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FOR TRI-COUNTY EC MEMBERS

MARCH 2025

The Greatest Mettle

Museum in Arlington
celebrates Medal of Honor
recipients' heroics



**TRI-COUNTY
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16



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March 2025



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06 Home of the Brave

The long-awaited National Medal of Honor Museum in North Texas tells the stories of our nation's greatest heroes.

By Cyndy Irvine

A Journey of Resilience

Caddo Mounds State Historic Site builds community while rebuilding itself after a devastating 2019 tornado.

Story and photos by Anna Mazurek

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By Shane Torno

ON THE COVER

The late George "Bud" Day received a Medal of Honor after his F-100, like the one behind him in Houston, was shot down over Vietnam.

Photo by Robert Seale

ABOVE

Exhibits at Caddo Mounds.

Photo by Anna Mazurek

Women's History Month



THOSE RED AND WHITE signs herald a grocery chain that has grown to more than 435 stores in Texas and Mexico since its founding in 1905 in the Hill Country.

Howard E. Butt is credited with launching the H-E-B empire, but the family's first store was the creation of his mother.

Florence Butt, above, was the mother of three young sons and wife of a pharmacist unable to work because of tuberculosis. She invested \$60 to open C.C. Butt Grocery, named for her husband, on Main Street in Kerrville.

Howard took over the store in 1919 after he returned from World War I.



TCP Contests and More

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\$500 RECIPE CONTEST
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FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
Catch of the Day

RECOMMENDED READING
Texas Independence Day is March 2. Read *Texas Independence* from March 2016 to learn more about the birthplace of a nation. Find it at TexasCoopPower.com.

“Texas has yet to learn submission to any oppression, come from what source it may.”

—SAM HOUSTON

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Making my bed every morning 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 January prompt: **The best year of my life was ...**

When my brother (now deceased) came home safe from the Vietnam War.

SUSAN MARTIN
SAN PATRICIO EC
THREE RIVERS

When I figured out that happiness is just a state of mind.

ADRIAN MAUI SCLAWY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC
ELKHART

The year I married the girl of my dreams—52 years ago.

STEVE BAILEY
PENTEX ENERGY
GAINESVILLE

2012, when I moved to Texas to join the love of my life after being apart for almost 40 years.

TOM DIFRANCESCA
NUECES EC
BISHOP

Visit our website to see more responses.

JANUARY 2025 Our Nosy New Neighbors

“As a child, I remember spotting black bears as far east as Waco. My mom told me their favorite drink was Dr Pepper.”

GLORIA CURRIN
WOOD COUNTY EC
VAN



JARED MARKGRAF

Can We All Get Along?

I checked out the videos from Rancho Ursa Major and was captivated by them [Our Nosy New Neighbors, January 2025]. I hope the black bears continue to thrive and that humans will be able to coexist with them.

Betsy Drapela
Pedernales EC
Boerne

Know what to do when encountering a mother with her cubs. If the cubs are scurrying up a nearby tree, try not to lose sight of the mother.

Back yourself slowly out of the area. Do not run until well clear of the area. The article mentioned carrying bear spray: excellent advice.

Frank Ott
Concho Valley EC
Eola

Easing Into Y2K

I spent New Year’s Eve 1999 at home logged into my work’s network watching Y2K come into our sites overseas, beginning with Japan—midnight their time, 9 a.m. Dallas time [Black-Eyed Peace, December 2024]. All systems were up and running.

I informed my boss. He told me to continue to monitor. Taiwan and the Philippines were next. Again, all systems up and running.

This continued until our Germany and France sites hit midnight, 5 p.m. Dallas time. All systems up and running.

My boss told me to enjoy the rest of my New Year’s Eve with my family.

Mark Murray
Farmers EC
McLendon-Chisholm

Not Asking Too Much

Loved this [Dear Santa, December 2024]. What a wonderful and simple time.

Laneta Beach
Via Facebook



CHRIS WORMELL

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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HOME *of the* BRAVE



RECIPIENT: **SPC. JAMES C. MCCLOUGHAN**
BRANCH: **ARMY**
COMBAT: **VIETNAM WAR**

Among his heroics as a combat medic in May 1969, the private first class was hit twice by small arms fire and shrapnel from a grenade—bleeding heavily—as he rescued multiple wounded comrades.



RECIPIENT: **LT. COL. WILLIAM D. SWENSON**
BRANCH: **ARMY**
COMBAT: **AFGHANISTAN WAR**

The captain's combat team was ambushed in September 2009. His exceptional leadership and stout resistance against the enemy during six hours of continuous fighting rallied his teammates and effectively disrupted the enemy's assault.

The long-awaited National Medal of Honor Museum in North Texas tells the stories of our nation's greatest heroes



RECIPIENT: MAJ. GEN. PATRICK HENRY BRADY
BRANCH: ARMY
COMBAT: VIETNAM WAR

Maj. Brady used three helicopters in one January 1968 day to evacuate 51 seriously wounded comrades. One aircraft was heavily damaged, and his missions encountered close-range enemy fire and descended through heavy fog and smoke.

BY CYNDY IRVINE

A distinctive, boxy building under construction for the past three years in Arlington's entertainment district is not another sports arena or entertainment complex. Instead, in stark contrast to its glitzier surroundings, this structure's solemn purpose is to pay tribute to American heroes who have displayed exceptional courage under fire.

Heroes like Marine Corps 2nd Lt. George Herman O'Brien Jr., who charged through a hail of gunfire during the Korean War, fighting while injured and holding the line for hours. Like Army Sgt. James Marion Logan, who singlehandedly captured a German machine-gunner emplacement during World War II. Like John E. "Jackie" Kilmer, a Navy hospital corpsman who died using his body to shield an injured comrade during the Korean War.

The National Medal of Honor Museum will tell their important stories and those of many others. The much-anticipated national landmark is a tribute to recipients of our nation's highest and most prestigious military award for valor.

After a nationwide search, Arlington, in the Metroplex, was chosen in 2019 as the ideal setting due to its easy accessibility and location near the center of the country. Construction began in March 2022, and the grand opening is set for March 25, National Medal of Honor Day.

"We knew it is important for the museum to be located in an area which already has significant foot traffic and an infrastructure for supporting tourism," says Cory Crowley, executive vice president of the National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation. "Finally, we knew Texas has a strong and patriotic philanthropic base of generous individuals, families and corporations with whom this project would resonate."

Through an international competition, renowned architect Rafael Viñoly (who has since died) submitted the winning design for the museum. He reportedly was inspired by the heavy burden carried by members of the U.S. military and envisioned a large slab formation supported by five columns, each representing a branch of the military.

PORTRAITS: ROBERT SEALE; NOVEMBER 2024. LE MERIDIEN DALLAS. THE STONELEIGH



ALL IMAGES THIS SPREAD COURTESY NATIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR MUSEUM

The museum’s dramatic structure follows Viñoly’s vision. Entry is through a spacious open-air rotunda encircled by the five concrete megacolumns that bear the primary building structure 40 feet overhead. Two glass elevators and a double helix of staircases lead to the upper level.

Inside, visitors will find galleries housing an extensive collection of personal mementos, compelling artifacts (including a fully restored Vietnam-era Huey helicopter), and state-of-the-art exhibits that tell the history of the Medal of Honor and the stories of the heroes who earned it.

Powered by a database of hundreds of hours of recorded video interviews, generative artificial intelligence will enable visitors to hold interactive conversations with medal recipients and hear their stories brought to life.

“Our museum is focused on collecting artifacts that will share the full history of the Medal of Honor, from its beginnings during the Civil War to modern day,” says Greg Waters, director of curatorial affairs. “The collections continue to grow as we bring in additional artifacts that will help us

ABOVE A nighttime rendering of the National Medal of Honor Museum designed by renowned architect Rafael Viñoly. The structure rests 40 feet high on five columns, each representing a branch of the military.

BELOW Entry is through a spacious open-air rotunda. Two glass elevators and a double helix of staircases lead to the upper level.

inspire our future visitors with these incredible Medal of Honor stories.”

The more than 100,000-square-foot complex, set on five acres alongside a small lake, includes a tranquil green space for reflection, an event center for memorials and ceremonies, an outdoor amphitheater, and the National Medal of Honor Griffin Institute.

The institute, with its 220-seat theater and conference center, will offer outreach programs and educational opportunities for all ages. “It’s one way we can live our mission to inspire, equip and connect people around the values inherent in the Medal of Honor—so everyone can live and lead with honor,” says Anthony Brock, executive director of the institute.

To receive the Medal of Honor, a recipient must have shown exceptional courage in combat, often risking their life beyond the call of duty. The medal is conferred by congressional approval only after an extensive review of supportive evidence and at least two eyewitness accounts documenting the heroic actions.

The president typically presents the medal in a formal White House ceremony before family members and invited guests. The medal is recognizable as a five-pointed star attached to a light blue neck ribbon—with slight variations in design between the military branches.

The Medal of Honor originated during the Civil



War when President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation creating the award in 1861 for Navy personnel and in 1862 for Army soldiers to honor “gallantry in action” during combat activities. Congress then established the Medal of Honor as a permanent decoration in 1863.

While more than 41 million Americans have served in the military all-time and more than 2 million have earned Purple Hearts, just 3,547 Medals of Honor have been conferred in more than 160 years. There are 19 double-recipients.

More than 600 of the medals have been awarded posthumously—a testament to the sacrifice required for the honor. Seventy-seven Medals of Honor have been awarded to Texans. Today there are 61 total living recipients across the U.S.

Retired Staff Sgt. Clint Romesha of Minot, North Dakota, who received the Medal of Honor for heroism in Afghanistan, says his medal was “not given for a day that went easy.”

“It’s a very personal thing, this museum,” the Army veteran says. “It’s not just highlighting the legacy of the medal and the recipients themselves, but it really shows the root and the values of the medal for all. ... It will share [the medal’s story] with the American people and constantly remind them that freedom isn’t free.”

The \$210 million museum is primarily funded by generous donations from private individuals, foundations and corporations. Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, a neighbor of the museum, contributed \$20 million.

“This is not a war museum or a history museum,” Crowley says. “It is a biography museum, which will leave visitors with the understanding we are all born with the potential to be extraordinary and we all have the opportunity to be heroes in our own communities, families or vocations.”

For O’Brien—who was promoted to major as a member of the Marine Corps Reserve and later returned to West Texas



Did You Know?

Only one woman has ever been awarded the Medal of Honor: Mary Edwards Walker, who served as a Union Army surgeon during the Civil War.

Only one president has a Medal of Honor: Theodore Roosevelt, for his service during the Spanish-American War.

Nineteen Americans have been awarded two Medals of Honor.

The youngest Medal of Honor recipient, Willie Johnston, earned the award as an 11-year-old drummer during the Civil War.

Milton M. Holland, an African American from Panola County or Austin (sources vary), was the first Texas-born recipient of the Medal of Honor, for assuming command of a Union company during the Civil War.

Two Texans, Army Lt. Col. Robert G. Cole of Fort Sam Houston and Marine Pfc. Charles Howard Roan—both Medal of Honor recipients—died on the same day, Sept. 18, 1944, in separate actions during World War II.

It is illegal to wear someone else’s Medal of Honor.

There are three medal variants, as shown. Members of the Marine Corps and Coast Guard are eligible to receive Department of the Navy recognition.

to live and work—the medal represented so much more than his own sacrifice.

“This medal’s not mine. It belongs to those kids who never grew up to be grandfathers,” he said before he died in Midland in 2005. “It’s in trust, and I hope I wear it well.” ■

A Journey of Resilience

Caddo Mounds State Historic Site builds community
while rebuilding itself after a devastating 2019 tornado



STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNA MAZUREK

On April 13, 2019, 80 people were celebrating Caddo Culture Day at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site, a pre-Columbian village and ceremonial center near Nacogdoches, in East Texas. Members of the Caddo Nation had traveled from several states to attend the festivities that included traditional dance and music performances, guided hikes, and artist exhibits—when tragedy struck.

A powerful storm system had unleashed multiple tornadoes early that afternoon, including one that swept directly over Caddo Mounds, even as visitors sought shelter in an interior room of the visitor center. A passerby was killed, and collapsing walls paralyzed one survivor and left others seriously injured.

“The shock of the 2019 tornado is unique to each individual who was present that day,” says Rachel Galan, assistant site manager. “Caddo citizen Tracy Burrows described the response of all of those there that day as a tribal response. With three hours before outside first responders were on the scene, all those on-site and the community around us took care of each other.”

But the healing process for the Caddo community took much longer and required a great measure of hard work.

Finally, on May 18, 2024, another gathering celebrated the grand reopening of a new 5,150-square-foot visitor center. Rebuilding became a pathway to recovery for the survivors, strengthening the Caddo connection to the site and to each other, and shaping the site’s future.

OPPOSITE The site’s traditional grass house was rebuilt thanks to efforts from the Caddo Nation and the Texas Historical Commission.

ABOVE The rebuilt visitor center includes tribal replicas and exhibits. It also has tornado shelters.



Caddo History

By the year 800, the Caddo people were firmly established near the Neches River in present-day East Texas, anthropologists say, due to the abundance of food and fertile soil for agriculture.

While Caddo territory is mainly centered around the Red River Valley, in Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas, archaeological finds at the Caddo Mounds site—copper sourced from the Great Lakes and shells from the Gulf Coast—illustrate their vast trade network, which included the El Camino Real de los Tejas.

“This trail network has been appropriated as a Spanish-Euro western trail system, which is actually a network that was created over centuries, if not millennia, that connects Caddo all the way up to the Great Lakes with copper and Cahokia Mounds, Spiro Mounds and all the way down into Mexico City and over to Santa Fe,” says Lauren Toho-Murrow Haupt, an Indigenous anthropologist and citizen of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma.

“These were really wide networks of trade that really speak to how diverse Caddo were and how influential we were.”

The Caddo even influenced the name of the Lone Star State. “Texas comes from the Caddo word *tejas*, which means friend,” she explains.

Many centuries after the Caddo became established in the area, pressure from Anglo colonization efforts increased, and the Caddo were forced to leave Texas for Oklahoma in the 1850s. Today the Caddo Nation is headquartered in Binger, Oklahoma.

In 1982, a portion of the ancestral home of the Caddo Nation became the 397-acre Caddo Mounds State Historic Site, which is owned and overseen by the Texas Historical Commission.

The grounds include a section of the El Camino Real de los Tejas and three earthen mounds created about 1,000 years ago—one for burials, one for ceremonies and a third, a low platform, that doubled as a plaza space for meetings and gatherings. The mounds were one of the few features to survive the tornado unscathed.

Rising Again

The Caddo term for a tornado experience is *shahó*, a word shared with the nation by Alaina Tahlate, a Caddo Nation citizen and language preservationist—and a survivor of the tragedy.

“That’s one of the gifts of that kind of tragedy—that shared experience,” explains Galan, whose husband, archaeologist Victor Galan, was paralyzed as a result of the tornado. “For many of us, it just deepened our relationship to the place and our commitment to the place.”

One of the main efforts of the restoration was rebuilding the site’s replica grass house, originally constructed in 2016. Traditionally, a grass house would have been built in a day, but the fundraising and rebuilding process after the tornado took roughly 18 months due to the pandemic, weather and supply shortages.

Five female Caddo apprentices were hired to rebuild the house with funding from the Texas Historical Commission and Friends of Caddo Mounds, an advisory nonprofit that supports the site.

Caddo society is matriarchal, with women being central to social organization, and matrilineal, with family lineage traced from the mother’s side. While choosing female apprentices wasn’t necessarily planned, Toho-Murrow Haupt, one of the apprentices, considers it “reflective of the significance of female participation through all dimensions of Caddo culture.”

Rachel Galan recalls the “really powerful experience” of witnessing the rebuilding process and “having the house rise again” thanks to the five apprentices—Toho-Murrow Haupt, Jackie Bullard, Kay O’Neal, Katelyn De Anne Polly and Debbie Turner.

Traditional Caddo houses are beehive-shaped structures with a tiered, multilayered exterior and a pointed top. “The grass houses were the place that the families came together,” Toho-Murrow Haupt says. “It’s where children got to listen to stories in the winter ... they were a place of connection.”

A hundred volunteers—Caddo and non-Indigenous—donated time and labor to assist through the nine-month rebuilding process. The grass house was completed in 2022.

“That’s one of the gifts of that kind of tragedy—that shared experience. For many of us, it just deepened our relationship to the place and our commitment to the place.”

“It was a special process of engaging in the matriarchy rite of looking to an elder to guide us maternally through the process and nurture and facilitate this growth of a house, which eventually became a home,” Toho-Murrow Haupt says.

“To be doing Caddo things with Caddo people was a really special experience that I wish every Indigenous person got to have. It was making new relationships and hearing stories from people I’d never met before.”

Lasting Commitment

The completion of the \$2.5 million visitor center was also part of the first phase of the reconstruction efforts. The interior roof features a conical dome mirroring the structural shape of the grass house. The center includes tornado shelters and a berm for safety.

The site is currently raising money to build an education activity center, cisterns for rainwater collection and an open area for workshops and programs.

In addition, Galan has implemented a braided land conservation plan that weaves together Western-based science with traditional ecological knowledge acquired by Indigenous groups over generations.

The first programs “center on the revitalization and preservation of Caddo traditions: pottery, split-cane basket making, tending wild spaces and more that have led to nonextractive opportunities for Caddo citizens along with unique learning opportunities for visitors,” Galan says.

The programming includes weekend talks and workshops



ABOVE The exterior of the new visitor center was designed to blend into the natural environment with a self-weathering steel roof intended to mirror the shape of the Caddo mounds.

LEFT Archaeological excavations at the 20-foot burial mound, one of three earthen mounds on the site, revealed 90 bodies in roughly 30 burial pits.

such as ancient pottery techniques and the cultural importance of bead art. Educational activities include a free six-day family experience held over a series of three consecutive weekends and a six-week family garden camp.

These events are just one more way that shahó has brought more Caddo people to the site and increased their involvement while also bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors.

“By creating opportunities for authentic partnerships between Caddo citizens and the site, engaging Caddo citizens with the goal of being less extractive, and supporting cultural revitalization and preservation efforts, we have witnessed how an increase in Caddo participation with Caddo Mounds State Historic Site directly impacts visitation and interest in the site,” Galan says.

Caddo Mounds attracted 6,756 visitors last year—a 33% increase over 2023, with a notable bump after the rebuilding of the grass house and reopening of the visitor center.

Sustainability and land conservation are an integral theme of these new initiatives and a vital part of Caddo culture. Toho-Murrow Haupt says the Caddo coevolved with the land and maintained a healthy and balanced ecosystem.

“To truly live sustainably means to not leave a mark,” she says. “It means to allow for the full process of returning to the earth and completing that cycle.”

Though structures like the grass house are impermanent, the 2019 tragedy showed that the Caddo Nation and community’s commitment to the site is everlasting. ■

Myth Busting with Geothermal Heat Pumps

by Brian Shaw, Texas Territory Manager
WaterFurnace

“Well, you could have a geothermal heat pump, but...”

...You Need a Bunch of Land

As one old timer put it, “If you have a lawn mower, then I can put in a geo unit.” With numerous options for the underground loop systems, that’s actually true. A vertical loop is often installed under driveways or even 10’ x 10’ patches of ground. There are many other options including using an existing water well, a pond, or if in fact you have more than ½ an acre, a long horizontal ditch is a great solution. If you Google “ground heat exchanger options” you will find a variety of solutions that might work for you.

...It Isn’t Safe

Since geothermal heat pumps are 100% electrical, there is no combustion of gas or oil in the home for heating. So, there’s no chance of smelly fumes, explosions, or carbon monoxide poisoning. Because heat pumps are certified by independent laboratories, they include safety cutoff switches for every circuit in the system.



A geothermal unit easily integrates into your current heating and cooling system.



When using a geothermal unit, about 75% of the heating and cooling energy comes from the earth.

...Electric Heat is Expensive to Operate

Some geo systems are installed with electric strip heat for extreme cold weather. And yes, that can add to your electric bill. However, modern systems are designed to operate without backup heat down to extremely low temperatures. And if your underground system (the “loop”) is sized right, no back up heat is needed at all.

...It’s Too Expensive to Install

Installing geothermal heating and

cooling for your home or building is an investment, no doubt about it.

Geo system owners quickly realize their systems are saving so much money they are recouping their investments in 5-7 years. With the 30% tax credit and other incentives geo can even cost less than a new boiler or HVAC system to install. When you consider the loop will outlive anyone alive today and the heat pump will deliver twice the useful life of most alternatives, that makes for a much more attractive investment.

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State of Texas

MONTHLY AVERAGE¹

\$53

for Geothermal Heating & Cooling



Symphony Insight

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1. 14.5¢ kWh - June 2024 Texa's Monthly Electricity Rate Average | Actual data powered by Symphony

2. ENERGY STAR rated units qualify for 30% through 2032, 26% through 2033 and 22% through 2034



**SCOTT
SPENCE**

PRESIDENT/
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER

ON THE RIGHT PATH

Tri-County Electric Cooperative (TCEC) remains focused on two key goals in 2025: continuing to ensure the cooperative's financial health and improved service to you, the TCEC member.

Thanks to the dedication of approximately 300 employees and the expertise of the new leadership team, progress is being made to reduce the debt mountain without compromising safety or reliability:

- TCEC drew just \$4 million from its line of credit in the second half of 2024, resulting in a balance of \$208.5 million at the end of calendar year 2024. For context, TCEC had a zero balance at the end of March 2020.
- Including the \$4 million, the cooperative was able to keep its total 2024 line of credit draw to \$35.5 million. This is much better than taking out \$100 million in additional long-term debt that had been previously planned and approved to keep the cooperative open in 2024. The result was a \$65 million cash savings for members last year, along with a savings of \$5 million, at current interest rates, each and every year going forward.
- The cooperative slashed \$17 million from its long-term debt in 2024. This reduction alone saves over \$1 million in interest expenses, with more savings for each year the debt decreases.

Other cost-savings actions taken include reductions to purchased material costs, administrative cost reductions and the ending of cooperative subsidies for new members.

Just like the efforts to reduce the debt are paying off, so too has the work to secure a five-year power-supply agreement that started on January 1 and runs through 2029. The agreement financially protected TCEC and its members from the spike in wholesale market prices that resulted from January 2025 winter weather. Wholesale market prices peaked at 219 cents per kilowatt hour, an over 1400% increase from the 14.425 cent base rate TCEC members pay. Without this agreement, members would have seen a dramatic swing in the power cost recovery factor (PCRF) to cover that 219 cent price tag. Instead, the cooperative's power costs remained stable, and the agreement further ensures that the PCRF remains a credit to members in 2025.

Along with ensuring the cooperative's financial health, improved member service remains a top priority. The Member Information Center is consistently updated with more transparency than ever before. Transparency was the idea behind two recent Member Connections events. One in-person session provided members the opportunity to speak with experts and get their individual concerns addressed. An additional virtual Q&A allowed even more transparency through member questions answered live by leadership team members.

TCEC has enhanced programs and features that are uniquely part of being a member. Through MyTriCountyTX, either on the website or mobile app, you can access your bill instantly, track energy usage, or enroll in a variety of options, including auto pay and paperless billing. And with instant outage alerts, you'll be automatically notified of an outage impacting your home.

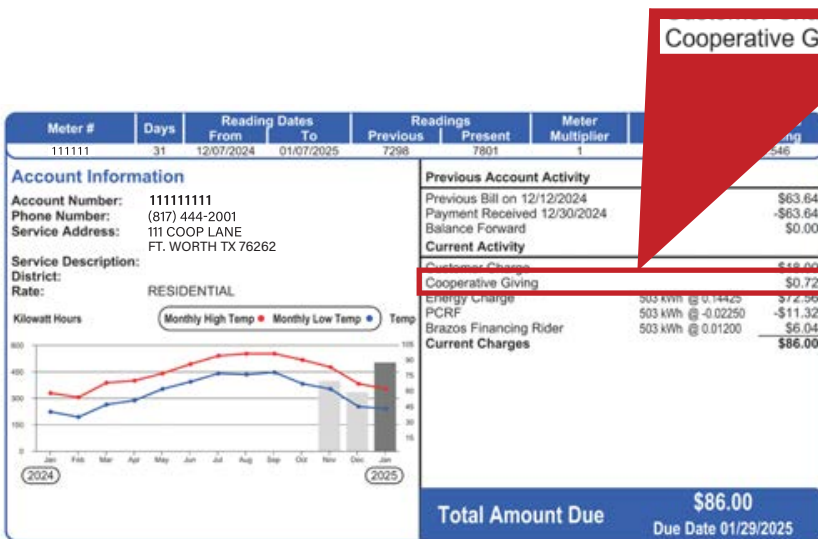
The 2024 successes laid out above, and others not directly mentioned here, give us a strong foundation as 2025 begins. But they are just the first of many necessary steps. We are thankful to be able to provide safe and reliable power for members. As long as we continue on this path, we are confident that TCEC will continue to do so for years to come.

Scott Spence
President & CEO



TURN SPARE CHANGE INTO POSITIVE CHANGE

If you enroll in Round Up for Cooperative Giving, your electric bill will be rounded to the nearest dollar—just \$6 a year on average. Your change, combined with other members, will go to Texas Neighborhood Services to be administered and provide financial assistance to members in need. Enroll online at MyTriCountyTX.com.



Cooperative Giving \$0.72

SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION

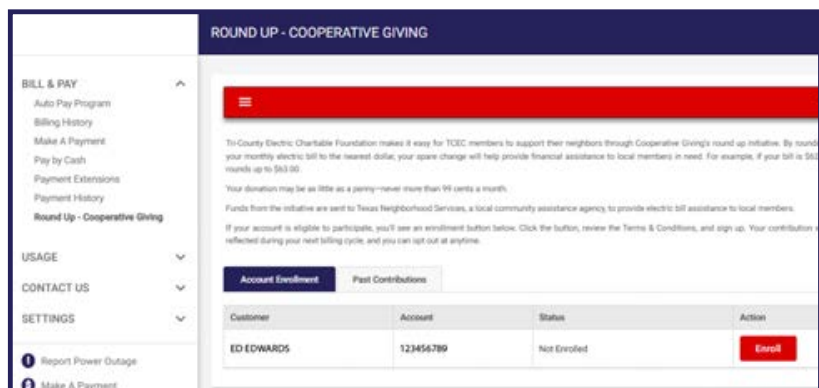


HOW TO SIGN UP

Log into MyTriCountyTX.com

Under Bill & Pay in the left-hand navigation, click on Round Up - Cooperative Giving

Click Enroll



MEMBER CONNECTIONS EVENT

Tri-County Electric Cooperative's leadership and staff recently engaged with members during the first Member Connections event, held in person on Thursday, January 23, in Azle.

Member service representatives were on hand to speak with members in one-on-one settings and answer specific questions tailored to the account. MSRs were also available to discuss the latest TCEC programs available.



MEMBER CONNECTIONS VIRTUAL EVENT

On Thursday, January 28, members of the TCEC leadership team participated in a live Members Connections virtual event. Members joined the meeting to hear the leadership team discuss the Cooperative's challenges, the solutions implemented, and the preliminary results. The leadership team also addressed questions submitted by members during the registration process.

A recording of the meeting is available on the online Member Information Center.

As referenced during the meeting, the PCRf for the rest of 2025 has been updated on the TCEC website.



ELIMINATE SURPRISES WITH BUDGET BILLING

To smooth out the fluctuations in your seasonal electrical bills, consider enrolling in Budget Billing.

This payment option allows you to pay an amount each month based on a rolling average of your previous twelve (12) bills.

It's important to note that there is no settlement of account balances until you either disconnect your service or unenroll from Budget Billing. Additionally, your account should have a zero balance to enroll in this program.

To sign up, please contact Member Service by phone at 817.444.3201 or by email at memberservice@tcectexas.com.

MEMBER COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

As printing and mailing costs continue to rise, Tri-County Electric Cooperative is evaluating its communication methods with members.

The Current Conversations newsletter is produced and distributed using Tri-County's existing software tools at no additional cost.

Previously, the monthly Member Bulletin was included with your billing statement, either by mail or in the PDF version if you were enrolled in paperless billing. This incurred printing costs of approximately \$10,000 each month.

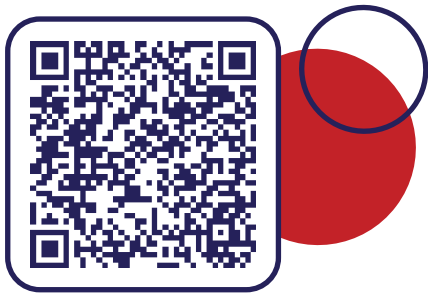
Additionally, the Texas Co-op Power magazine, which is distributed statewide for electric cooperatives, costs the Tri-County Electric membership close to \$1 million annually for printing and mailing by Texas Co-op Power in Austin, TX.

You can help reduce this expense by completing the opt-out form to stop receiving a paper copy of the magazine. A digital version of the magazine is available on our website at tcectexas.com/texas-co-op-power.

Contact Member Service at 817.444.3201 or email memberservice@tcectexas.com to stop receiving a paper copy of the magazine in the mail.

TCEC BLOOD DRIVE A SUCCESS

Thanks to the members and employees who participated in Tri-County Electric Cooperative's blood drive on Monday, January 20, at its Aledo and Granbury offices. 33 donors gave 34 pints of blood that will help more than 100 patients in need. If you missed the TCEC blood drive, consider signing up at a Carter BloodCare location or mobile blood drive near you.



33

DONORS

34

PINTS

100+

**PATIENTS
HELPED**

Thanks to everyone who donated at TCEC's Blood Drive on Monday, January 20, and helped save a life!



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

CONTACT US

200 Bailey Ranch Road

Aledo, Texas 76008

Phone 817.444.3201

Office Hours Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

VISIT US ONLINE

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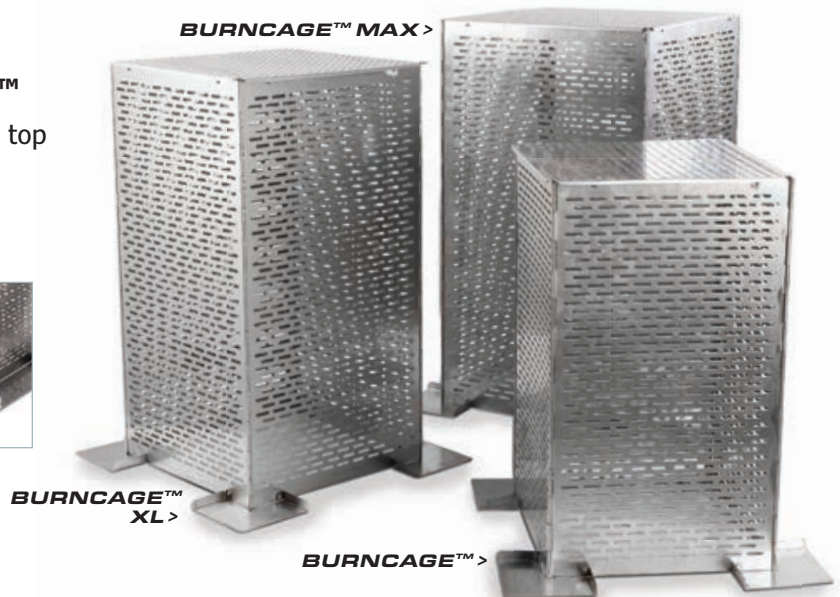
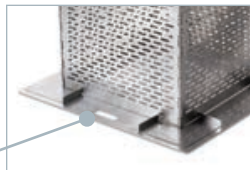
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Military Mosaic

An out-of-the-way Central Texas café houses a growing homage to American veterans

BY WILLIAM E. MOORE • PHOTO BY WYATT MCSPADEN

I DISCOVERED THE Hwy 77 Cafe in 2013 while I was visiting Rosebud.

I was in the small town, between Waco and College Station and home to about 1,500 people, to document the local tiny jail. Calabooses were once a common architectural feature on the Texas landscape, and as an archaeologist, I was on assignment with Texas A&M University Press to document Rosebud's defunct 177-square-foot jail.

Since I was there at lunchtime, I asked the locals about a good place to eat.

Unanimously, the answer was the Hwy 77 Cafe, just north of town. Upon entering the small restaurant surrounded by fields and not much else, I was awestruck. Hundreds of photos of American military veterans graced the walls, veterans from Rosebud and across Texas.

When Martha Westerman opened the café in 2001, she hung a few military pictures of her relatives on a wall to honor their service. It wasn't long before customers began bringing their own pictures to add to the ever-growing tapestry of veterans representing all branches of service.

Today, nearly 650 portraits occupy the designated wall of honor, which now covers most of all four of the small restaurant's walls—up to 10 rows deep. It's a stunning collection interwoven with framed American flags and the daily specials that keep watch over diner tables with gingham tablecloths.

The second owners, Sue and Bill Sturrock, continued the tradition started by Westerman. The current proprietors, David Diaz and Monica Castellanos, members of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, were not aware of this custom when they purchased the café in 2022.

"Monica and I are proud to honor the tribute that Martha started 23 years ago, and we have the utmost respect for those who served," Diaz says. "We are constantly reminded of the pride the community has for its veterans, past and present."

Images of men and women of America's armed forces on these sacred walls date from the Civil War to those currently deployed at home and abroad. All major wars are represented, and the photos include veterans of famous battles and events such as the Battle of Iwo Jima, the Normandy landings on D-Day and the attack on Pearl Harbor. Also

represented are former prisoners of war, Purple Heart recipients, and those killed or missing in action.

Each photo is numbered and appears on a list available to patrons who want to search for friends and relatives. This list identifies the veterans and their branch of service as well as when and where they served, with such particulars as their occupational specialty (tank driver, bombardier, etc.), rank and military honors.

Barbara Borden is one of the regulars at the café who has contributed to the military mosaic. I joined her and others for lunch and was treated to stories about various family members who are represented on the wall of honor.

"My husband, 1st Lt. Billy D. Borden, was a company commander at Fort Leonard Wood from 1969 to 1971, and my father-in-law, Billie E. Borden, was a gunner on the troop transport ship RMS Aquitania," she says. "They were proud to serve, and the family is grateful to know that they will be remembered by their photos, courtesy of the Hwy 77 Cafe."

On the back wall of the restaurant, Billy D. Borden occupies space No. 160, and Billie E. Borden is nearby, in spot No. 106.

I've added three photos of my own to these hallowed walls.

I joined the Army Security Agency in 1972 and served as a translator and aide to a colonel in Berlin. My father was a medic in World War I, transporting the wounded in France. And my cousin was a Marine Corps pilot in World War II and the Korean War.

It was the food that first attracted me to this diner (including the ever-popular liver and onions, scrumptious homemade pies, and excellent banana pudding), but it's the people—on the walls and behind the counter—who keep me coming back. It adds to my unwavering pride to know my family is among those greeting visitors as part of this grassroots café tribute.

As Gen. George S. Patton once said, "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the dead. Rather, we should thank God that such men lived." ■

Monica Castellanos and David Diaz own Hwy 77 Cafe in Rosebud, with walls honoring veterans.



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I Lost a Fortune at the French Races, but Fortunately I Found This Bag



Ready! Set! Go!" The starting gate opened and 19 horses galloped off, each jockeying for the lead. While Apache, the horse I bet on, was the odds-on favorite, his rival Napoleon pulled ahead in the race's final seconds.

In less than a minute I lost a fortune at the Paris horseraces.

After a brief moment of disbelief, something caught my eye. It seemed like every woman in Paris was carrying the same classic handbag! I had to have one for my own, so I had our handbag designers interpret this classic offer. Presenting the **Parisian Chic Claire Handbag**.

Inspired by the equestrian gear I encountered in the stables after the race. The **Claire Bag** is the color of saddle leather with metal adornments that recall horse bits and stirrups. Sturdy and chic, the Claire Bag is ideal for the woman on the go. See for yourself why the **Parisian Chic Claire Handbag** is the toast of France!

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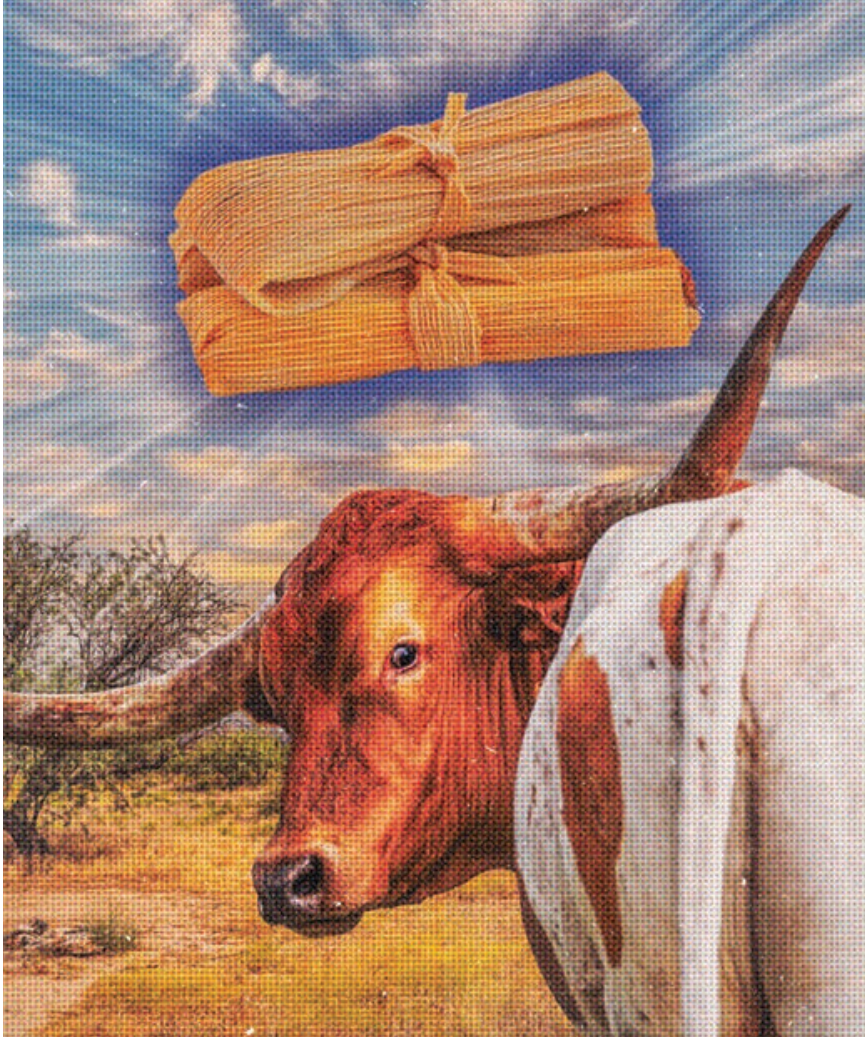
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TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



He was wily.

He would often stop, face south and sniff the breeze for the smell of the Gulf. At night, a cowboy would rope him and tie him to a big bush or tree.

One day, the cattle balked at a full-flowing river. "Rope old Sancho and lead him in," a boss ordered. They did so, and Sancho led the herd across.

But as soon as he was released, Sancho returned to the rear of the herd where he could watch for chances to head home to his mesquite tree and tamales.

The herd nonetheless moved ever northward. Across the Canadian, across the Cimarron. Across Kansas, around Dodge City, across Nebraska, under the Black Hills and past the Bighorn Mountains—2,000 miles.

They finally reached Wyoming. Sancho was still halting now and then to sniff southward to see if he might get a whiff of Texas somewhere in the wind. He didn't like this new land.

The new ranch branded CR on Sancho, and the Shiner boys headed home, leaving Sancho behind.

The next spring, back in Texas, Rigby was riding near Kerr's home. He said, "I looked across the pear flat and saw something that made me rub my eyes."

He rode over and looked. It was Sancho. He had both the 7Z road brand and the CR range brand on him as plain as day. He went to talk to Kerr.

"Yes, Sancho got back six weeks ago," Kerr said. "Hoofs worn down to hair. But Maria went might near out of her mind with joy at seeing him." She hugged him and cried and fed him hot tamales.

After that, Sancho slept every night under the mesquite by the gate. ■

Sancho's Long Road

The legend of the tamale-loving longhorn

J. FRANK DOBIE ADAPTATION BY W.F. STRONG

FOLKLORE IS NOT HISTORY, but it is historical. It gives us a window into the sentiments and humor of the people who lived in those times and told those stories.

One of folklorist J. Frank Dobie's favorite stories was that of a longhorn named Sancho. He heard it from John Rigby of Beeville, in South Texas. Dobie figured Rigby had dressed up the story a bit and admitted that he himself had done some "constructive work" on it over the years.

It goes like this.

There was a man named Kerr who lived on a small ranch out in the brush country south of San Antonio. One winter day in 1876, he found a cow dead in a bog with her near-lifeless calf beside her. Kerr roped the calf and took it home to his wife, Maria.

She cleaned up the poor calf and bottle fed him until Kerr could find another cow with a calf to adopt the orphan. Maria named the calf Sancho.

She began feeding him tamales, shuck and all, seasoned with peppers. Out in the brush, he began eating the chile pequin peppers that grew wild in shaded places.

Sancho was eventually branded and turned into a steer, but he was as strong as any bull. Nonetheless he remained Maria's pet and came in from the range each night to sleep under a mesquite tree.

When Sancho was 3, Kerr sold the steer to the Shiner brothers, who were to deliver three herds to buyers in Wyoming.

They branded him 7Z for the drive north, but Sancho kept lagging back and was tagged by the boys as one to watch.

Pies, Pies, Pies

Regardless of the filling, you're guaranteed a slice of heaven

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Indulge in chocolaty goodness with this easy pie. A luscious mix of whipped cream and rich pudding creates a smooth, decadent filling. Each bite offers a satisfying crunch and melt-in-your-mouth sweetness, making this dessert irresistible for any chocolate lover!

Chocolate Chip Pie

1 quart heavy cream
2 cups powdered sugar
2 tablespoons vanilla extract
1 box instant chocolate pudding mix
(5.9 ounces)
2 cups whole milk
2 cups mini chocolate chips, divided use
2 chocolate cookie pie crusts
(9 inches each)

1. Using a handheld or stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, whip heavy cream, powdered sugar and vanilla on medium-high speed until medium peaks form, about 3–4 minutes. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together pudding mix and milk until smooth. Gently fold half the whipped cream and 1 cup mini chocolate chips into the chocolate pudding.
3. Divide filling evenly between crusts, and smooth out top with a spoon.
4. Top with remaining whipped cream and sprinkle with remaining 1 cup chocolate chips.
5. Place in fridge to chill at least 2 hours. Serve chilled.

SERVES 12

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Piloncillo Candied Pecan Pie.





Peanut Butter Buttermilk Pie

ROSE M. DAILEY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC

This is a creamy, indulgent twist on a Southern classic. It combines the tangy goodness of buttermilk with the smooth, nutty flavor of peanut butter, creating a filling that's sweet and slightly tart.

**1 unbaked deep-dish pie crust
(9 inches)**

4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter

½ cup creamy peanut butter

1¼ cups sugar

3 tablespoons flour

⅛ teaspoon salt

1 cup buttermilk

4 eggs, lightly beaten

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. If crust is not already in a pie dish, arrange unbaked crust in pie dish.

2. In a microwave-safe bowl, melt butter and peanut butter together in the microwave on medium-high (70% power) for 15 seconds, or longer as needed to melt butter. Allow to cool 5 minutes.

3. In a large bowl, stir together sugar, flour, salt and buttermilk. Stir in eggs to blend completely. Add the cooled peanut butter mixture and stir until smooth.

4. Pour filling into pie crust. Bake 10 minutes at 425 degrees, then reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake 25–30 minutes longer.

5. Remove from oven and allow to cool before serving.

SERVES 6–8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

\$500 WINNER

Strawberry Custard Pie

MILLIE KIRCHOFF
NUECES EC



Delight your guests with this perfect blend of sweet and tangy flavors. Fresh strawberries nestled over a creamy custard are sweetened with vanilla and a hint of lemon juice for brightness. The velvety filling pairs beautifully with the buttery crust. This is a showstopper.

1 pie crust (9 inches), prepared and baked according to package directions

2 egg yolks

1½ cups sugar, divided use

7 tablespoons cornstarch, divided use

¼ teaspoon salt

2 cups whole milk

1 tablespoon (½ stick) butter

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 cup water, divided use

1 tablespoon lemon juice

6 cups fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered

1. Place crust on a baking sheet. In a heatproof medium bowl, lightly whisk egg yolks.

2. In a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, whisk together ¾ cup sugar, 4 tablespoons cornstarch, salt and milk. Bring to a boil. Boil 1 minute, whisking constantly.

3. Slowly pour ½ cup milk mixture into egg yolks, whisking constantly. Add egg mixture to the saucepan, reduce heat and cook for an additional minute, whisking constantly until mixture thickens.

4. Remove from heat and stir in butter and vanilla. Pour custard mixture into baked pie shell.

5. In a bowl, stir together remaining ¾ cup sugar, remaining 3 tablespoons cornstarch and 2 tablespoons water.

6. In a medium saucepan over high heat, bring remaining ¾ cup water to a boil. Stir in sugar mixture and cook, stirring constantly, 2–3 minutes until thick and clear. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice. Fold strawberries into syrup.

7. Spoon strawberries over custard mixture and chill in refrigerator at least 4 hours. Serve chilled.

SERVES 6–8



TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

BEEFY BURGERS DUE MARCH 10

Backyard grilling is the best part of summer. How do you build your perfect burger? Submit your all-star recipe, and you might flip over \$500. Enter by March 10.

UPCOMING: ONE-SKILLET DINNERS DUE APRIL 10



Edna's Dewberry Pie

TINA WEBB
BLUEBONNET EC

Fresh berry filling crowned with a sweet, crunchy topping makes for one appetizing pie. Webb's mother-in-law, Edna, passed down this recipe that's been in the family for generations. Webb uses the native dewberries she gathers each season to make the pie, but blackberries will work too.

PIE

- 1 unbaked pie crust (9 inches)
- 4 cups dewberries
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ cup sour cream

TOPPING

- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, chilled and diced



1. **PIE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. If crust is not already in a pie dish, arrange unbaked crust in pie dish.
2. Place dish on a baking sheet and place berries inside.
3. In a bowl, mix together sugar, flour, salt, eggs and sour cream. Pour mixture over dewberries.
4. **TOPPING** In another bowl, stir together flour and sugar. Use hands to work in butter

Tips by the Ton

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

I baked a ton of pies for this issue. Before all that testing, I wish I had known:

Place your pie on a baking sheet in the oven to prevent a huge mess. The filling might bubble over. Trust me on this one.

Don't rush the cooling process. Allow the pie to cool completely before slicing. It's worth the wait.

pieces until large clumps form. Sprinkle topping over pie.

5. Bake 45 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from oven and allow pie to cool 2 hours at room temperature before serving.

SERVES 6-8

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Peace Silver Dollar: With a beautiful design memorializing peace following the end of World War I, the 90% silver Peace Dollar proved to be very popular with the American people. Extremely Fine (XF) condition coin included in set.

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original, revered Type 1 "Heraldic Eagle" reverse design by John Mercanti, 12th Chief Engraver of the U.S. Mint. In Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Heaven in Houston

A Rice University art installation transports viewers at dusk and dawn

BY CHET GARNER

THERE I SAT, in total silence, on the campus of Houston’s Rice University, surrounded by dozens of other people just staring at the ceiling. But this wasn’t any normal ceiling.

It was equal parts lights show, meditation and spaceship, slowly changing colors and seemingly transporting all of us into another dimension. After 40 minutes, the light show ended, and I felt like I’d been given a brain massage—a welcome side effect to witnessing the glory of the Twilight Epiphany Skyspace.

This bit of artistic madness was created by James Turrell, an internationally acclaimed master of color, light and messing with your eyes. In the daylight, this artistic installation built in 2012 looks like a giant UFO hovering over a Mayan pyramid. But at sunrise and sunset, the UFO fires up its engines and lifts off. It’s currently closed but will reopen in late spring.

I rolled onto Rice’s campus about 20 minutes before sunset. The experience is totally free and open to the public, and there was a docent on-site to answer questions. “So, we just go sit and stare?” I asked. “Yes,” she answered. “You’ll know when it starts.”

At first, I felt a bit uncomfortable sitting around with total strangers staring at a blank white surface. But as the daylight faded, the lights began to shine and we all drifted into a hypnotic trance. There were neons and purples, greens and reds, each fading slowly into the next.

Was I looking at the orange hues of a Texas sunset, or was it just a vibrant projection? Hard to say, as the edges of the giant square seemed to blend seamlessly into the surrounding sky.

Every now and then, a giggle would break the silence and remind me that this was indeed a very strange collective experience. However, sometimes the weirdest art is the most wonderful of all. ■

ABOVE Chet takes in the exterior of the Twilight Epiphany Skyspace.

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.

MARCH

1

Weatherford [1–31] Grow at Clark Gardens, (940) 682-4856, clarkgardens.org

8

Abilene The Gatlin Brothers, (325) 676-6211, abileneconventioncenter.com

Luling Rajun’ Cajun Throwdown & Gumbo Cookoff, (830) 875-5058, lulingmainstreet.com

14

Round Top [14–15] Herbal Forum & Plant Sale, (979) 249-3129, festivalhill.org

Tolar [14–15] Ceramic Expo & Handcrafted Items, (254) 716-5227, westceramicshow.com

16

Fredericksburg St. Patrick’s Day Coin Hunt, (830) 990-2044, fbgtx.org

22

Huntsville Herb Festival at the Wynne Home, (281) 787-3895, texasthymeunit.org

Kingsville How To Recognize a Champion Horse, (915) 533-0048, tomlea.com

La Grange David Wilcox, (979) 968-9944, thebugleboy.org

Palestine Dogwood Festival, (903) 729-6066, palestinechamber.org

Tomball Choo-Choo Chow Down, (281) 290-1035, tomballtx.gov

25

Fort Worth [25–30] Clue, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

27

Sagerton [27-29] Hee Haw,
(940) 200-0035, facebook.com/sagertonheehaw

28

Cuero [28-29] Heirloom Stitches Guild of Cuero Quilt Show, (361) 550-9388

Georgetown [28-29] Quilt Show, (512) 869-1812, handcraftsunlimited.com

Hamilton [28-29] Hamilton County Master Gardener Vegetable Sale, (254) 386-3919, hamilton-tx@tamu.edu

29

Burnet Hill Country Lawn & Garden Show, (512) 756-3059, burnetcountyhighlandlakes mastergardener.org

Sabinal [29-30] Wild Hog Festival & Craft Fair, (830) 486-8549, sabinalwildhogfestival.com

APRIL

3

Corsicana John Conlee, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

4

Fredericksburg [4-6] Texas Fandango, thetexasfandango.com

5

Port Arthur Cajun Heritage Fest, (409) 985-7822, visitportarthurtx.com

Waxahachie [5-May 26] Scarborough Renaissance Festival, (972) 938-3247, srfestival.com

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

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Small Spaces

Tiny and terrific, there's a whole world to explore right at our fingertips. Between the cracks of the sidewalk, tucked in the petals of a flower or deep in an underground cave, nature awaits if we only slow down long enough to take a look.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 KATY FRANCESCHINI
PEDERNALES EC

"This little frog in our garden frog found the perfect spot to hide."

2 SHELBY BARLET
HAMILTON COUNTY EC

"I found this little guy looking for respite on my window-sill. Turns out he was trying to get away from my cat!"

3 KATHERYN JAGER
PEDERNALES EC

"My husband, Garrett Smith, an environmental scientist, squeezes into a Texas cave entrance."

4 GREGORY COTHERN
TRINITY VALLEY EC

"A tree frog finds shelter for the day in the leaf whorl of a canna lily."



Upcoming Contests

DUE MAR 10 Catch of the Day

DUE APR 10 College Life

DUE MAY 10 Off-Road Adventures



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Nanny's Blessing

A grandmother sows memories for generations through her love of bluebonnets

BY SHANE TORNO
ILLUSTRATION BY
SARAH FERONE

MY GRANDMOTHER, NANNY to us kids, loved bluebonnets. She loved all wildflowers but especially bluebonnets.

She was a native Texan so that fact is probably no surprise. However, her love for these attractive weeds went beyond the standard Texas loyalty.

A typical Texan will happily drive for hours in the spring for the chance to view vast fields of the state flower. Of course she would often do this, but she would also collect seeds throughout the year so that she could plant them along highways in the fall.

As a child, I would sometimes accompany her and operate the shovel while she sowed the seeds in places where she could keep her eye on them during their growth.

Prior to these experiences with her, I had always assumed that the wildflowers

were responsible for their own dispersion. Now, whenever I see bluebonnets along the road, I imagine a little old woman urging a reluctant teen boy with a shovel to “keep up the pace!”

Nanny didn't just plant bluebonnets along the road though, she sowed them anywhere the sun shined. Her front yard, her side yard, her backyard, city parks, vacant lots, alleyways.

She was very successful, too. Her bluebonnet patches often attracted admirers, photographers and plenty of pollinators.

My wife also loves bluebonnets. She grew up in Kerrville and got to enjoy some of the state's best bluebonnet gazing with her family along the Hill Country's famously scenic Willow City Loop.

Once we had our own children, my wife and I would photograph our young sons in Nanny's bluebonnet patches. That's because, despite my shovel work with my grandmother, I never had any success growing my own.

Back in 2015, I bought some property out in the country that would eventually be my homesite. One of the first things I did with that property was plant bluebonnet seeds with my sons.

But no bluebonnets came up. Year after year I would plant more seeds. No bluebonnets.

Nanny died in December 2023 at the age of 97. She had good health and enjoyed her independence until the very end, and she even tended her garden with care up until the last few years.

She was a blessing to many people, even some who never knew her or knew why there were so many bluebonnets between Sinton and Rockport, north of Corpus Christi.

Last spring—inexplicably—I had some big, beautiful bluebonnet patches in my front flower bed, even though I didn't sow any seeds in the fall.

If you ask me if I think this is a coincidence, I would say, yes, of course it is.

But it is my favorite coincidence ever. ■



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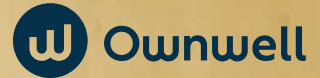
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