

THE DAZZLING PECAN TREE
NEAR FORT WORTH

THE MIGHTY HONEYBEE
IS BUSY AS EVER

REMEMBER THE
GREAT Y2K SCARE?

Texas Coop Power

FOR TRINITY VALLEY EC MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2024

Cookie Season

Co-op Country kitchens
share their recipes

TRINITY
VALLEY EC
NEWS

SEE PAGE 16



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December 2024



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An old pecan tree's dazzling annual metamorphosis becomes a community tradition.

By Pete Alfano
Photos by R.J. Hinkle

Everybody's Beeswax

Texans help each other help the mighty honeybee help the rest of us.

By Claire Stevens
Photos by Eric W. Pohl

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The best of our Cookie Exchange recipe contest. Get baking on Page 26.
Photo by Jason David Page

ABOVE

Busy bees at Two Hives Honey in Manor.
Photo by Eric W. Pohl

Y2...What?



THE WORLD SEEMINGLY teetered on turmoil 25 years ago this month at the hands of Y2K, a supposed computer glitch that threatened to stymie systems as the calendar turned from 1999 to 2000. It was quite a big deal—though for TCP’s editors and writers, not so much:

Samantha Bryant: *I was at my grandmother’s house in Poolville, listening to the news on TV while my siblings and I did a Y2K-proof activity—a puzzle.*

Chris Burrows: *I was making sure our family computer kept ticking (by playing video games all night).*

Alex Dal Santo: *We were with neighbors, watching Space Jam. None of the adults seemed very concerned.*

Claire Stevens: *That was before my time, but my parents didn’t even see midnight. I’m told they “went to bed hoping the world and digital appliances would live to see the next day.”*

Tom Widlowski: *I was one of the 260,000 revelers packing Congress Avenue in Austin.*

Read *Black-Eyed Peace* on Page 25 to learn more about the experiences of Texans during Y2K.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My favorite holiday lights are ...

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 October prompt: **My favorite hand-me-down is ...**

Old recipes. You get to learn, by trial and error, how much a pinch and a dash actually is.

TABITHA FOUNTAIN
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC
SAN AUGUSTINE

My name. My dad named me after his sister. We both were Yvette Françoise “Sissy” Sherman.

YVETTE COOPER
BANDERA EC
BANDERA

A small screwdriver my dad gave me when I was about 6. I’m 75 and carry it on my key chain every day.

GARY ELLIOTT
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

75 Candles

Three Texans with storied careers in their chosen fields turn 75 this month.

- Hall of Fame golfer **Tom Kite** was born December 9, 1949, in McKinney.
- ZZ Top guitarist **Billy Gibbons** was born December 16 in Houston.
- Academy Award-winning actress **Sissy Spacek** was born December 25 in Quitman.



TCP Contests and More

ENTER CONTESTS AT
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RECOMMENDED READING

Download our issue from December 2004 and enjoy our look at holiday lights. Find it at texascooppower.com/magazine-archives.



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Hauling Grass

Hadn't seen lawn mower racing in years—since I left the hills of Kentucky [*Grassroots Movement*, October 2024].

Mark Wright
Via Facebook

Come Together

Thanks for the old Beatles memory [*Invading Dallas*, September 2024]. I saw them the night before in Kansas City. I was a sixth grader in Topeka, Kansas.

Larry Chabira
Pedernales EC
San Leanna

The Cactus Experience

I have looked for a book—*Guns smoke in the Redlands*, about feuds in San Augustine. Felton Cochran said he had the book in his hand, and two days later I had it in my hand [*Texas Book Man*, July 2024].

Buddy Hancock
Deep East Texas EC
Center



JULIA ROBINSON

OCTOBER 2024 There's No Party Like La Pitada

“I extend my gratitude for including such a small town like ours in your amazing magazine—and also the tradition we hold sacred, celebrating our Dallas Cowboys!”

SANTA GARCIA
MAGIC VALLEY EC
BROWNSVILLE

I ventured into Cactus Book Shop about 22 years ago. Felton Cochran was so pleasant and welcoming, and I picked out several books totaling well over \$100. Back then, he didn't take credit cards.

I asked him to hold my books until I could come back in a few days with a check, as I was a 100-mile round trip from San Angelo. He insisted I take them with me and mail him a check later. He didn't ask for ID, phone number or anything.

Susan Wellborn
Concho Valley EC
Robert Lee

Saltshaker Logic

I especially enjoyed the last two sentences: “Oh well, even the imperfect ones have purpose. I grabbed the saltshaker.” We humans are imperfect and sometimes say or do something that rubs another person the wrong way [*Culling Time*, July 2024].

Instead of getting upset at someone, grab the imaginary saltshaker. Take what the other person said or did with a grain of salt.

Ted Pasche
CoServ
Argyle

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

Please include your electric co-op and town. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

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An old pecan tree's dazzling
annual metamorphosis becomes
a community tradition

Field of Beams

BY PETE ALFANO • PHOTOS BY R.J. HINKLE

A family gathering on Thanksgiving culminates in the pasture of a 10-acre ranch where a pair of old geldings, Zephyr and Max, graze during the day. In the middle of this equine playground is a pecan tree, standing like a sentry, having taken root about 30 years after Texas became a state.

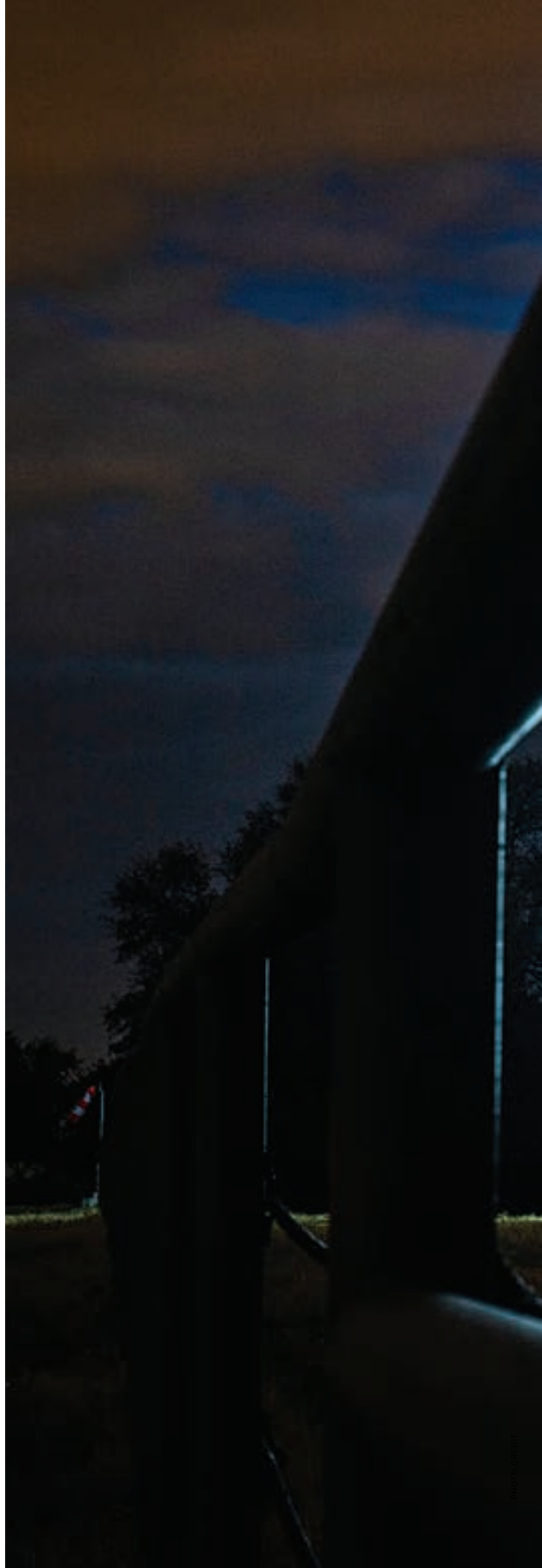
But for the past 17 years, the tree has been more than just a vestige of the past; it is the town of Bartonville's symbolic tribute to the holidays.

Without fanfare Barbara Nunneley first lit the nearly 50-foot-tall tree in 2007, when about 60,000 bright LEDs illuminated the darkness and could be seen from 3 miles away. The bright lights attract visitors who admire and photograph it or quietly take in the glow, reflecting on another year coming to an end.

"It's mesmerizing, almost a spiritual thing," says Jaclyn Carrington, mayor of Bartonville, 30 miles northwest of Fort Worth. "It is so black out because there are no streetlights, so all you see is this gigantic, beautiful bright tree. The first time I saw it, I thought, 'Wow, this is magnificent.'"

This month is the 18th renewal of a tradition Nunneley, a retired lawyer, initiated to honor her father, Earl, a larger-than-life personality, she says, who was battling prostate cancer during the early 2000s. She plays host to siblings and their families on Thanksgiving and wanted her father to be there to witness a tree-lighting ceremony that has become as anticipated in Bartonville as the annual tree-lighting event at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

"It's mesmerizing, almost a spiritual thing," Bartonville Mayor Jaclyn Carrington says of the centuries-old lighted pecan tree on Barbara Nunneley's ranch.





“
No one could have predicted that an old and revered pecan tree would become the centerpiece of the holiday season in Bartonville. It has had a life of its own and now, ‘a light of its own.’
”



Her dad, however, was too ill to make the 70-mile trip from Nocona on Thanksgiving in 2007, but with her family gathered around the tree in the pasture after dinner, Nunneley flipped the switch that brought the pecan tree to life.

“There was dead silence for a couple of minutes,” she says. “Then tears.” Her father died the next day, but Nunneley has faith that he has seen the tree from a far loftier perch.

Bill Rathburn, owner of the Christmas Light Co., first suggested lighting the 150-year-old tree in 2005. His crew was there to string lights across the roofline of Nunneley’s sprawling ranch house when he sized up the gangly mass of limbs and branches after the tree had shed its leaves and

dropped its pecans. He pondered what a different kind of Christmas tree it could be.

But Nunneley and her partner, Jan Deatherage, decided against the challenging and costly job of lighting the tree. With her father’s illness progressing, however, and his love for anything over-the-top, Nunneley gave the go-ahead two years later.

Stringing lights on the tree is labor intensive. Rathburn’s crew uses cherry pickers to reach the top, and the project takes a couple of days each year to set up and then take down in early January. Nunneley says a new circuit board had to be installed to handle the power output and that a timer now turns the lights on at dusk and off at midnight.

The tree has had various light colors over the years, but white appears to have the most dramatic impact. CoServ, an electric cooperative based in Denton, provides the electricity for the property and the tree.

Pecan trees are resilient, and this one has obviously survived numerous winters of freezing temperatures and ice storms as well as tornado seasons and Texas’ broiling summer heat. During severe drought, Nunneley runs garden hoses out to the tree from the house to ensure it stays healthy.

Carrington says the famous tree has had a modest economic impact during the holidays as people from the region make the pilgrimage to Bartonville. They eat dinner in the town of about 1,800 and then park along the side of the road fronting the pasture to admire the tree from behind the low fence.

“They make an evening out of it,” Carrington says. “It’s a huge event every year.”

One evening the week before Christmas last year, local Kim Corser stepped out of her car and walked up to the fence to just marvel at the tree. “I was out running errands and realized I hadn’t come to see the tree yet,” she says. “I usually come with my kids, but we’ll come back.”

Some visitors have tried to scale the fence to get even closer to the tree despite a sign that warns against trespassing. “Some high school boys tried to climb it,” Nunneley says. “People sneak in because they think it is on a vacant lot. Parking can be an issue because we’ve had people pulling into our driveway.”

She says a neighbor who works for the Federal Aviation Administration has informed pilots about the tree, which can be seen from planes as they come and go from nearby Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

The pecan tree is not just a tourist attraction but a source of inspiration. Deatherage displayed a coffee-table book about the tree compiled by Flower Mound photographer Meredith Butterfield. “It has entries by different photographers with stories of what the tree means to them,” she says. It’s a limited-edition book: The only copy belongs to Nunneley and Deatherage.

One holiday season early on, Nunneley heard a knock on

the front door and found a sheet of legal paper under the doormat. It was left by a young man who wanted to propose to his girlfriend under the tree because she had admired it the year before. But there was no name, phone number or other contact information.

“Several days later, I was walking in the pasture collecting the horses and saw yet another sheet of yellow legal paper,” Nunneley says. “It was the second page of the original letter. Clearly the wind had come up and separated the letter. It had the young man’s name and the way to contact him.” She followed through and gave her blessing to his request.

It happened again years later when a polite young man, about to graduate college, rang the doorbell and nervously asked whether he could propose to his college sweetheart under the tree. “He thought it was a logical place because it was a place of so much light, hope for the future and promise,” Nunneley says.

The young Romeo kept it a secret from his girlfriend when they came to view the tree. He convinced her that he knew the owners and it would be OK to trespass and take photos under the blinding canopy.

When they went over the fence and walked up to the tree, his family and hers drove from around the corner and watched as the young man dropped to one knee and proposed. “There were celebratory handshakes and hugs and lots and lots of flash camera pictures,” Nunneley says.

No one could have predicted that an old and revered pecan tree would become the centerpiece of the holiday season in Bartonville. It has had a life of its own and now, “a light of its own,” Nunneley says. ■



OPPOSITE Nunneley began the tree-lighting tradition in 2007 to honor her father.

THIS PAGE The 60,000 LEDs have made the tree a famous attraction over the holidays.





Everybody's

BY CLAIRE STEVENS
PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Michele Jaquier, a tour guide at Two Hives Honey in Manor, shows guests a beehive frame loaded with bees and honey. Jaquier captures a sample of honey. Atlas, owner Tara Chapman's son, helps with the smoker. Honey production in the U.S. was up last year even as bees face a range of threats.

For years now, all eyes have been on the bees. In the mid-2000s entire colonies of worker bees started disappearing suddenly and mysteriously, raising alarm bells around the world. Since then, there has been serious concern for the insects we depend on to pollinate our crops and native flora. Bees are up against a whole host of threats, including habitat destruction and fragmentation, invasive parasites, and extreme weather.

But things might finally be looking up for honeybees. In the U.S., honey production was up 11% in 2023 after three years of decline, according to the Department of Agriculture.

That's due, at least in part, to the many dedicated defenders of these critical pollinators. Across Texas a growing movement



Beeswax

**Texans help each other
help the mighty honeybee
help the rest of us**

of beekeepers, educators and researchers are working to save the bees. One such defender—Juliana Rangel, a professor of apiculture who runs the Texas A&M University honeybee lab—says those efforts are starting to pay off.

The biggest threat facing the bees, Rangel says, is the varroa mite, a tiny parasite that feeds on bees and spreads viruses among colonies worldwide. Despite measuring just over a millimeter, the pests have devastated U.S. honeybee populations as they've spread since the late 1980s. Some insecticides are effective against varroa but can also have negative effects on bees.

Making matters worse, increasing urbanization has left wild and managed bees with less forage.

Bees also must contend with extreme weather amid a changing climate. The February 2021 winter storm in Texas impacted bee populations unequipped for the cold and delayed the spring blooms they rely on for food. In addition, increasingly hot summers and droughts have left many bees starving. Beekeepers can keep them alive, but they'll struggle in the heat, with poor nutrition leading to no honey yields.

Against these threats, it's impressive that bees can survive in the wild. While beekeepers keep honeybees almost exclusively, native wild bees often live secluded, in nests, making them much harder to study. But they face many of the same challenges as their managed counterparts.

“I love feral colonies because they are kind of like a beacon of not just diversity but also resilience against all of these issues,” Rangel says. “If they’re alive, it’s because they’ve been able to survive on their own.”

Luckily, not all bees have to do it on their own. Beekeepers across the state dedicate themselves to the pollinators.

Suzanne Truhlicka, a Lyntegar Electric Cooperative member who lives in Tahoka, just south of Lubbock, was hooked after a neighbor took her along for a hive removal in 2019. “I just became addicted to bees,” Truhlicka says. “The bees are like therapy to me. They’re a challenge, every day.”

She now maintains 12 hives and sells honey and beeswax products online and at local shops through her business, Flying Fancy Bees. She’s one of many Texans who have picked up the trade in recent years. In fact, the number of farms with bees in Texas more than quadrupled from 2012 to 2022, according to the USDA’s Census of Agriculture. Texas had 8,939 farms with bees—more than twice as many as the next highest state, Ohio.

One leading contributor to Texas’ honeybee craze is a 2012 state law that allows folks with 5–20 acres of land to get a property tax break under an agricultural exemption if they keep bees.

That tax break was what originally prompted Susan Allen to put hives on her North Texas property, deciding that tending bees was going to be a whole lot easier than maintaining



RIGHT Chapman has become focused on beekeeping education.

BELOW A collection of hives in September at Two Hives Honey. The smoke keeps the bees calm while keepers perform hive inspections.



Save the Bees

If you want to do your part to help bees, here are a few steps you can take:

- **Grow native plants.** While a perfectly manicured lawn might be your homeowners association's preference, having a "wild" portion of your lawn where native plants and wildflowers can grow is much preferred by bees.
- **Plant large patches of the same flower.** Bees have site fidelity, meaning they prefer to return to the same patch of flowers again and again. Having a large patch of one species, rather than just a few of each kind of flower, makes it easier for them to do so.

- **If you're ready to begin caring for your own hives,**

now is the ideal time to learn and order a nucleus colony, often just called a nuc, to get started.

Nucs are typically delivered in late spring but often must be ordered in advance.

- **Support local beekeepers.** Find a map of Texas honey retailers on the Texas Beekeepers Association's website, texasbeekeepers.org.



the hay the land had been used for. But what started as a smart financial move quickly grew into a passion as Allen, a Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative member, became more and more involved in beekeeping, connecting with other local beekeepers through the Grayson County Beekeepers Association.

The more Allen learned about bees, the more she was invested. "They're just so stinking smart," Allen says. "They're fascinating. That's what keeps me going. It's just learning more and more about them."

Beekeeping clubs exist all over Texas, gathering in churches, community centers, restaurants and homes to educate, discuss challenges and collaborate.

Best friends Rosie Lund and Meredith Pace started their honey and beekeeping supply business, Apis Supply, in 2023 and quickly realized they needed a bee club in their neck of West Texas, where high winds and dry weather make keeping bees particularly tricky. The duo helped organize curious beekeepers into the Permian Basin Beekeeping Association, which now meets monthly in Seminole.

"It's a family, really," says Pace, a Lyntegar EC member. "We all just kind of support each other. It's like, 'Oh, hey, I have an extra frame,' or 'I have an extra box,' until you can get stuff in the mail because everything takes a week to get here."

Much like the community inside a hive, the community of beekeepers depends on each other. And they depend especially on people like Tara Chapman, whose beekeeping venture goes well beyond honey production, aiming to get more people informed and excited about bees.

Chapman took a beekeeping class in 2013 while looking for a new career after 10 years at the CIA. She became fascinated with bees and decided to trade war zones for worker bees, starting with just two hives maintained by her and a friend. Her operation has grown to more than 300 hives at Two Hives Honey in Manor, just east of Austin.

Chapman doesn't get to spend as much time "in bees" as she used to but now focuses on beekeeping education. In addition to tours of the honey ranch, honey tastings and

beekeeping classes, Two Hives offers a six-month hands-on "beek" apprenticeship program. Last month Chapman published *For the Bees: A Handbook for Happy Beekeeping*.

"Beekeeping is the most nuanced form of ag there is," she says. "I will argue to my death that that is true, and it's not totally intuitive to everybody."

Chapman set out to teach people about the "bananas" world of bees, making sure they understand basic bee biology first. Inside each hive is an entire society, she explains, with a queen at the center. But the queen, while important, isn't really in charge. Honeybees make decisions democratically, communicating through pheromones and "waggle dances."

"It just so defies logic of how humans live and exist," she says. Understanding the foreign world of bees is one of the things that can make keeping them so challenging.

"I've made every mistake, and I think it's why my greatest asset is my ability to teach beekeeping," Chapman says. Those mistakes have included an incident in which an improperly secured box resulted in roughly 50 pounds of spilled honey in the back of Chapman's truck.

Luckily, she says, bees will quickly come to take care of any honey that's just sitting there for the taking, but "while they're taking care of it, it's going to be a terrifying sight for the layman that happens to be walking by your driveway."

Chapman's and others' efforts haven't been in vain. Rangel says the increased awareness and interest have been important and that honeybees are doing better now than when the public first learned about collapsing colonies—though it's too soon to say they're in the clear. Honeybee numbers can fluctuate year-to-year as environmental factors change, but Rangel says there's been a trend of about a 1% increase in the U.S. managed population each year.

"In the last 15 years, the number of studies on honeybees and honeybee health have grown exponentially, which increases our understanding of all the issues that they face," she says.

"Increased awareness by the public and the farming community, I think, is what's mostly helping." ■

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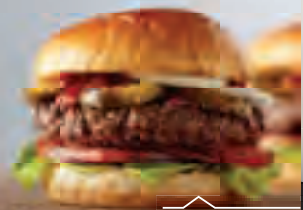
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MESSAGE
FROM
GENERAL
MANAGER/
CEO

JEFF LANE

Supporting Communities Is the Co-op Way

AS SOME OF YOU MIGHT KNOW, cooperatives across the globe adhere to the same Seven Cooperative Principles, which guide our decisions—from how we run the co-op to how we engage with our communities.

Concern for Community is the seventh principle, and it's one of the most cherished among the employees of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative. During the holiday season, this principle seems especially important.

Electric cooperatives have a proud history of supporting the communities that built them. From toy and food drives to scholarships and direct charitable donations, TVEC steps up to help our members, their friends and families, and neighbors.

Co-op members do their part, too. Through the Operation Round Up program, members can round up their energy bills to the next whole dollar, and the extra change goes toward helping those in need, right here in our community.

Electric cooperatives' commitment to community extends globally too. Co-ops across the country have donated equipment and sent lineworkers to other countries—to help bring power to people who have never experienced the benefits of electricity.

So many families go without on a daily basis and struggle to make ends meet. This struggle can be especially hard during the holiday season.

There are many ways you can give back to the community that go beyond dollars and cents. Take some time to go through your closets and find clothes that no longer fit or you don't use. Bag them up and take them to a local charity or church clothing drive. Volunteer for a local food or toy drive, deliver meals to the sick and older adults, or simply make a meal for a neighbor in need.

No matter how great or small the act, every time we lend a hand, we strengthen our community. So take time this holiday season to think about your neighbors. If you're like me, you'll feel all the better for it.

I hope you enjoy a wonderful holiday season filled with happiness and love. ■



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Keep Holidays Happy and Safe

THE WINTER HOLIDAYS can be the best time of the year—as long as you and your family stay safe.

Be extra vigilant about fire safety as you celebrate the holidays. Amid the guests, the cooking, the decorations and the business of the season, a third of all residential fires occur during the winter, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Protect your family and your home by following these electrical safety tips:

- ▶ Don't overload outlets or electrical cords. Instead of plugging the extra lights, appliances and decorations into a multisided plug, invest in a power strip.
- ▶ Never run extension or other cords under rugs or in high-traffic areas. People can trip over them, and the rug can cause wear on a cord, making it vulnerable to overheating and starting a fire.
- ▶ If you find a cracked or frayed wire on any cord, throw it (and whatever device it's permanently attached to) away.
- ▶ After the holidays are over, pack up your extension cords and store them with your decorations. Extension cords are not designed for permanent use.
- ▶ Test smoke detectors regularly and replace batteries at least annually. ■

THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME



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JUNE 15-22, 2025



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Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Local (972) 932-2214
Toll-Free 1-800-766-9576
Web tvec.net

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24/7

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ABOUT TRINITY VALLEY EC

TVEC operates in Anderson, Dallas, Henderson, Hunt, Kaufman and Van Zandt counties.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Kaufman District Headquarters

1800 E. Highway 243, Kaufman

Athens District Office

909 W. Larkin St., Athens

Cedar Creek District Office

1012 W. Main St., Ste. 102
Gun Barrel City

Wills Point District Office

582 N. Fourth St., Wills Point

Lobby Hours

8:15 a.m.–4:45 p.m.

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2024 TVEC Annual Meeting

The 86th yearly co-op gathering aimed for taking care of business, with a side of fun and family

THE 2024 TRINITY VALLEY Electric Cooperative Annual Membership Meeting was an event to remember with 760 attendees filling the Canton Civic Center for an evening of 1950s-themed fun. With Elvis impersonator Terry Edwards singing the rocker's biggest hits, the pre-meeting activities and meal became a highlight for many.

Longtime TVEC attorney John Mosley was recognized for his contributions to the co-op, as new attorney Carl Galant was introduced to lead the proceedings.

Tony Watson, assistant general manager and chief operating officer Tony Watson highlighted many of the co-op's accomplishments over the last year, including safety milestones, service reliability enhancements and communication efforts.

"Society is becoming increasingly dependent on highly reliable electric service, so it is imperative that we strive to provide you with the most reliable service possible," Watson said. "We currently service just over 8,300 miles of line serving right at 85,223 meters, maintaining that distribution system with 196 employees."

Watson highlighted a \$500,000 budget increase for a total of \$6.4 million for right-of-way clearing to combat tree-caused outages.

"We realize most property owners regard trees as an asset," he said. "It is vital that vegetation be cleared from power lines to provide reliable service and eliminate hazardous conditions."

Watson also touted the efforts of the co-op's member services team of 23 employees who handle member calls and concerns by phone, online chat and email.

"In 2023 the department handled 292,993 phone calls...and worked 715 online chats generating more than 50,000 service orders along with 8,765 new service requests," he said. "We are constantly looking for ways to make your cooperative better and I want to assure you that this is an ongoing process."

Bobby White, TVEC chief financial officer, gave attendees an overview of the co-op's financial performance. In particular White noted that while population and business growth had been beneficial over the past several years, recent slower growth and the impact of mild weather on electric revenue was clear to see.

That sentiment was echoed by TVEC General Manager/CEO Jeff Lane, as his remarks tackled the potential for upcoming rate adjustments.

"We are pleased that we haven't had a rate increase since 2008 with our base rate at 10.484 cents," he said. "While year-over-year inflation is down to 2% now, since 2008 that is up 49%. Growth has propped us up for the most part, but that is slowing down and we are starting to see the erosion of our financial and reliability metrics. We are in the final stages of a cost-of-service study and, while that is not final, at this point I believe a rate increase in 2025 is very likely."

As of the deadline for this magazine, rate plans had not been finalized. Any rate adjustment will be announced



TVEC members chat with Jeff Lane, general manager/ceo, prior to the business meeting October 10 at the Canton Civic Center

LEIGH DENNEY/TVEC



FLOYD CHOYCE | TVEC

A festive family atmosphere is always a feature at the TVEC Annual Meeting. This year's meeting featured a 1950s theme with a light meal of hotdogs, chips and ice cream.

well in advance, and is not expected to occur before April. Look for future communications in *Texas Co-op Power* magazine.

Improving system reliability was also a topic of Lane's address, emphasizing the role of investment in technology that gives line crews and engineers more tools to address system problems before outages occur, and to respond more quickly to outages that happen.

"We have new equipment coming online like automatic transfer switches and devices called trip savers that help our crews keep the lights on," Lane said. "The use of artificial intelligence tools in vegetation management has helped that process become more efficient, and we have added to the budget in that category. We've also ramped up our device maintenance programs, and added tools to our AMI metering system to incorporate high and low voltage reporting."

Lane also addressed the state of the Electric Reliability Commission of Texas grid, including ongoing reliability enhancements and market redesign efforts that have followed the February

2021 winter storm energy emergency.

"Perhaps the largest impact, at least in the long term, will come from the Texas Energy Fund, which will provide grants and low interest loans to finance dispatchable generation and other projects," he said. "Our generation partner, Rayburn Electric Cooperative, is one of 72 applicants and the only co-op to apply. The Public Utilities Commission of Texas recently selected 17 applicants to move to the evaluation phase. Including the 570 megawatt Rayburn project, these projects would provide an additional 9,781 MW to the Texas grid."

Additional Meeting Highlights:

- David Copeland of Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss LLP provided a report on the co-op's yearly audit, which earned a clean, unmodified opinion.

- Board election results were announced, with District 3 incumbent Paul Weatherford retaining his seat. Weatherford was unopposed on the ballot.

Thank you to all members who voted in the board election, and to those who attended the meeting.

We look forward to seeing you all again next October. ■



FLOYD CHOYCE | TVEC

Elvis was in the building as celebrity impersonator Terry Edwards of Crandall kept guests smiling ahead of the business meeting.



ADOBE STOCK

No Capital Credits Retirement for 2024

TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC cooperative is a not-for-profit business, with any excess revenue allocated back to members each year, in proportion to the amount of electricity purchased. Those funds are retained by the co-op for a time as the working capital that allows the co-op to invest in new infrastructure, maintain lines and equipment, and keep up with our growing membership.

For the last 16 years, that has meant a capital credits retirement each December, putting millions of dollars back into the hands of TVEC members.

That will not be the case this year, however, as the co-op’s revenue has been lower than anticipated.

“TVEC has charged its residential members the same electricity rate since 2008. However, our cost to do business has significantly risen over the recent years,” said Bobby White, TVEC chief financial officer. “In 2024, TVEC’s revenue simply cannot absorb these rising costs and retire capital credits without having an adverse impact on TVEC’s financial condition.”

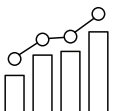
The TVEC Board of Directors retains the authority to revisit this decision during future financial reviews.

The oldest capital credits currently held by the co-op were allocated in 1996, within the 30-year retirement window shared by many electric cooperatives. ■

How Capital Credits Work



At the end of each year, if TVEC has received more revenue than was necessary to cover expenses, the difference is allocated back to members as capital credits based on each member’s share of electricity purchased.



When the co-op’s financial condition permits, the board of directors may decide to retire, or pay back, some of the capital credits. With lower revenue and rising expenses, there will be no capital credits retirement this year.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
Saturday, December 7

Bake Cookies Day
Wednesday, December 18

Christmas Hanukkah begins
Wednesday, December 25

Our offices will be closed Tuesday–Wednesday, December 24–25, in observance of the holidays.

New Year’s Day
Wednesday, January 1
Our offices will be closed.



ELI ASENOVA / ISTOCK.COM



FIZMES | ISTOCK.COM

A Good Fit?

Mini-split systems are a popular option in home additions or to supplement heating and cooling in a space that may be far from the main living area, such as a finished attic or garage. In these instances, it may not be feasible to install or extend the duct-work required for central cooling and heating systems.

Mini-splits are also relatively easy to install, requiring only a small hole for the conduit connecting the indoor and outdoor units.

Most systems can handle up to four indoor rooms or zones connected to one outdoor unit. Each of the zones can be customized because each includes its own thermostat, saving energy and money over time.

Cool Solutions

Mini-splits bring additional benefits. They're quiet and improve indoor air quality. Many come with remotes to make temperature control even

easier, and because of their smaller size, mini-splits have many placement options for indoor and outdoor units.

One of the greatest benefits of mini-splits is that they typically have a higher seasonal energy efficiency ratio than traditional central systems. The higher the unit's SEER rating, the more energy efficient it is.

Additional Considerations

Not every room is ideal for a mini-split system. It may be well worth the expense to have an HVAC professional assess your space and assist in planning your installation.

Aesthetics are another factor to consider, as some homeowners may not like the appearance of the intrusive indoor units, which are more visible than central AC vents.

If you're considering an upgrade or additional heating and cooling equipment, talk to a qualified technician to learn if a ductless mini-split system might be the right choice for your home. ■



TVEC ENERGY
MANAGEMENT
SUPERVISOR

CHRIS WALKER

Is a Ductless Mini-Split System Right for You?

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE a personalized comfort zone within your home—one where the temperature is customized to your preference and may be

different than the temperature in the shared living areas or other rooms in the house? This flexibility and customization are precisely why mini-split systems, also known as ductless air-source heat pumps, are so popular.

These systems can also be energy-efficient.

Nuts and Bolts

Let's unpack some mini-split basics first.

Similar to central heating and cooling systems, mini-split systems have two main components—an outdoor compressor and one or more indoor air-handling units. A narrow conduit links the indoor units to the outdoor compressor.

While central systems have an indoor unit connected by long lengths of ductwork, mini-splits are typically ductless. This means energy is not lost traveling through long stretches of tubing. 12440001

Installing the air-handling unit in a room enables you to control the temperature more precisely in that space—instead of the entire house or building—reducing energy consumption.



Lineman Lunch

Wade's Place

Chandler mainstay is known for fish but offers much more

CHANDLER HAS GROWN A LOT over the last decade, and the traffic down State Highway 31 is starting to show it. But it is worth the drive for many area residents headed to Wade's Place, just a few blocks off the main drag. The restaurant was opened in 2010, but the old railroad warehouse housing the dining room and adjoining country store give it a much older feel.

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative employees have made Wade's Place a regular stop, enjoying the restaurant's focus on fried fish and keeping customers well fed.

"It is a good, hometown environment with a friendly staff, but of course, it is the food I'm headed there for," said Eddie Conner, safety and loss control coordinator. "I like the fish and shrimp baskets of course, but when the crawfish are in season, we get over there for sure."

The menu incorporates a Cajun twist, with specials like crawfish étouffée. There are also a selection of sandwiches and sides to keep all diners happy, even if you don't eat fish.

With the addition of enclosed outside seating, Wade's Place service is quick even when there is a crowd

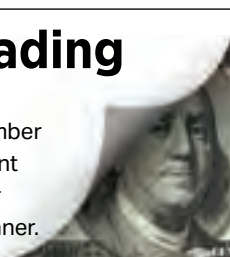
The attached Chandler Country Store features fashion, decorative and gift giving options on the way out the door.

Wade's Place is located at 104 E. Main St. in Chandler. You can find them online on Facebook. ■



Win \$100 Just for Reading

Somewhere hidden on pages 16–23 is a TVEC account number. Read closely. If the account number is yours, contact the member services department by December 31 to receive a \$100 credit on your electric bill. Don't miss out—you could be our winner.



Energy Quiz

What is the height of the world's tallest power transmission structures?

- A • 300 feet**
- B • 122 meters**
- C • 475 feet**
- D • 385 meters**

Win \$100!

Send your answer and contact information to contest@tvec.coop or contact TVEC Member Services by December 31. One \$100 bill credit winner will be chosen from all correct replies. Look for the correct answer in a future *Texas Co-op Power*.

November Energy Quiz: Texas Power Generation

TEXAS DOES EVERYTHING BIG and that includes our energy footprint. With size of the state and our rapidly growing population and business development, it is no surprise that our state led the nation in both electric generation and demand.

In 2023, the state's electricity generators accounted for 13% of U.S. production, more than twice as much as second-place Florida.

Congratulations to our October Energy Quiz winner, Gary Gandy of Canton.

Look for the winner of this month's contest in the February issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. ■



Charitable Foundation

Year-To-Date Grant Totals by Purpose

Animal Rescue	\$11,250
Children's Advocacy	\$25,500
Community Outreach	\$19,500
Community Projects	\$7,500
Continuing Education	\$4,000
Emergency Services	\$2,250
Environmental/Beautification	\$5,000
Family Resource	\$50,500
Fine Arts	\$4,000
Fire Departments	\$171,000
Food Pantry	\$21,000
Health Resources	\$15,500
Mental Health	\$9,000
Public Library	\$7,500
Public School Education	\$19,500
School Supplies/Lunch	\$7,000
Special Needs	\$16,000
Veterans	\$9,500
Youth Programs	\$3,000

2024 Total	\$408,500



One Man's Treasure

One Man's Treasure is making a significant impact on reducing recidivism by providing men with clothing and essential social service connections to support their reintegration into society.

Annette Jenkins, director of development & program services at One Man's Treasure tells us more about this organization on the latest episode of **Consider It Hot**.



One Man's Treasure
Clothing that makes a difference

Visit onemanstr.org/ to learn more.

October 2024 Operation Round Up Awards

Grants

One Man's Treasure	\$5,000
Serenity Church Terrell	\$5,000
Texas Ramp Project	\$7,500

Fire Departments

Fire Departments **\$171,000**

57 TVEC area fire departments were each granted \$3,000

The combined giving of thousands of co-op members adds up to making a big difference for charitable organizations that work in the service area. Thank you for rounding up, TVEC members!

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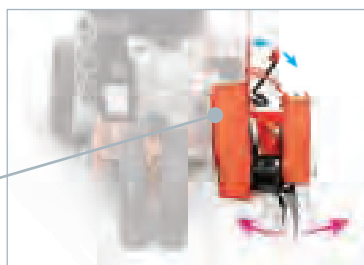
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Dear Santa

Small-town Texas children had meager requests in 100-year-old letters to St. Nick

BY BARBARA FINLAY • ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS WORMELL

IN THE HUSTLE and bustle of the holiday season, we often hear nostalgic wishes for the simplicity of Christmases past. It sometimes seems the season has always been a time of stress, hectic shopping, expensive decoration and frantic preparation.

The old folks who grew up in rural Texas know better.

I happened on some powerful reminders of their experiences as I was looking through old newspapers in search of information on my hometown, Fife, 85 miles south of Abilene.

Now almost deserted, Fife in 1910 had more than 500 residents, two general stores, a working gin, post office, two schools and assorted churches.

The spirit of a Texas Christmas in the early 20th century is well captured by letters that Fife children of that era wrote to Santa, letters that were published in pre-Christmas editions of *The Brady Standard*. As is still true today in many small towns, children would write their local paper

with their Christmas wishes.

Their letters are revealing for not only what they say but also for what they don't say. Unlike today's letters to Santa, there were no references to brand-name items—the media-driven advertising age had not yet hit. The children's wishes then were much simpler—often they asked for only one or two items.

The generosity of the children is striking, as they often expressed modest wishes for themselves but also asked Santa to remember children who were less well off.

As I read through the letters, sometimes recognizing names of people I knew only as adults, I feel a wonderful sense of their childhood holiday spirit come to me.

I share a few of these letters, written by Fife children in the 1920s and early 1930s, in the hope that readers might recapture some of the same spirit of generosity, simplicity and fellowship in this holiday season. ■

Dear Santa:

As Christmas is near at hand we thought we would write and let you know the things which we would like most as presents. W.D. wants a school dinner bucket, a big rubber ball; Nellie Fay wants a doll, sand bucket and ball; Gladys wants a doll and we also want some nuts, apples and oranges.

Your little friends,

W.D., Nellie Fay and Gladys Bradley (1920)

Please bring me a pop gun, a sack of marbles and some candy and nuts.

Your little friend,

Cyril Farmer (1920)

After reading your letter in *The Brady Standard* I thought it was about time to write to you. I hardly know what to ask you for as you have been so good to me every Xmas. The only thing I select is a pair of bedroom slippers.

Your friend,

Voncile Duderstadt (1920)

I would like to have some chocolate candy and bananas and oranges and apples and peaches.

Your friend,

Lillian Roberts (1921)

Will you please bring my little brother and I a knife and a pair of nice leather gloves. And Santa, if you will, please bring me a nice fountain pen and my little brother a car. I have a little sister 3 years old. Bring her a doll that will say mamma and a little doll bed and lots of nuts and candy.

Love to Santa,

Charles and Floyd Tedder (1923)

Will you please bring me a scooter-scoot, a horn, a football, a blackboard and a box of handkerchiefs for Christmas and if you have anything else for me send it to some other little boy who has no parents. I try to be a good boy.

Your loving friend,

A. M. Finlay, Jr. (1924)

We have tried to be good little children. Please bring me a velocipede, a tinker toy set, some fire crackers, a ball and some caps for my gun you brought me last Christmas. Please bring Little Sister a kiddie car, a doll that says "Mamma," and a doll bed. Please bring us lots of fruit, nuts and candy. Bye-bye, Santa.

From

John Gordon and Elizabeth Maurine Tedder (1924)

I will tell you what I want. I want an embroidery set, set of dishes and a doll. I won't ask for too much, as I'm afraid you can't get around to all the children.

Your friend,

Una Ranne (1925)

I will write you a little letter and tell you of a few things I would like to have. I would like to have a new doll, as my old one has lost a leg, and I want a doll bed. I want a doll that can walk and talk, and I would like to have some little dresses, also.

Dear Santa, don't forget my little brothers, J.D. and Sid, they want a coaster wagon.

Lovingly,

Charlotte Painter (1925)

I thought I would write while I have time. I want a watch and a pistol. I want a toy flute and a toy truck and a pencil sharpener. Thank you.

From your friend,

Tom Bradley, Jr. (1927)

I've been the very best little boy lately, and if you don't hurry and come, I don't know if I can stay good much longer. I just want a few things this year, as Daddy says Santa is as poor as he is. I'd like a tractor, a car, a ball, a bat, gloves, and a lot of fruit and candy and nuts.

From

Leeman Roberts (1930)

I sent a letter to *The Brady Standard*. I want you to know I am going to write to *The Brady Standard* every Christmas. I want you to bring me a cap and a sweater for my doll and a big ball. There are many other little boys and girls that want Christmas presents. So I will go now.

Yours truly,

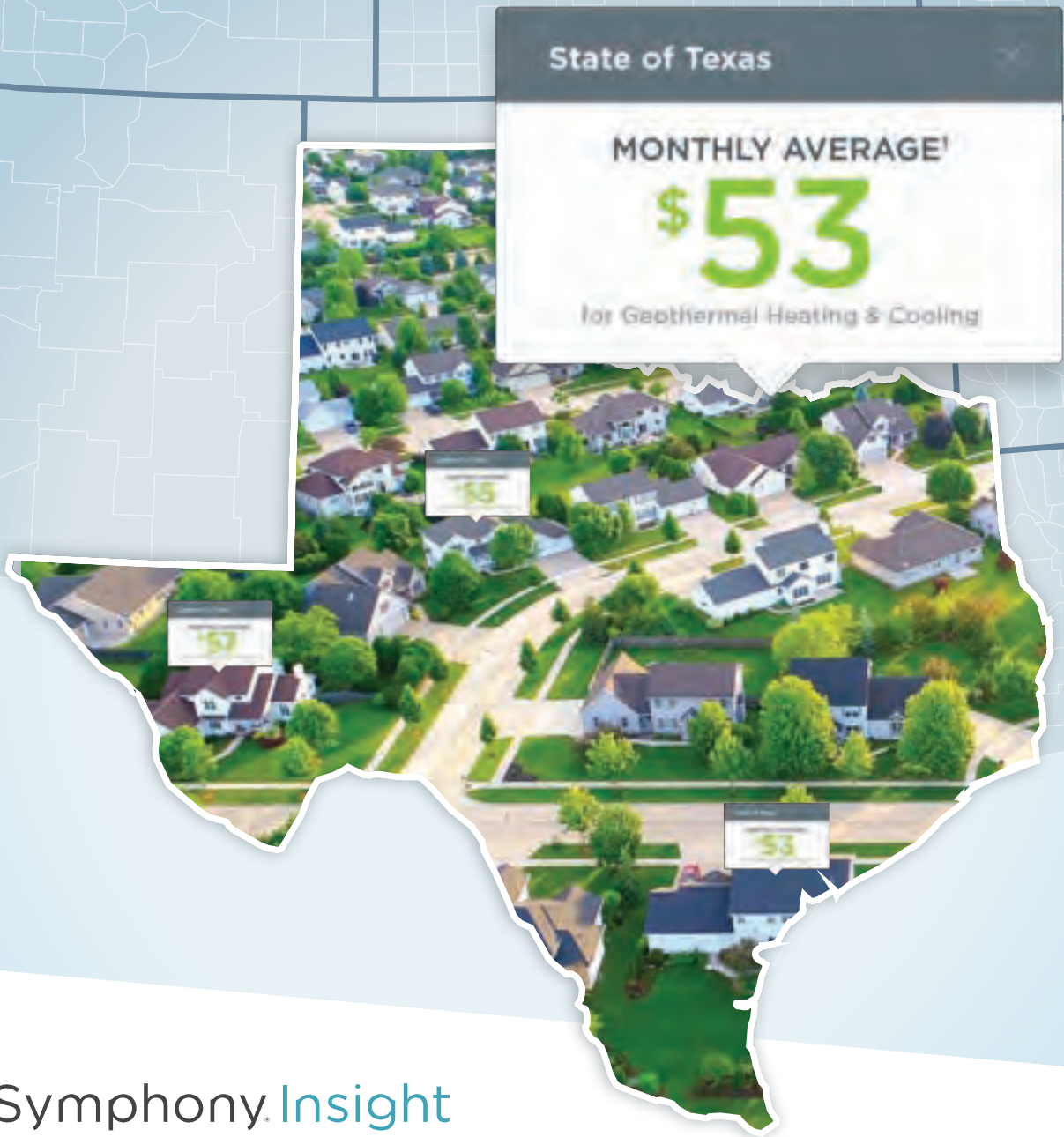
Golda Eileen Utsey (1930)

I have been a good little boy. Will you please bring me a velocipede, a flashlight, some apples and candy. Bring Grandpa a pair of socks and I'll put some corn at the gate for your reindeer.

Your friend,

Robert Pearce (1930)

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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



Black-Eyed Peace

Y2K upended New Year's traditions for Texans ready for anything

BY CHRIS BURROWS • ILLUSTRATION BY TARA JACOBY

AS KATIE WILLIAMS shopped in the run-up to Christmas 1999, the holiday wasn't on her list. The Kaufman resident had loaded up her cart with flashlights and batteries, toilet paper, water, and crates of food.

"I really think something's going to happen," Williams told *The Dallas Morning News*. "We have a pond in case we run out of water for the toilet. We can boil it if we have to drink it."

Michelle Quintiliani and her family were planning to hit the road after Christmas, leaving behind their home near the Comanche Peak nuclear plant southwest of Fort Worth.

"We're going to open our presents and then we're gone," Quintiliani told the *Waco Tribune-Herald*. "It's probably

stupid, but I don't want to chance it."

By December 30, shoppers in Victoria were hitting H-E-B hard.

"Today is busier than expected," a store manager told the *Victoria Advocate*. "This is the kind of day we expected tomorrow."

Twenty-five years ago this month, in the weeks before a new millennium, hardy Texans joined the rest of the world in making anxious last-minute preparations.

Computer experts had spent months warning that the Y2K bug might take down computer systems—and a society that was increasingly reliant on them—at the stroke of midnight. Breathless coverage took stock of the preparations as global industries—banks, utilities,

airlines—assured folks that the lights would stay on if everybody did their part to gird against glitches caused by computer systems not built with the foresight to handle the "00" in "2000."

For its part, the state of Texas spent a quarter-billion dollars on upgrades; the U.S. more than \$100 billion; and across the world, \$300 billion.

Texans weren't overly concerned though. The results of a statewide poll in October 1999 found 55% weren't worried about serious problems. One in 3 expected the lights to go out.

But they didn't.

On New Year's Eve, celebrations in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston tallied more than 320,000 total revelers.

Headline writers were ready. In the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*: "Y2K? Why Worry?"

San Angelo Standard-Times: "Y(awn)2K-Feared bug doesn't bite."

Wichita Falls' *Times Record News*: "It wasn't the night the lights went out in Texas after all."

The bug may have been a bust, but Leon Kappelmann, a University of North Texas professor who worked on several technical committees in preparation for Y2K, says the world learned a lot.

"In terms of IT management, many of us learned what a mess we had just about everywhere and realized it was past time to professionalize and improve our practices," he said. "IT had proliferated so quickly and completely over the 40 years prior to 1995, our ability to effectively and efficiently manage it had simply not kept up."

And besides, some Texans hadn't wasted any worries on Y2K.

C.M. Dehtam told the *Tribune-Herald* that he planned to be selling fruit out of his pickup on New Year's Eve.

"If it's going to happen, it's going to happen," he said. "It's not something I have any control over. I got other things to worry about, like what I'm going to eat tonight." ■

Cookie Exchange

Be the star of the swap with these family gems

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

One of my favorite cake flavors transforms into cookies for a delicious addition to your cookie exchange. With a vibrant Christmas red hue; soft, chewy texture; and a crunchy topping, they're decadent enough to feel indulgent and light enough to enjoy more than one on Christmas morning.

Red Velvet Cookies

1½ cups flour
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
¾ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
1 cup sugar
1 egg
1 tablespoon buttermilk
1 tablespoon red food color
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ cup white chocolate chips
½ cup semisweet chocolate chunks
White sanding sugar

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa powder, baking powder and salt.
3. In another bowl, cream butter and sugar with a hand mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy. Reduce mixer speed to low and add egg, buttermilk, food color and vanilla.
4. Add flour mixture in two batches, scraping down the sides and bottom of the bowl and mixing until well combined. Fold in the white chocolate chips and semisweet chocolate chunks. Cover and chill the dough in the refrigerator at least 1 hour.
5. Place 2-tablespoon scoops of dough 2 inches apart on baking sheets. Use the bottom of a glass to gently press cookies to about ½ inch thick. Sprinkle with sanding sugar.
6. Bake 10–12 minutes, until cookies are slightly puffy and set on the edges. Allow cookies to cool and sprinkle with additional sanding sugar if desired.

MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES

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



Grandma Melton's Sand Tarts

LAURA MCNABB
PEDERNALES EC

These are considered the official cookies of Texas, at least according to McNabb's family. A crescent-shaped cookie that melts in your mouth, leaving a hint of sweetness and buttery goodness, they have a tender, crumbly texture that pairs perfectly with their light, nutty flavor. The delicate powdered sugar coating gives them a festive, snow-dusted appearance, making them a perfect addition to your holiday cookie platter.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- 1 cup powdered sugar, plus more for dusting**
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
- 2 cups flour**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Using an electric mixer on medium speed, beat butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add vanilla and mix well. Reduce mixer speed to low. Add flour and salt, mixing until almost combined.
3. Gently fold in pecans with hands, being careful not to overmix. Chill dough 30 minutes.
4. With floured hands, shape 1 tablespoon of dough at a time into a crescent. Place crescents 1 inch apart on baking sheets.
5. Bake 12–14 minutes or until the edges are lightly browned. Allow cookies to cool about 5 minutes on baking sheets then transfer to cooling racks. While the cookies are still warm, dust with powdered sugar.

MAKES 3 DOZEN COOKIES

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29 >



\$500 WINNER

Flonnie's Orange Slice Cookies

JENNIFER KEITH
WOOD COUNTY EC



Keith found her grandmother Flonnie's recipe for these cookies in her mama's recipe box, and they have become a holiday staple in her house. These cookies are a delightful and nostalgic treat. The candies melt slightly during baking, creating pockets of gooey, fruity goodness throughout. A soft, chewy cookie with bursts of citrusy flavor in each bite is the merriest sweet for gifting this holiday season.

MAKES 5 DOZEN COOKIES

- 2 cups (4 sticks) butter, softened**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 2¼ cups brown sugar**
- 3 eggs**
- 2 teaspoons baking soda**
- 3 tablespoons warm water**
- 6 cups flour**
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon**
- 2 cups sweetened coconut flakes**
- 2 cups chopped walnuts**
- 1 package orange slices candy (10 ounces), diced**

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, cream butter, sugar and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, scraping down sides of bowl after each addition.
3. In a small bowl, dissolve baking soda in warm water.
4. To the large bowl, add baking soda mixture, flour and cinnamon and mix until incorporated. Fold in coconut, walnuts and candy slices.
5. Use a medium cookie scoop to place dough onto a baking sheet, leaving 1 inch between each cookie.
6. Bake 11–14 minutes, until lightly golden brown.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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There are endless ways to fill an enchilada. Share your favorite filling to roll up in a tortilla and you could win \$500. Enter by December 10.

UPCOMING: SUMMER PASTAS DUE JANUARY 10





HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

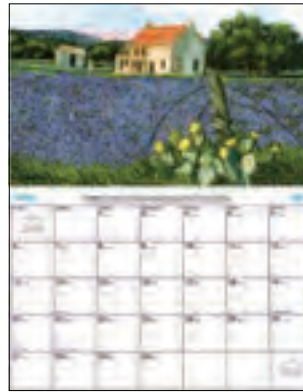
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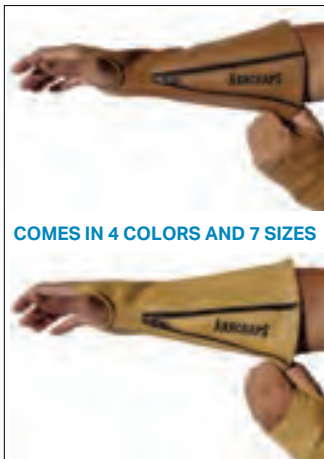
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

Grandma's Italian Chocolate Spice Cookies

MARY BOLSINGER
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

These cookies have a firm, slightly crunchy exterior that gives way to a soft, cakelike interior. The harmonious blend of cocoa, cinnamon, cloves and vanilla creates a warm, spiced flavor that's perfect for the season. Chocolate is complemented by the subtle warmth of coffee, making each bite a cozy experience.

COOKIES

- 2 cups flour
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup olive oil



- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 tablespoons brewed black coffee, at room temperature
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

ICING

- 2¼ cups powdered sugar
- 3–4 tablespoons milk
- Sprinkles (optional)

1. **COOKIES:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, baking powder, salt, cinnamon and cloves.
3. In another bowl, whisk together eggs and sugar until sugar is dissolved. Stir in olive oil, vanilla and coffee.
4. Add the flour mixture and stir until smooth. Stir in the walnuts.
5. Scoop the dough with a medium cookie scoop. Roll into balls with floured hands. Place on baking sheets about 2 inches apart.
6. Bake 10–12 minutes.
7. **ICING:** Whisk together powdered sugar and milk until smooth.
8. Dip the tops of cookies into the icing mixture and top with sprinkles.

MAKES 4 DOZEN COOKIES



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Belle Reborn

Experience Tres Palacios Bay like a French explorer—without the sinking

BY CHET GARNER

THERE I STOOD in the middle of Tres Palacios Bay, part of Matagorda Bay, aboard a sailing vessel named La Petite Belle. The crew and I had set out from Palacios into the same gulf waters that French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, had sailed 338 years before.

Hopefully, our seafaring adventure wouldn't meet the same fate as the French explorer's crew.

Our expedition started in the town's historic district at the City by the Sea Museum, where every era of Palacios' colorful past is brought to life through exhibits and artifacts. Most interesting (and tragic) is the story of La Salle's doomed voyage to Texas. La Belle, one of his four ships, wrecked on a sandbar and sank into the bay's muddy bottom in 1686. Luckily the Frenchman was already on land, exploring Texas.

In the 1990s, archaeologists found the ship and resurrected its hull along with 1.6 million French artifacts. The preserved remains are on display at the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin.

La Petite Belle, a half-sized, 30-foot-long re-creation of the original, now sails the high seas of Texas, giving tourists a taste of maritime history and adventure. The jolly crew of museum volunteers seemed seaworthy as they called out commands across the deck and navigated our ship using 17th-century techniques.

I simply walked around, rattling ropes and trying not to expose my greenhorn lack of sailing knowledge. While this isn't a pirate ship, I jumped with excitement when the crew announced it was time to fire the cannons. We loaded them up with pyrotechnics and yelled "fire in the hole" as we shot at imaginary ships.

The ship is small, but the adventure is surely Texas-sized. ■

ABOVE Chet, aboard La Petite Belle, ponders a 17th-century existence.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all his Explorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

DECEMBER

7

Castroville **Castroville Conservation Society Candlelight Home Tour**, (830) 708-5680, castrovilleconservationsociety.org

Fredericksburg **Pearl Harbor Commemoration**, (830) 997-8600, pacificwarmuseum.org

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

La Grange **Beat Root Revival**, (979) 968-9944, thebugleboy.org

Marble Falls **Christmas Home Tour**, (830) 798-2157, fallsmuseum.org

Palestine **Christmas on Main**, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

Sealy **Fantasy of Lights Parade**, (979) 885-3222, sealychamber.com

Woodville **Christmas Twilight Tour**, (409) 283-2272, heritage-village.org

Richardson **[7, 14] Hot Cocoa Crawl**, citylinedfw.com

8

George West **Church to Church Christmas Story Stroll**, (361) 449-5396, facebook.com/firstbaptistgeorgewest

12

New Braunfels **New Braunfels Conservation Society Christmas Market**, (830) 629-2943, newbraunfelsconservation.org

13

Seguin **[13-14] Country Christmas**, (830) 379-0933, texagedu.org

Shiner [13-14] Christmas Village, (361) 594-3830, shinerfumc.org

Kyle [13-15] A Night in Bethlehem, (512) 268-7044, f-pc.org

Montalba [13-15] Walk Through Bethlehem, (903) 549-2319, montalbabaptistchurch.com

Palestine [13-15] A Seussified Christmas Carol and Variety Show, (903) 394-2173, thetexas theater.com

14

Brenham The 3 Redneck Tenors Christmas, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Coldspring Christmas on the Square, (936) 653-2184, coldspringtexas.org

Frankston Frankston Garden Club Christmas Tour of Homes, (817) 913-1982, frankstongardenclubtx.com

Jasper Country Lights, (409) 384-5231, tpwd.texas.gov

15

Stonewall Tree Lighting, (830) 644-2252, tpwd.texas.gov

19

Corsicana Santa's Sip & Stroll, (903) 654-4851, facebook.com/corsicana mainstreet

Richardson [19-22] Christmas With C.S. Lewis, (972) 744-4650, eisemanncenter.com

31

Fredericksburg Countdown to 2025: New Year's Eve, (830) 990-2044, fbgtx.org

Submit Your Event

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



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Young Photographers

Slow down a moment and take in the world through the lens of a child. These young photographers are honing their skills and having a great time doing it. One thing's clear: The future of Texas photography is in good hands.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 CRYSTAL CANTU
VICTORIA EC

"I heard a frog and went on an adventure to find him," says Magi Jo, 15.

2 CARLY LATHAM
HEART OF TEXAS EC

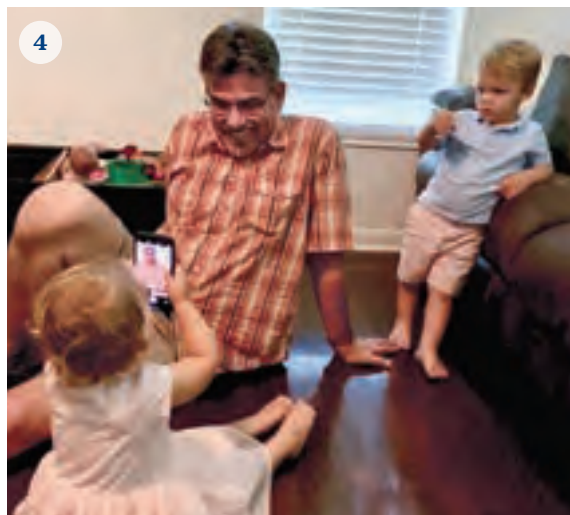
"The fasciated bluebonnets are so exciting to find. My sister and I always try to see who can find the most variations," says Byron Ace Latham, 10.

3 MARK GARTON
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

My son, 9, learns to take pictures of Texas bluebonnets at Fort Parker State Park.

4 LAURA DAVIS
BANDERA EC

Blakely Barton, 2, has an impromptu photo session with her papa, Brad Davis.



Upcoming Contests

- DUE DEC 10** Characters
- DUE JAN 10** Patterns
- DUE FEB 10** Family Vacation



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Young Photographers photos from readers.



Emily's Wish

Christmas feels bleak when a family's hearts are in two places

BY FRED AFFLERBACH
ILLUSTRATION BY
THE BRAVE UNION

ON CHRISTMAS EVE 2022, it was my honor to tuck into bed my 6-year-old granddaughter, Emily. We said nighttime prayers, then she asked Santa for a bigger bike, stick-on earrings and an art set. I thought she was finished, but after a pause, she continued.

"I wish Mommy would be home from the hospital so that the whole family can be together for Christmas."

I closed Emily's door behind me. But I left pieces of my heart scattered on her bedroom floor.

Emily's mother, my daughter-in-law, Kim Afflerbach, delivered healthy twin boys five days before at St. David's Women's Center of Texas in Austin. Shortly after delivery, she experienced cardiac arrest. The cesarean section surgery apparently opened a Pandora's

box of stagnant blood clots that gushed throughout her body.

Her heart stopped beating after one nefarious clot lodged in her main artery. Fast-acting nurses and doctors performed CPR and rushed her to the intensive care unit, where she remained Christmas Eve.

Christmas morning, Emily held little sister Avery's hand as they walked downstairs together. Her shiny new bike awaited. Avery rushed to a Peppa Pig playhouse, dropped to her knees and squealed in delight.

The tree glowed in the early-morning light, and their nana removed golden-brown pigs in a blanket from the oven. I sipped hot coffee laced with Irish cream.

It looked like Christmas. It smelled like Christmas. It even tasted like Christmas. But it didn't feel like Christmas. There was something missing—Mommy.

Christmas Day at a hospital is a rather solemn occasion. Folks carry on the best they can. A skeleton crew in the cafeteria dishes out turkey and dressing and gravy. Doctors and nurses and families of patients smile while passing in corridors and sharing elevators.

Kim remained sedated. She had received multiple transfusions by then and would need more. Yet doctors remained optimistic. They eschewed invasive surgery. And we waited.

Finally, Kim moved out of the ICU on New Year's Eve and into a private room.

Come January 5, Emily's father, Eric, pushed Kim's wheelchair down hospital hallways toward the valet parking. Nurses, doctors and staff lined their exit route, clapping and waving, holding out flowers and balloons, and offering heartfelt goodbyes.

It's often said that a request delayed is a request denied. But that's not always so! Emily's entire family celebrated Christmas 2023 at home together. Emily and Avery, twin brothers Bryson and Jackson, Daddy—and especially Mommy.

Although a year late, Emily's Christmas wish came true. ■