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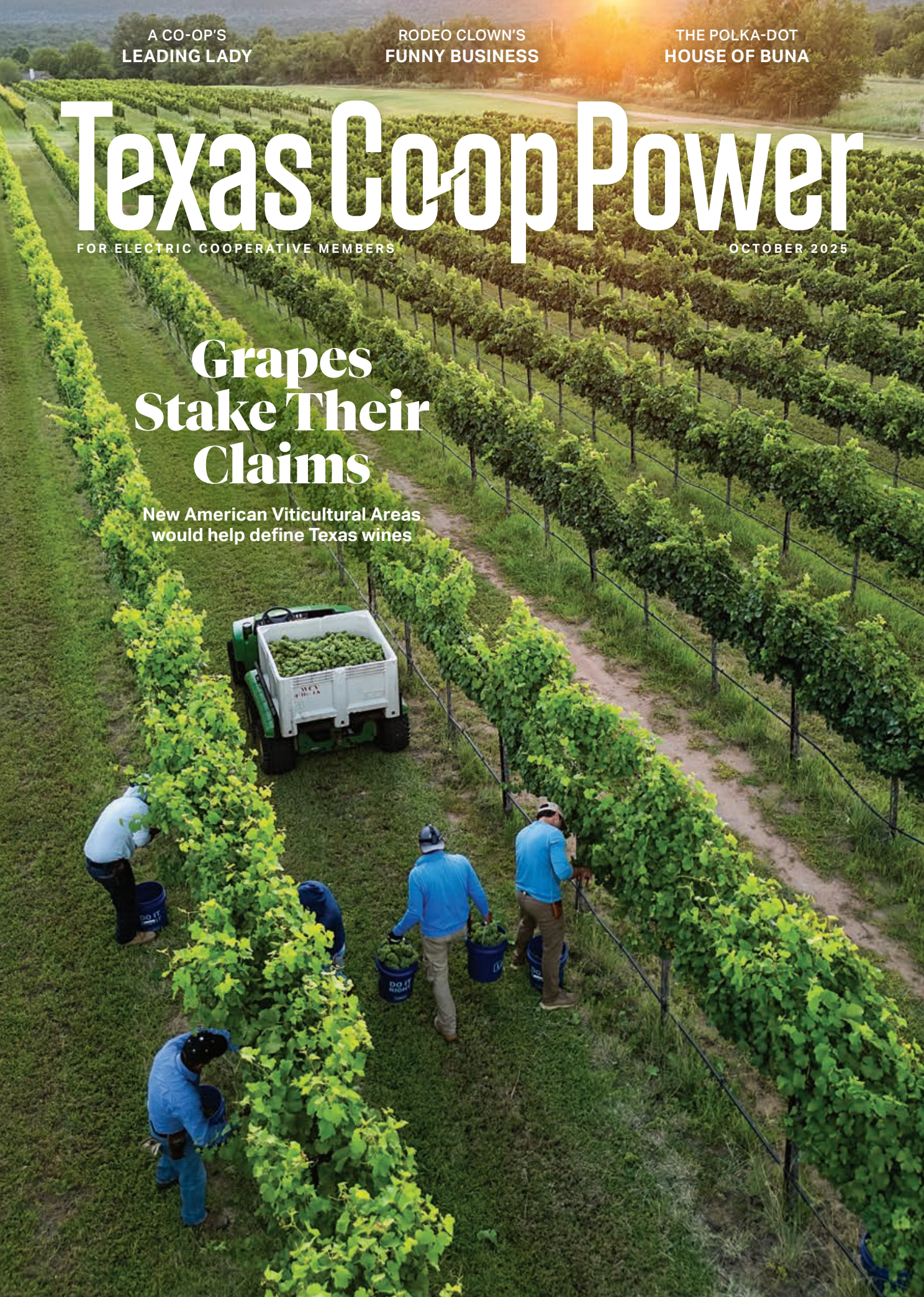
# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

OCTOBER 2025

## Grapes Stake Their Claims

New American Viticultural Areas  
would help define Texas wines





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# October 2025



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## 06 Putting Grapes on the Map

Growers continue to refine and expand the distinctive character of Texas wines.

*By Amanda Ogle  
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

## Her Life of Service

Managing an electric cooperative was a job too big for one man.

*By D’Ann Nichols Drennan*

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ON THE COVER  
Harvesting at Uplift Vineyard in July begins at dusk.  
*Photo by Erich Schlegel*  
ABOVE  
For decades, Jerry Nichols was the unofficial first lady at Wood County Electric Cooperative.  
*Photo by Jay Patrick*





# Taco Timing

**NATIONAL TACO DAY** moved to the first Tuesday in October in 2024. Marketers liked the idea of Taco Tuesday.

Of course, in Texas, every day is taco day. Still, mark your 2025 calendars for October 7. And remember that we had the best reader recipes for tacos in March 2021—available online any day of the week.

## Get Over It

Sugar Land wants to rise above all the snarling traffic around Houston.

The southwest suburb is looking at two solutions that could have commuters whizzing around overhead. Electric, self-flying taxis using vertical takeoff and landing is one possibility. Another is a system of on-demand, electric gondolas, left, that would glide on cables above city streets.

"We're told to be trailblazers and not be afraid to take risks," says Melanie Beaman, the city's transportation and mobility manager.



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The best food I've ever had at a fair is ...



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

Here are some of the responses to our August prompt: **Another day, another ...**

Texas scorcher.

BENNY CALVIT  
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Book read.

EMMA MACHALICA, AGE 12  
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Day to say I love you.

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VIA FACEBOOK

Gray hair!

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Chance to make a difference.

LISA LEOPOLD  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES  
BRYAN

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JAN PENTER CANAMORE  
NUECES EC  
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Visit our website to see more responses.

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Barbecue Sides

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From the Oil Fields

**RECOMMENDED READING**

October is National Co-op Month. In October 2015 we looked at some of the terrific work co-ops do—in Texas and worldwide. Read the story at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).





AUGUST 2025 Disc Jockeys

“Some think it’s just for college kids, slackers and stoners when, in fact, it’s a great sport for people of all ages (I’m 68).”

GREG MCCARTY  
PEDERNALES EC  
BUDA



WYATT MCSPADDEN

### Before There Was Golf

My husband’s family is proud of the fact that his uncle, Fred Morrison, invented the Frisbee, first called the Pluto Platter [*Disc Jockeys*, August 2025]. Several family members, including my then-teenage future husband, demonstrated the invention at state fairs before it was finally bought by Wham-O.

Kathleen Warr  
San Bernard EC  
Hockley

### Fire Prevention

I could add another tip: During holidays that normally have fireworks involved or during an extended dry spell, at each outdoor faucet I will stage a water hose with an attached nozzle [*Every Part of Texas Is at Risk*, August 2025]. If a fire starts that could affect our house, I can fight it till the fire department arrives.

Ted Pasche  
CoServ  
Argyle



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### Learned Our Lesson

The quote from “Anonymous” was an insult to every educator in this state [*Currents*, August 2025].

The quote means, “After you’ve forgotten how to read, forgotten mathematics, forgotten EVERYTHING that you learned in school ... then you’re truly educated.”

Preposterous! As a retired educator, I can assure you that dedicated educators are teaching Texas students what they need to continue in life—in college, on-the-job training or life experiences—which they wouldn’t even be able to comprehend without those “useless things” they learned in school.

Susie McCalla  
Central Texas EC  
Kerrville

### One Rare Sight

A little over 40 years ago, I lived in north-east Arkansas for a while, and I kept a tiny carved agate armadillo on my desk [*Dillo Dirt*, July 2025]. One day a woman in the office finally picked it up and said, “What is this?”

She had never seen one.

Mona Tucker  
Rusk County EC  
Carthage

**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

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Growers continue to refine and expand the distinctive character of Texas wines

# PUTTING GRAPES ON THE MAP

BY AMANDA OGLE • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

**D**rive across Texas and you expect to see cattle, oil pump jacks, and cotton or corn.

But grapes?

They're more Texan and more common than you might think—increasingly so. And they've been here far longer than those pump jacks.

In fact, more than 14,000 acres of grapevines provide for some 600 winemaking facilities in Texas, according to the Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association. That's way up from 3,000 acres and 200 wineries just a decade ago, a reflection of the rapidly expanding \$24 billion Texas wine industry.

Spanish missionaries brought grapevines with them to Texas in the 17th century, and attempts at winemaking with wild mustang and muscadine grapes occurred until Prohibition.

Modern winemaking picked up in the 1960s as researchers at Texas Tech University planted grapes in the High Plains of the southern Panhandle, and producers are still refining what grows best where.

The state has eight American Viticultural Areas, distinct appellations of origin used on wine labels. AVAs define grape-growing regions and identify specific geographic or climatic features that affect the characteristics of grapes.

The Texas High Plains AVA is the most productive in the state, with more than 8,000 acres of vineyards, followed by

ABOVE Claire Richardson is a winemaker at Burnet-based Uplift Vineyard near Lake Buchanan.

OPPOSITE Drew Tallent with a handful of iron-rich Hickory Sands soil at Tallent Vineyards, north of Mason.









ABOVE From left, Bob Young, Bending Branch Winery CEO; Tallent; and Jen Cernosek, Bending Branch general manager, at Tallent Vineyards.

OPPOSITE Ron Yates of Spicewood Vineyards. He sources grapes from the proposed Dell Valley American Viticultural Area in the Chihuahuan Desert of far West Texas.

the Texas Hill Country AVA with about 2,500 acres. The oldest, the Mesilla Valley AVA, established in 1985, straddles Texas and New Mexico in the El Paso area.

As the Texas wine scene continues to expand, more oenophiles are learning about what they taste in the state's specific terroirs, nailing down hyperlocal characteristics that help them understand exactly what types of wines they like from each region.

"The entire country of France has more than 360 different appellations," says Valerie Elkins, managing director of membership operations for William Chris Wine Co., based in Hye, between Fredericksburg and Johnson City. "Yet Texas is larger than France, and we only have eight defined AVAs. These AVAs help the consumer to identify regions and regional expectations, so establishing more AVAs helps get more national and international understanding."

"If you were to go to a restaurant today and order a chardonnay, you'd look for a California Russian River Valley chardonnay because that's one of the regions where those grapes grow the best. We don't really have that in Texas yet."

Grape and wine producers await the approval of three viticultural areas by the U.S. Treasury's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau. The process for establishing an AVA is tedious and slow. If approved, these new appellations would be Texas' first since 2005.



## LLANO UPLIFT AVA

Located entirely within the Texas Hill Country AVA, the Llano Uplift AVA would cover 1.3 million acres. The greater Hill Country region sits over an ancient limestone seabed, meaning the soils are more alkaline compared with the slightly acidic soils of the uplift, which is marked by a geological formation made primarily of granite rather than limestone.

According to Justin Scheiner, associate professor and viticulture specialist at Texas A&M University and the petitioner behind this AVA proposal, the Llano Uplift has its own aquifer system, which impacts nutrient availability and water quality and allows for different rootstocks to be planted. The uplift gets less rain than surrounding areas, which contributes to the distinct character of wines made from the vineyards here.

"Aromatically, the wines in the Llano Uplift AVA exhibit more floral, delicate and perfumed characteristics," says Claire Richardson, winemaker at Burnet-based Uplift Vineyard, which is within the proposed Llano Uplift AVA and a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative.

"The wines are typically medium in body and have a distinct tannin structure that could be described as dusty or powdery," she says, noting that depending on the vintage and variety, herbal characteristics can be present in the wines, including mint, eucalyptus and subtle green pepper.



## **HICKORY SANDS DISTRICT AVA**

This proposed viticultural area is located entirely within the western part of the proposed Llano Uplift AVA and on the edge of the Edwards Plateau in Mason County. Soils here are rich in iron, with granite and sandstone. Water from the Hickory Aquifer is important for irrigation.

Bending Branch Winery, based in Comfort and a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative, sources Hickory Sands grapes from Drew Tallent of Tallent Vineyards, one of the catalysts behind the application for this AVA proposal.

“Vines are able to root deeply into the soils of the Hickory Sands,” says Jennifer Cernosek, general manager of Bending Branch. “The Hickory Sands aquifer gives great water content to the soil, and the well-drained soil contributes to the fruit-forward nature of the wines from these grapes.”

Cernosek says that the wines Bending Branch makes from Tallent’s grapes tend to be softer in tannins, have a deeper mineral profile and are earthier.

“There’s a vanilla note in the wines that comes through across various grape varieties,” she says.

## **DELL VALLEY AVA**

In the Chihuahuan Desert of far West Texas, the proposed Dell Valley AVA is in Hudspeth County, west of the Guadalupe Mountains and east of El Paso.

The higher elevation here, 3,640–4,200 feet, provides diurnal shifts, which means it’s hot during the day and cold in the mornings, so that grapes can produce sugars in the heat and acids as they cool.

Ron Yates of Spicewood Vineyards, a member of Pedernales EC, sources grapes from Dell Valley. He says the distinctive altitude, soil and farming techniques come through in the grapes.

“For me, it’s probably the best-value fruit we have in the



state,” he says. “Not a lot of folks are getting it, and it makes great wine. That mountain air up there is almost no humidity, so disease pressure for the grapes is less. Plus, deer aren’t roaming and eating your grapes.”

“It’s probably one of the only places in the state that I have found where we can make lower-alcohol wine, and it’s still really jumping out with flavors and fruit.”

## **ABOUT TIME**

Establishing a new AVA involves filing a petition that takes time to be “perfected” to meet TTB regulation requirements, a period for public comment and then rulemaking finalization. It can take years.

But the Llano Uplift AVA, filed with the government in 2022, is close to becoming official; it’s third in line to enter a public comment period, followed by Hickory Sands, filed in 2023, which is 10th in line.

However, while the AVAs aren’t yet official, you can still enjoy wines from each of these areas at wineries and vineyards across Texas and beyond.

“Texas is becoming known as a world-class wine region,” says Elkins of William Chris Wine. “Breaking down our grow regions to show the unique characteristics of the soil and growing conditions will help raise awareness for the variety of terroir Texas has and continue to make Texas-grown wine more prominent in the national and international wine world.” ■



## **Worth the Squeeze**

**Grapes to sample from each of the proposed AVAs**

### **LLANO UPLIFT**

Montepulciano and sangiovese, both used in Italian red wines

### **HICKORY SANDS**

Red grapes merlot, mourvèdre, touriga nacional, tannat and tempranillo, and white grape viognier

### **DELL VALLEY**

Cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon, chenin blanc, petit verdot, tempranillo, muscat, riesling, chardonnay and sémillon





Managing an  
electric cooperative  
was a job too big  
for one man



# Her Life *of* Service

BY D'ANN NICHOLS DRENNAN  
PHOTO BY JAY PATRICK

When Jerry Jordan said “I do” to Juan D. Nichols in 1951, she didn’t realize all she was saying yes to.

Jerry, born in 1933, was 3 or 4 when electricity came to her family’s farm near Newsome in East Texas.

“My grandparents’ and my parents’ houses were on the highway, so we were fortunate,” she says. “We were one of the first to get power.” While she doesn’t remember her own home before electric lights, she recalls visiting family and friends who didn’t have such luxuries. “It made me feel very lucky.”

She never dreamed she’d devote herself to the electric industry. She says that her first husband was a sailor in Korea, her second a college student, her third a fertilizer salesman and her fourth the general manager of Wood County Electric Cooperative. With a twinkle in her clear, green eyes, the 92-year-old whispers conspiratorially, “They were all the same man.”

In 1961, Jerry was happily settled with Juan and their three small children in Woodway, just outside of Waco.

“But Juan D. didn’t want to live anywhere other than Wood County,” where he grew up, she says. A family friend who served on the board of directors at Wood County EC told Juan about a new position opening up at the East Texas co-op: power use adviser.

Juan met Virgil Shaw, the co-op’s founding general manager, at his farm just east of Quitman on a Saturday in late fall. Jerry remembers that Juan rushed back to where she and the children were visiting with her in-laws and said, “Jerry, come on, he wants to meet you too.”

Jerry purses her lips. “Juan D. told me I didn’t have time to change, so I hopped in the car and off we went.” She must have made a good impression because Shaw hired Juan that day.

Jerry Nichols, at her Quitman home, holds a portrait from her wedding to Juan D.





"It wasn't unusual," Jerry explains, "for an employer to expect the wife to help the man—without compensation, of course."

She knits her still-dark brows. "Back then, I signed everything as Mrs. J.D. Nichols, never my name. When my daddy died, the clerk sent me out of the room so Juan D. could sign the papers to inherit my property. I couldn't get a credit card, couldn't take out a bank loan without my husband's signature." Jerry smirks. "Even though I managed our money better than he did!"

When Juan and Jerry moved to Quitman, about 35 miles north of Tyler, there were no houses available to purchase. They rented a little green house in town. Jerry remembers it snowed that winter, and flakes drifted in around the closed window and piled up on the dining table next to it.

They soon bought a lot on Meadowbrook Lane and built a modest ranch-style home. It was the first all-electric residence in Quitman. Juan installed extra meters to measure how much electricity it took to run the range, water heater, and central heating and air. Jerry didn't get along with the electric stove. "Not to start with!" she exclaims. "I hated that

electric stove. Boy, when it boiled over, it made a mess!"

Not long after they moved in, there was a gas outage in town, and a gas company employee showed up at the door. Jerry told him, "I don't have any gas."

"Everybody has gas," he answered. "For your stove, your heating and your hot water."

Jerry's voice is still smug as she repeats what she told him: "Not in my house."

A college graduate with an English degree, Jerry didn't want to leave behind her young children to teach school. At that time, public school began in first grade. So Jerry started the first kindergarten in Quitman in the garage of their new home. She operated Kiddie Kollege until 1970, when she and Juan were expecting their fourth and last child.

On January 1, 1968, Juan was promoted, becoming the second general manager of Wood County EC. At age 37, he was one of the youngest managers in the state.

Not long after Juan began working for the co-op, Jerry noticed that several wives of members of the board of directors would drive their husbands to the monthly meetings and wait in their cars outside. With a laugh, she explains that the men were "too old to drive—they were in their 60s and 70s!"

Jerry invited these ladies to her home. For more than three decades, she served coffee and dessert and visited





## National Cooperative Month

October is when the more than 30,000 co-ops in the U.S. celebrate their unique business model and the cohesive communities they create and support. Included in that number are 894 electric distribution and generation and transmission cooperatives with some 42 million members. That includes 77 co-ops that power the lives of some 3 million Texans with 363,000 miles of line across the state.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Jerry at the Nichols' house on Meadowbrook Lane, the first all-electric residence in Quitman. A moment from Juan D.'s roast when he retired from Wood County Electric Cooperative. The family gathered to celebrate Jerry and Juan D.'s 70th wedding anniversary.

ABOVE The Nicholsons in 1973.

RIGHT Jerry when she served as president of the Sabine River Authority of Texas.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: COURTESY JERRY NICHOLS

with the wives one Monday a month while their husbands conducted business.

"It was a consuming job for both of us," Jerry says. In those days, when an ice storm hit, Juan went to the office until the lines were cleared. Jerry cooked huge pots of chili or stew so the lineworkers could have a hot meal when they came in.

The co-op didn't have 24-hour dispatching until 1981. Before that, people called the Nichols' home phone whenever their power went out. Jerry recalls one night when the harsh ring woke Juan from a deep sleep. She heard him ask three times for the caller's last name, then finally inquire, "How do you spell that?" Jerry laughs as she remembers hearing Juan repeat back, "J-O-N-E-S."

In the '80s, the co-op hired lawyers from Washington, D.C., and consultants from Georgia to help with wholesale power purchases and other national issues affecting rural cooperatives. "There weren't many options for hotels near us in those days, so I always hosted whoever was in town at our home," Jerry remembers. "At first, I was intimidated, but I discovered these men were grateful to have a home-

cooked meal and spend time with our family."

Even though Jerry was a supportive wife, she wasn't content merely to serve stews and sip coffee. She took a leadership role in her community and in statewide organizations.

Jerry was active in the Quitman PTA, donating her time to the schools her children attended, and she was the editor of the Texas Rural Electric Women's Association newsletter.

Her proudest accomplishment came in October 1991, when Gov. Ann Richards appointed Jerry as the first female director of the Sabine River Authority of Texas. Initially, a staffer was assigned to be Jerry's "chaperone" at every board function. After the second encounter, Jerry decided, "Enough is enough."

At the next meeting, she walked up to the huddle of male directors.

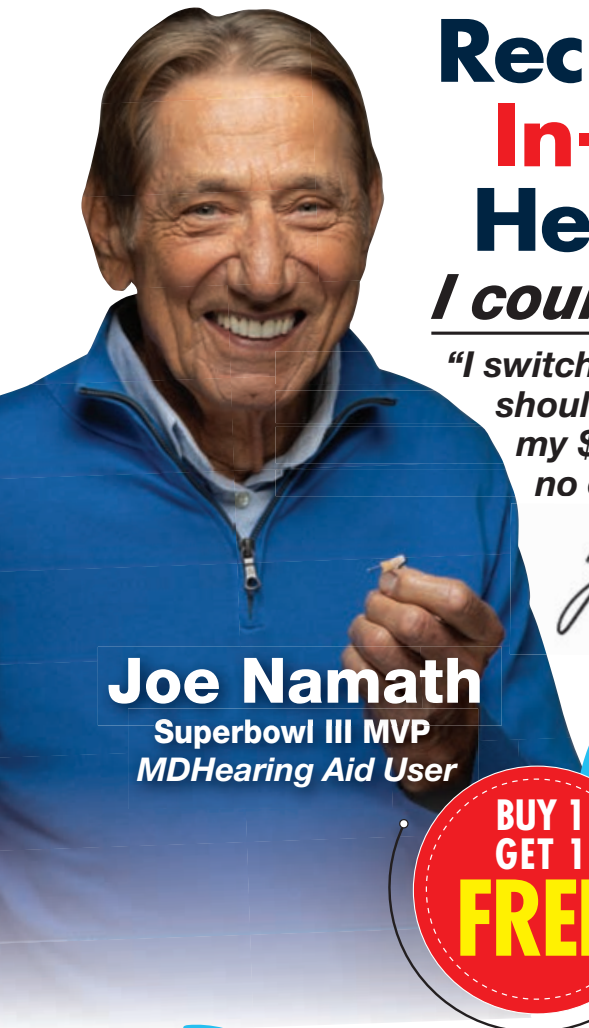
"They didn't have anything to say that would shock me," she exclaims, tapping a red-polished nail on the arm of her chair. "I shared these experiences with Juan D. Hopefully, I helped make it easier for women to become leaders in our co-op."

Jerry encouraged Juan to recruit women for executive positions and the board. In 1991, Cathy Roberts was chosen to fill an unexpired term, becoming the first female board member of Wood County EC. When Juan retired in 1997, he recommended Debbie Robinson to succeed him as general manager. She was one of the first women in the nation to lead an electric cooperative.

Juan died the day after Christmas in 2021, but Jerry continues to live in the house they shared. She has four children, eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren, who she says are the center of her world.

Jerry rocks gently in her recliner, a smile lighting her face. "I don't know how I got so blessed," she says. "Juan D.'s and my work with the co-op provided us with opportunities I never could have imagined." ■





**Joe Namath**

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## SCOTT SPENCE

President/  
Chief Executive  
Officer

# CHECKING OUR PROGRESS AT MID-YEAR

Just as students will soon bring home their first report cards, it's important for your cooperative to pause mid-year and evaluate how we're doing. This summer, TCEC completed its 2025 Mid-Year Review—our version of a progress report that measures both strengths and opportunities.

The review confirms that your cooperative is on track. Financial recovery efforts are becoming more and more evident, supported by an independent audit from Baker Tilly that delivered the highest possible opinion an auditor can provide. That result validates both sound decision-making and the daily efforts of a team that understands and is committed to a single mission of delivering safe and reliable power at the lowest possible cost. You can access audited financial statements in the Member Information Center on the TCEC website.

Operationally, we've made improvements designed to serve members better. One example is our new Aledo operations site. From this site, crews can respond more quickly to members in the Aledo, Willow Park, Hudson Oaks, and Weatherford areas, while reducing travel and fuel costs. At the same time, we are working through the sale of the Aledo office building to ensure resources are put to their best use.

We also entered into a long-term supply chain partnership with Irby, a move that will save millions of dollars each year and strengthen reliability across the system. Decisions like these—grounded in service and stewardship—support our mission to provide safe and reliable power at the lowest possible cost.

These efforts—ranging from financial responsibility to operational improvements—directly support the cooperative's two goals: strengthening the organization's financial health and enhancing member service. Both goals are essential to fulfilling the mission of delivering safe and reliable electric service at the lowest possible cost.

As a member-owned cooperative, we don't just measure numbers; we measure trust. Your continued support and engagement make these results possible. At mid-year, the report is clear: together, this team is building strength for today and resilience for tomorrow.

**Scott Spence**  
**President & CEO**

# 2025 TCEC ANNUAL MEETING UPDATE

The 2025 Tri-County Electric Annual Meeting was held virtually on Tuesday, Sept. 23 at 6 p.m. During the meeting, cooperative updates were shared presented and the results of the 2025 director elections announced. The meeting was recorded and is now available online at: [tcectexas.com/annual-meeting](https://tcectexas.com/annual-meeting).

## 2025 Board of Directors



**Sommer Portwood, Chair**  
**District 7**



**Margaret Koprek, Vice Chair**  
**District 2**



**David Manning**  
**District 3**



**Robin Corder**  
**District 5**



**Don Lambert**  
**District 9**

### Special Elections Announced

The Tri-County Electric Board of Directors has authorized a special election to fill the vacant seats in Districts 6 and 8 for the remainder of their current terms, which expire in 2027.

These seats will then be included in the regular voting cycle for future elections. A complete election timeline is expected to be finalized and shared later this month.

For director election information, visit [tcectexas.com/director-elections](https://tcectexas.com/director-elections).



# Take Control with Prepaid Billing

Ready to manage your electricity costs like never before? TCEC's Prepaid Billing puts you in the driver's seat by letting you pay for power before you use it.

**Here's how it works:** Load money onto your account, and we'll automatically deduct your daily usage from that balance. When funds run low, you'll get a friendly reminder to add more—it's that simple

## Why members love it:

- **No deposit required**—start saving from day one
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- **Complete flexibility**—no due dates, no late fees, just pay when convenient

Perfect for budgeters, seasonal residents, or anyone wanting more control over their electric bill. Ready to switch? Call Member Service at 817.444.3201 to enroll today.



# 2025 Energy Efficiency Rebate Pilot Program



## HVAC Tune-Up Rebate - \$125 Bill Credit

- Complete tune-up with certified HVAC technician
- Upload itemized receipt showing required checklist completion
- Receipt must be dated January 1, 2025 or later
- One rebate per account

## ENERGY STAR Appliance Rebate - \$50 Bill Credit

- Purchase any ENERGY STAR certified product
- Upload receipt and ENERGY STAR label
- Receipts must be dated January 1, 2025 or later
- One rebate per account

## You CAN Apply for TWO Rebates!

One HVAC rebate + one appliance rebate per account  
Funded by energy efficiency unclaimed funds - not your electric bills!

***Limited Funds Available First Come, First Served***



# Tri-County Issued Top Audit Opinion

Tri-County Electric Cooperative has been formally recognized for a year filled with success in improving the Cooperative’s financial health.

In its audit of TCEC’s recent financials, auditor Baker Tilly provided an “unqualified” opinion, the most favorable opinion an auditor can give.

This opinion comes after the decisive actions by TCEC’s new leadership team, in its first year together, to stop the Cooperative’s historic financial bleeding and set it on a path toward long-term success.

Read more on the Cooperative’s latest accomplishments in its 2025 Mid-Year Review and 2024-2025 Annual Report, available now on the TCEC website.

*“In my 25 years of being an auditor and the last 8 years of leading our energy division, it’s a privilege to choose the organizations we partner with—and **Tri-County is truly one of those partners of choice...** It’s been an absolute pleasure getting to know them and witnessing their unwavering integrity and dedication to the future of their cooperative.”*

Julie Desimone  
Managing Principal | Baker Tilly  
Energy and Natural Resources

# Learning From Those Who Built Our Foundation



Last month, Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Inc. hosted a special gathering with our retirees—the dedicated individuals who built the foundation of the cooperative we serve today.

We came together to hear their stories and learn from their experiences. Their insights into the Cooperative’s past and future were invaluable, and their presence reminded us that our future is built upon their legacy of service and dedication.

The guidance they offered will help inform our decisions as we continue serving you into the next century and beyond.

**To Our Retirees:** *Thank you for your years of service and for remaining part of our story. Your legacy lives on in everything we do!*

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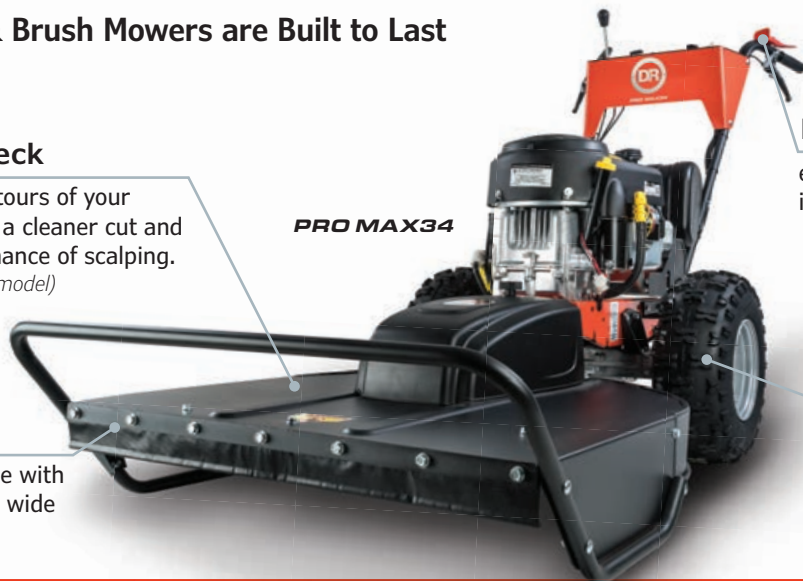
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# Plan for the Wurst

Five days of work, hundreds of volunteers, thousands of pounds of sausage, one tasty good cause

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

**HALF A DOZEN APRON-CLAD** men gather around a 40-foot smoke pit behind Zion Lutheran Church in Walburg, checking on the homemade sausage sizzling on its metal racks.

At a long table nearby, more volunteers slice links and load them into tubs to be carried inside and arranged in plastic containers. In front of the church, vehicles line up at a makeshift drive-thru, their drivers buying the sausage, sweet potatoes, sauerkraut and green beans for \$15 a plate.

On the first Monday of November for more than half a century, this tiny unincorporated community about 40 miles north of Austin has come together for the Wurstbraten sausage supper.

The event began in 1971 to raise money for new carpeting in the church. The congregation's women's group came up with the idea of a sausage supper to honor the community's German heritage.

"We butchered a hog, and back then farmers still had smokehouses," says Ethel Mickan, who turns 90 this month. She served on the first organizing committee and has participated in every Wurstbraten since.

Four hundred people showed up that first year, paying just \$2.25 for adults and \$1.75 for children. The event raised enough to recarpet the church and then some.

That first year, a transformer blew out, and church members had to call the electric company. "Everybody stayed, and we kept on with the meal," Mickan says. Another year, torrential rains forced organizers to move the parking area down the road, where it wasn't so muddy.

Depending on whom you ask, organizers settled on the first Monday in November either because they wanted to do it in cooler weather, before deer season, or because Monday night wouldn't interfere with business at restaurants in the area.

"In those days there were only two or three restaurants in Georgetown, and they didn't like it when churches had events on Fridays, Saturdays or Sundays because that took away from business," Mickan says.

Over the years, Wurstbraten has grown into the quintessential community gathering. Most of the proceeds are used to fund church projects, but about 10% is donated to food banks and other nonprofit

organizations in nearby rural areas.

"The sausage is wonderful, and the meal is absolutely fabulous, but the biggest blessing of all is to see your friends," says Dan Cowan, who since 2021 has served as the *braška*, a Wendish word meaning leader of the feast.

Mickan agrees.

"I think the main thing is that we bring people together that don't get to see each other but once in a blue moon," she says.

At last year's 52nd annual Wurstbraten (the 2020 event was canceled due to the pandemic), volunteers prepared 10,500 pounds of sausage—some of it to sell by the pound, plus enough to make about 3,000 meals for pickup.

"It takes us five days and more than 300 people to pull this off, and it's all volunteer," Cowan says.

Several days before the event, organizers buy thousands of pounds of pork and beef, plus 100 pounds of black pepper, and 300 pounds of salt. They start making the sausage early Saturday, then smoke it overnight. Sunday, they prepare side dishes and sell some of the uncooked links by the pound.

"It's a pretty mild sausage," Cowan says. "I think part of the secret is that we smoke it for about 12 hours. It's stuff your grandmother would be proud of."

By 4 p.m. Monday of the 2024 event, two lines of vehicles inch their way toward the pickup area as constables direct traffic. By 5 p.m. cars stretch for a mile, and the wait is more than 30 minutes. Volunteers dash back and forth, taking orders and delivering containers of food through open vehicle windows.

"I put some in the freezer and use it for the whole year," says Nina Frias of Jarrell, who has come with her mother to pick up food. "It's hometown, it's sausage—and oh, it's magnificent."

As Frias motors away, more cars approach. Organizers say their goal is to run out of food, but that never quite happens. There's always just enough sausage to feed everyone who wants some.

"It's kind of like a miracle," Cowan says. ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Dan Cowan as cars line up for Wurstbraten in 2024. Sabrina Jansak-Noble and son Elias Jansak-Noble weigh bulk sausage. Kyle Kokel, left, and Rick Zinsmeyer work the pit.







# Spirituality Meets Artistry

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

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals



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# Funny Business

Rodeo clown Red Sublett traveled the world wrangling laughs

BY CHUCK LYONS

IT WAS CLAIMED, journalist Jerry Armstrong once wrote, that rodeo clown Red Sublett would ride anything that “a saddle, a riggin’ or a rope could be used on”—horses, mules and bulls, of course, but also cows, buffaloes, zebras and at least one ostrich. Sometimes he rode them straight, sometimes backwards but always with zany antics that left the crowd laughing.

Sublett was “the greatest and the highest-paid arena comic of his day,” Armstrong wrote.

He was born John Dixon Sublett in Arlington in November 1893, and he died, by then known to everyone as Red, in Dallas a scant 56 years later.

His family had settled in the countryside when the prairies were still unfenced.

The town of Sublett, now part of Arlington and some 18 miles southeast of Sublett’s modest, pink granite headstone in Mount Olivet Cemetery, bears the family name.

Sublett’s father moved his family from Texas to Oklahoma via horse-drawn covered wagon with two milk cows tied to the tailgate.

Before World War I intervened in 1917, Sublett worked rough stock on ranches, including the 101 Ranch in Oklahoma and later the Four Sixes in Texas. Before that, at just 16, he had ridden broncs and steers for Booger Red’s traveling cowboy show and Lucille Mulhall’s show.

He enlisted in the war effort and saw action in France with the medical corps before returning to his rodeo antics.

At a rodeo in Magdalena, New Mexico,

the story goes, producer Tex Austin and announcer Foghorn Clancy took Sublett aside and told him he was getting plenty of big laughs just being himself and that he should become a rodeo clown.

It paid better, they said.

As rodeo evolved from its beginning in ranch corrals in the early 1900s, promoters realized their audiences drifted away whenever there was a break in the action due to injuries and other delays. So the rodeo clown was created to keep spectators entertained during those breaks.

When bull riding became a regular part of rodeos in the 1920s and ’30s, the clown’s role—and importance—grew as he stepped in to distract the bull and allow its rider to get out of danger. Today’s rodeo protection teams, made up of highly trained athletes, are still a vital part of competitions—work that started with the clowns.

“The early clowns were cowboys who could rope and ride with the best of them ... and they were, above all, showmen,” wrote Jeanne Joy Hartnagle-Taylor in her 1993 book *Greasepaint Matadors*.

Sublett fit that description perfectly.

He picked up a trained mule named Spark Plug that he claimed could be taught to do just about anything, and together the duo performed in rodeos throughout the U.S. and abroad, including shows in London, Paris and Dublin. They also performed in films with actors Wallace Beery, Bob Steele and Pearl White.

Spark Plug died in Fort Worth in 1931, and Red’s career began sliding to an end. He died from a heart condition in the veterans hospital in Dallas on April 14, 1950.

His headstone reads, “World Famous Dean of Rodeo Clowns.” ■

# Candies and Fudge

Can't beat these treats—and no baking is involved

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

My *mami* has been whipping up these delights every holiday season for as long as I can remember. She had us kids shaping coconut balls by the dozen. She gifted them, served them at family gatherings and even shipped them to relatives.

## No-Bake Chocolate Coconut Joys

**¼ cup (½ stick) butter, melted**  
**1½ cups sweetened shredded coconut**  
**1 cup powdered sugar**  
**½ cup semisweet chocolate chips**  
**¼ cup chopped pecans**

1. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, stir together butter, coconut and sugar. Shape into 1-inch balls. Place on prepared baking sheet.
3. Gently press your thumb or the back of a teaspoon measuring spoon to make an indentation in the middle of each ball.
4. In a microwave-safe bowl, heat chocolate chips in 30-second increments, stirring each time, until fully melted.
5. Fill each indentation with melted chocolate. Sprinkle with pecans. Refrigerate until firm.

**MAKES 24 PIECES**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Concha Bark.







## Aunt Ruth's Candy Cornflakes

TAMMY CARR  
SAM HOUSTON EC

It doesn't get much simpler than this. These easy, quick, no-bake peanut butter treats are a perfect mix of sweet and crunchy.

**1 cup corn syrup**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**1¼ cups peanut butter**  
**6 cups cornflakes**

1. Line 2 baking sheets with wax paper and set aside.
2. Combine corn syrup and sugar in a large saucepan and bring to a boil, stirring continuously until sugar is melted.
3. Remove from heat, add peanut butter and mix well.
4. Add cornflakes and mix to combine. Drop by spoonfuls onto wax paper to create a rounded candy. Cool until set and firm.

**MAKES 24 PIECES**



**\$500 WINNER**

## Pumpkin Fudge

GERI HUPP  
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC



Hupp's pumpkin fudge with white chocolate and cinnamon is sure to be a hit with candy lovers. It's creamy, smooth and perfect for the fall. I advise making a triple batch because this rich fudge will go fast!

**¾ cup evaporated milk**  
**2½ cups sugar**  
**¾ cup canned pumpkin purée**  
**1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**  
**½ teaspoon salt**

**1 jar marshmallow crème (7 ounces)**

**2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter**  
**1 cup white chocolate chips**  
**1 teaspoon vanilla extract**

1. Line a 9-by-9-inch baking pan with aluminum foil and set aside.
2. In a large saucepan, heat evaporated milk and sugar over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Bring to a boil.
3. Stir in pumpkin purée, cinnamon and salt. Return to a boil.
4. Stir in marshmallow crème and butter. Return to a boil. Cook, stirring occasionally, 18 minutes.
5. Remove from heat. Add chocolate chips and vanilla. Stir until creamy and all chocolate chips are melted.
6. Pour into prepared pan. Cool completely until firm.
7. Remove from pan and cut into squares. Store in a cool, dry place.

**MAKES 16 PIECES**

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**BARBECUE SIDES** DUE OCTOBER 10

Superior sides can make a good barbecue great. For our March issue, we're serving up your best fixin's, with the top trimming earning \$500.

**UPCOMING: FIVE-INGREDIENT DINNERS** DUE NOVEMBER 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

## Confetti Fudge

LINDA FOREMAN  
TRINITY VALLEY EC

This is the prettiest fudge I have ever made. Flecks of dried fruit swirled into a creamy white chocolate marshmallow base really do give the appearance of festive confetti.

**¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, plus  
more to grease pan**  
**3 cups sugar**  
**¾ cup sour cream**  
**1 package white chocolate chips  
(12 ounces)**  
**1 jar marshmallow crème (7 ounces)**  
**¼ cup chopped dried cranberries**  
**½ cup chopped dried apricots**  
**¼ cup chopped golden raisins**

1. Butter a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a large saucepan, combine butter, sugar and sour cream over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium and cook 5 minutes, stirring



constantly to prevent scorching.

**3.** Remove from heat and stir in white chocolate chips and marshmallow crème until smooth.

**4.** Stir in cranberries, apricots and raisins. Carefully pour into prepared pan.

**5.** Cool completely until firm. Cut into individual servings.

**MAKES 12 PIECES**

## Sweet Sentiments

This upcoming holiday season, I'm gifting edible treats wrapped to impress! Here are a few fun ideas that take gifting to the next level.

**A candy-filled Mason jar** makes for a great reusable gift. Layer with parchment paper, top with a lid and tie a vibrant ribbon.

**Make use of spare tins.** Embellish with greenery, ribbon, bows or cupcake liners filled with candy.

**Wrap candy in cellophane then tuck it in a kitchen towel** for two gifts in one. I love this look!

—Vianney Rodriguez

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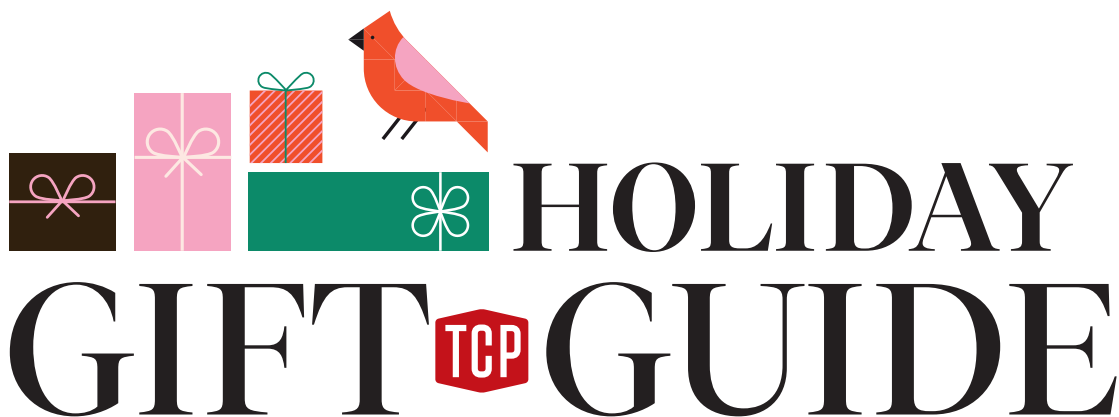
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# HOLIDAY GIFT TCP GUIDE

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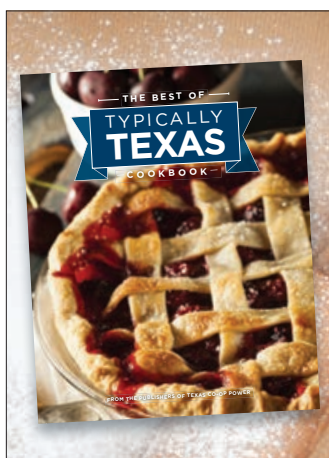


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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Terlingua's Traces

Pay your respects at this ghost town's eerie, ancient cemetery

BY CHET GARNER

IF YOU HEAD TOWARD the Big Bend and then go into the region between the national park and state park, you'll feel like you're driving onto an alien planet. Sweeping desert views in every direction punctuated by rocky cliffs of tan and red are both beautiful and bizarre.

Eventually you'll reach the notable ghost town of Terlingua (population 130 or so), a few miles from the Mexican border. It's hard to imagine how folks live in such a faraway locale, but a trip to the cemetery confirms that Texans have been living out here for a very long time.

Like every tourist, I started my visit with a bowl of red at the Starlight Theatre, a destination restaurant built inside the stone shell of an old movie theater. After filling my belly, I wandered down the street and stepped onto the hallowed ground of the town's historic cemetery.

This is not your typical green acres of eternal slumber but a dusty patch of desert with uneven stacks of rocks marking graves, along with handmade crosses, rusted metal ornaments, plastic flowers and even a few beer bottles.

The silence was broken only by the wind and the abrupt buzz of a grasshopper that I kept mistaking for a rattlesnake. Most of the graves date back to the early 1900s, when families moved here to seek their fortune in the long-defunct mercury mines. Many of the graves note the same death year: 1918, when the Spanish flu ripped through the community.

As the last bit of sunlight disappeared behind the mountains, the graveyard glowed with a dusty kind of reverence. It's clear the community still feels a great deal of pride and connection to its past. It serves as a reminder that not all who wander to this part of Texas are lost, and some choose to never leave. ■

ABOVE Chet explores the graves at the century-old Terlingua cemetery.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all 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.

## OCTOBER

9

**Groves [9–12] Pecan Festival,** (409) 962-3631, [grovescofc.com](http://grovescofc.com)

10

**San Marcos [10–11] Aviation Discovery Fest,** (512) 396-1943, [centraltexaswing.org](http://centraltexaswing.org)

11

**Corsicana Airsho,** (903) 467-7170, [coyotesquadron.org](http://coyotesquadron.org)

**Hillsboro Hill County Master Gardeners Tree Sale,** (254) 582-4022, [hill.agrilife.org](http://hill.agrilife.org)

**Luling Night in Old Luling,** (830) 875-0123, [lulingcc.org](http://lulingcc.org)

**Sanger Car and Motorcycle Show,** (940) 395-1306, [facebook.com/sangerpost268](https://facebook.com/sangerpost268)

**Chappell Hill [11–12] Scarecrow Festival,** (979) 836-6033, [chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com](http://chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com)

**Edom [11–12] Art Festival,** (903) 258-5192, [edomarts.com](http://edomarts.com)

16

**Lufkin Beatles to Bourbon Street: The Fabulous Equinox Orchestra,** (936) 633-5454, [angelinaarts.org](http://angelinaarts.org)

**Mansfield Haunt the Block,** (817) 728-3390, [visitmansfieldtexas.com](http://visitmansfieldtexas.com)

**Brenham [16–19] Texas Arts & Music Festival,** (979) 337-7580, [texasartsandmusicfestival.com](http://texasartsandmusicfestival.com)

17

**Dripping Springs [17–18] Lone Star Gourd Festival,** (512) 964-5540, [texasgourdsociety.org](http://texasgourdsociety.org)



18

**Calvert Hooves & Heels**  
**Historic 5K**, (512) 639-7886,  
[historiccalvert.org](http://historiccalvert.org)

**China Spring Oktoberfest**,  
 (254) 836-1825, [stphilipcs.com](http://stphilipcs.com)

**Llano Invitational Bullriding**,  
 (303) 912-1646,  
[llanobullriding.com](http://llanobullriding.com)

**Waco Oakwood Cemetery's**  
**Walking Tales**, (254) 717-1763,  
[facebook.com/heartoftexasstorytellingguild](https://facebook.com/heartoftexasstorytellingguild)

21

**Hallettsville St. Peter**  
**Lutheran Church Women**  
**in Mission's Country Store**,  
 (361) 798-2808,  
[stpeterhallettsville.org](http://stpeterhallettsville.org)

24

**Palestine [24-25] Hot**  
**Pepper Pop-Off and**  
**Festival**, (903) 729-6066,  
[palestinechamber.org](http://palestinechamber.org)

25

**Flower Mound Smoke**  
**& Whiskey Fest**,  
 (469) 360-7757,  
[fmsmokefest.com](http://fmsmokefest.com)

**Waxahachie Crossroads**  
**of Texas Go Texan Country**  
**Festival**, (469) 309-4040,  
[waxahachiecvb.com](http://waxahachiecvb.com)

**Granbury [25-26] Harvest**  
**Moon Festival of the Arts**,  
 (682) 936-4550,  
[granburysquare.com](http://granburysquare.com)

**Grapevine [25-26] Trick 'R**  
**Treat Trains**, (817) 410-3185,  
[grapevinetexasusa.com](http://grapevinetexasusa.com)

## NOVEMBER

6

**Round Top [6-9] Film**  
**Festival**, [roundtopfilmfest.org](http://roundtopfilmfest.org)

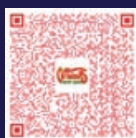
### **Submit Your Event**

We pick events for the magazine directly from [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com). Submit your January event by November 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

# Share the Joy



- Peace Plaza Ice Rink
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**2025 South African Krugerrand:** The Krugerrand continues to be the best-known, most respected numismatic coin brand in the world. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the South African Mint.

**2025 Canada Maple Leaf:** A highly sought-after bullion coin since 1988, this 2025 issue was struck in highly pure 99.99% silver at the Royal Canadian Mint.

**2025 British Silver Britannia:** One of The Royal Mint's flagship coins, this 2025 issue features Lady Britannia, defender of Britain, struck in 99.9% fine silver at The Royal Mint.

**2025 Australian Silver Kangaroo:** For the first time ever, the kangaroo has rounded out the top 5 in the top 5 coins in the world. This gorgeous coin continues the Australian Kangaroo series' tradition of combining high precious metal purity with stunningly detailed designs. Struck in 99.99% fine silver at the Perth Mint.

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# Heroes

They come from all walks of life and are our family, friends and neighbors. This month, please join us as we salute those who make a difference.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

**1 TAMRA BOLTON**  
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

"My dad, Stuart McAnally (top row, left), and some of his 31st Naval Construction Battalion buddies before they shipped out to the Pacific theater in September 1944. They had no idea they would end up on Iwo Jima."

**2 PEGGY MCCALL**  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

"Tom Wertman, our neighbor and Sisterdale Volunteer Fire Department volunteer, fights a fire near Comfort."

**3 VIRGINIA MURPHY**  
COSERV

"My daughter, Maureen, gave one of her kidneys to her brother, Sean, who desperately needed a kidney in 2023."

**4 LAURA BOEHM**  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Marines breaching into Australia.



## Upcoming Contests

**DUE OCT 10** From the Oil Fields  
**DUE NOV 10** Still Life  
**DUE DEC 10** Gates



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

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



## On the Dots

A little paint can go a long, long way

BY JULIE ROYCE  
ILLUSTRATION BY RAUL ARIAS

**A SHORT DISTANCE** from where State Highway 62 meets U.S. Highway 96 sits a small white house painted with bright blue polka dots. Located in the small town of Buna, about 40 minutes north of Beaumont, this landmark was built by my grandfather, Virgil Newton Davis.

Some say this eccentric piece of history put Buna on the map.

I'm the daughter of Virgil's third son, Jud. I grew up on a family homestead in Buna until I was 14. Although I never had the opportunity to meet my grandfather, as a child I heard all kinds of stories about him.

Family described him as a hardworking man of few words with an odd sense of humor who loved his coffee black and bitter. I soaked up stories about his adventures throughout the Southwest,

busting broncos before settling in Kingfisher, Oklahoma, where he became a rancher and a father of six.

But he's a Texan through and through, and my Texas roots run deep because of Granddaddy. He was born in Newton County, in the Old Laurel community, in 1896. Although he left the state as a teenager, he returned just as the U.S. entered World War II, making his way to Buna with his family in tow.

In 1948, he built the Buna Polka-Dot House, a home that would become a part of my family's legacy. Virgil took inspiration from Native American homes that dotted the stark plains of Oklahoma. Those homes were colorfully embellished with petroglyphs and other designs. He decided to bring some of that color to the area just outside the Golden Triangle.

I often think about this modest structure, made of lath and plaster stucco and covered in blue dots applied with an old cloth attached to a two-by-four. Was he trying to create a bright spot among the dust and gray that was still clouding most of the South in the aftermath of the war and the Great Depression, or was this stoic man really just a jokester at heart? Maybe it was both.

Personally, I like to imagine him as a jokester. I mean, he was building a duplex with plans to paint horseshoes and teardrops on either side when he suddenly passed away in 1950. If that décor didn't make people laugh, what would?

Decades later the Buna Polka-Dot House is as meaningful to this small community as it is to my family. It's the backdrop of many community events, was the home of the chamber of commerce for a period and was the subject of many pieces of folk art.

My only wish is that Granddaddy had lived long enough to see how cherished it has become. ■





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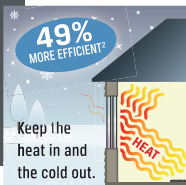


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