color to win!

We're celebrating Bluebonnet's 87th birthday! Enter Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's coloring contest for a chance to win a back-to-school bundle packed with supplies and surprises.

HOW TO ENTER: Download the coloring page at bluebonnet.coop/birthdaycoloringcontest. Color your best version of a lineworker holding Bluebonnet's birthday cake. Submit your entry by Friday, Aug. 28.



The switch is simple

Go paperless to cut down on mail and clutter.

SWITCH TO PAPERLESS BILLING

GET YOUR BILL FASTER

Your bill arrives by email as soon as it's ready.

LESS PAPER. LESS HASSLE.

No envelopes or paper clutter to keep up with.

EASY TO MANAGE

View bills anytime through MyBluebonnet.

YOU
got
THIS

Learn more at
bluebonnet.coop/yougotthis



Scan the QR code to get started.

