

YOUTH TOUR'S  
LASTING BONDS

THE REALITY OF  
FRONTIER DOCTORS

DON'T KNOCK THE LUCK  
OF THE SCOTTISH

# Texas Coop Power

FOR TRINITY VALLEY EC MEMBERS

JANUARY 2026



TRINITY  
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NEWS

SEE PAGE 16



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# January 2026



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Every town in Texas has a story to tell, if you just stop and listen.

*By Carlton Stowers  
Illustrations by Elly Walton*

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*By Claire Stevens*

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ON THE COVER  
The signs pointing the way to local treasures are everywhere if you pay attention.  
*Illustration by Elly Walton*

ABOVE  
From left, Austin Rees, Jolie Cox and Hannah Thetford represent United Cooperative Services at the U.S. Capitol during the 2025 Youth Tour.  
*Photo by Samantha Bryant / TEC*





New Braunfels physician  
Clay Buchanan in the caber  
toss at the Scottish Gathering  
and Highland Games in Salado.

# Strongly Scottish

**THE OBSERVATIONS ESSAY** on Page 34, *Fortune Knocks*, sent us down a rabbit hole about Scots and Scottish traditions, where we learned that Highland games are a hallmark of Scottish gatherings, as are kilts, bagpipes and dancing.

One of the oldest and largest gatherings in Texas takes place every November in Salado, between Waco and Austin. The competitions tend to involve heaving heavy objects, including something called a caber, which looks very much like a power pole. Contestants hold the caber, which can be up to 22 feet long and 200 pounds, upright from the bottom and flip it forward. The goal is for it to land upright then fall forward.

For the record, electric cooperatives prefer their poles remain upright and lodged firmly in the ground.

## 120,085

The number of steps logged by Layton Shadle of Victoria, right, a delegate of Victoria Electric Cooperative, during his eight-day Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., last June. That's between 50 and 60 miles.



## TCP Contests and More

### \$500 RECIPE CONTEST

The Art of the Sandwich

### FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Caught Napping

### RECOMMENDED READING

Twenty years ago we looked into the artifacts at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin, including the scrawled words in a reporter's notebook that launched the Watergate investigation. Download the January 2006 issue at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).



ENTER  
ONLINE

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

**I would love to have  
dinner with ...**

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

Here are some responses to our November prompt: **Changing our clocks twice a year is ...**

Something my dogs just never understand.

JULEY WELCH  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC  
FAIRVIEW

An opportunity for me to see the beautiful sunlight an extra hour in the spring and sleep an extra hour in the fall.

CONSUELO M. PEREZ  
MEDINA EC  
ZAPATA COUNTY

A great reminder to change the batteries in your fire detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.

CATHY MARTEL  
SAM HOUSTON EC  
LIVINGSTON

About as useless as a screen door on a submarine.

CODY HOOPER  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC  
FAIRVIEW

Visit our website to see more responses.

OCTOBER 2025 On the Dots

“Memories of traveling in the 1950s: My brothers and I took naps but wanted to be awakened to see the polka-dot house in Buna.”

LINDA BELL  
CECA  
COMANCHE



RAUL ARIAS

### Good Food, Good Cause

Frito pies have been the gourmet dish of choice in countless Texas stadiums and arenas—chili and chips served on chilly nights by Rotarians, band parents and electric co-op members to raise money for countless important community projects [*It's in the Bag*, September 2025].

Ken Roselle  
Wise EC  
Decatur

### Yodeler's Lore

My dad, born in 1925, and his siblings grew up listening to Jimmie Rodgers [*The Fast Track*, July 2025]. In the '60s, my siblings and I listened to his music on the record player. *T for Texas* comes to mind when I think about those Saturdays and the yodeling we would try to mimic.

Kathy Parker  
Pedernales EC  
Dripping Springs

My heart sank when the author mentions Cash, Haggard and Tubb and not one mention of Jim Reeves. Reeves was born and raised in Texas. His name carries weight as well.

Carol Racey  
Deep East Texas EC  
Joaquin

### A Tea for Texas

As I told my husband about the interesting *History in a Box* [August 2025], he informed me that he'd visited that very museum years ago. I then immediately remembered the souvenir box that he brought me filled with teas similar to those destroyed.

The information included with the box had the story of the Robinson Half Chest, though it failed to mention the Texas connection.

Ann Fincannon  
Pedernales EC  
Marble Falls



COURTESY RODGERS FAMILY LEGACY

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power  
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Austin, TX 78701

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

 Texas Co-op Power

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BY CARLTON STOWERS  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLY WALTON

## Every town in Texas has a story to tell, if you just stop and listen

**E**ven lifelong Texans haven't heard of many of these towns. They are hidden along isolated country roads, mostly forgotten, without stoplights, traffic jams or shopping malls. Truth be told, they have precious little reason for "being" aside from the fact that those who call them home wouldn't trade for all the big-city comforts you might offer. And they each have stories to tell—colorful, poignant and fascinating.

The following are a few of the favorite stops I've made over the years while wandering the state's back roads in search of yet another tale to tell.



**Pelham**  
Navarro County  
Population 35

## A FORMER FREEDMEN COMMUNITY

WHEN I MET HIM in 2012, 88-year-old Alfred Martin, the self-appointed town historian, lived across FM 744 from what was once the school he attended as a boy. Aside from the time he spent as a flight line crew member for the legendary Tuskegee Airmen during World War II, this was Martin's home.

He could recall when the state's last remaining all-Black community boasted a grocery, dry goods store, church, post office and a population of more than 300. Pelham even had an amateur baseball team that brought home a state championship.

Asked the current ages of his neighbors, Martin smiled and began pointing in the direction of their houses and counting: "Let's see ... 88, 93, 85 ..." Pelham, he admitted, wasn't likely to make it much longer.

When the Emancipation Proclamation freed the nation's slaves following the Civil War, each Black man in town was given 200 acres to call his own. Fields were cleared and tilled, cotton and grain planted, and new lives thrived.

Now, however, the community's well-tended cemetery is the resting place of the majority of past Pelham residents. The aging memorabilia and family histories housed in the school-turned-museum keep alive the memories of better days.



**Hye**  
Blanco County  
Population 100

## THE ALL-BROTHERS BASEBALL TEAM

INSIDE THE COMBINED Hye General Store and Post Office, a fading black-and-white photo hangs proudly behind the checkout counter. Nine Deike brothers, dressed in spanking new baseball uniforms, smiling for the camera.

It was snapped during the Depression doldrums when leisure time was as scarce as spending money. An endless routine of work awaited on the farms and at the cotton gin. Only on Sundays did the residents take time off to watch their baseball team play rivals from nearby rural communities.

It was called town ball, and it was generally played on makeshift diamonds carved from pastureland. The preacher would even cut his sermon short so members of his congregation wouldn't miss the first pitch.

Only Hye, 60 miles west of Austin, could field nine players from the same family. Fourteen-year-old Victor was the youngest; brother Edwin, 34, was the oldest. That's not to say they weren't occasionally joined by nonfamily members. Regularly, a lanky first baseman named Lyndon Baines Johnson would drive over from nearby Johnson City.

In 1935, a traveling salesman learned about the Deike brothers and hit on a can't-miss promotional idea. If he could find another all-family team, his Corpus Christi-based Nueces Coffee Co. would promote an exhibition game deciding the All-Brothers Baseball Championship.

Indeed, an opponent was found in Waukegan, Illinois. There, the Stanczak clan had 10 brothers on the same team.

The game would be played in Wichita, Kansas. Provided with their first uniforms and travel expenses, the Deikes made the 14-day trip to Kansas in two Model A Fords. The Stanczaks arrived by bus.

Alas, a perfect ending to the Hye brothers' story wasn't to be. Though they took an early 3-0 lead, the more talented Waukegan team eventually won 11-5. Today, it is their picture on display in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

Still, for the Texas farm boys, it was a time that would long be remembered. A special time, right up there with the day President Johnson came back for a visit to stand in front of Levi Deike's post office and swear in Lawrence O'Brien as the new U.S. postmaster general.



**Thurber**  
Erath County  
Population 48

## WHEN EVEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN

IN THE LATE 1800S, Thurber was the most populous town between Fort Worth and El Paso, boasting 10,000 residents. Today, travelers hurrying along Interstate 20 see only a solitary smokestack standing watch over its history.

The only reason to stop is for the home cooking served at Andrea Bennett's red brick Smokestack Restaurant. Inside, the walls are lined with photographs from another time, back when her restaurant was the local mercantile and the townspeople were mining 3,000 tons of bituminous coal and firing 80,000 bricks daily.

Workers and their families came to live in the small frame houses provided by the Texas & Pacific Coal Co. There was a school, a 650-seat opera house, general store, fire station, churches, a weekly newspaper, library, hotel, and a human-made lake for fishing and swimming.

The Thurber baseball team, made up of miners, won the 1896 Texas amateur championship. Each summer a traveling circus came to town.



Thurber bricks were used to build the Galveston seawall and pave many of Fort Worth's early streets. Its coal kept the trains running and homes heated.

Though the exact date isn't official, Thurber died in 1936. The oil boom was the killer, its black gold replacing coal as the nation's favored fuel. The mines began closing, and workers scattered in search of new jobs. The frame houses they had called home were sold off for \$40 each to anyone willing to haul them away.

Now all that remains are the ghost stories, the nostalgic pictures on Bennett's restaurant walls and the nearby 100-year-old town doctor's house where she lives.



## WHEN HOSS WAS JUST A COLT

IT IS TRADITION, you know, for small towns to alert passersby to the fact they were once home to somebody famous. Billboards are the favored tool. Even little Abbott had one to remind travelers that it was country music legend Willie Nelson's hometown until, hoping to regain a sense of privacy, he set fire to the sign late one boozy night.

To my dismay the Panhandle community of O'Donnell, just south of Lubbock, had not gotten around to any side-of-the-road celebration of its favorite son.

Back in the *Bonanza* heyday, *TV Guide* expressed interest in learning how this cotton crop way-stop had groomed famed actor Dan Blocker to become the good ol' boy Hoss Cartwright on the popular TV show. I hit the road.

And the townspeople were ever so obliging. Seemed almost everyone I bumped into went to school with Blocker, played football with him, fought with or dated him. Even those who didn't know him firsthand insisted they were faithful viewers of his portrayal of Hoss every Sunday.

Yet friend and farmer Wayne Carroll admitted Blocker's TV role puzzled him. "It's kind of hard to picture Dan on the Ponderosa," he said. "Farming and ranching never interested him. He was the guy we all went to for help with our lessons, always studying or reading a book."

His mother, Mary, agreed: "One Christmas we got him a horse and saddle, but he really wasn't interested. After a while, we sold the horse."

When her son didn't have his nose in a book, he worked weekends at his dad's Blocker Grocery & Market. On Friday

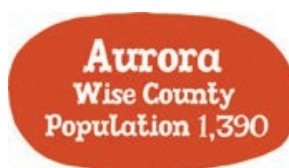
nights, he was a standout lineman and kicker for the O'Donnell Eagles. The only kid in town who could lift the rear end of a '47 Plymouth, his strength and size (already 6 feet tall and 200 pounds by age 13) earned him a scholarship to play for what was then Sul Ross State College in Alpine.

Once Blocker earned his degree, his life's goal was to become a teacher. He did teach for a time in high schools in New Mexico. But then Hollywood and the fictional Ponderosa beckoned.

Rest assured, Blocker never forgot his roots and came to visit regularly. At the height of his acting career, he even made an appearance at the annual O'Donnell Rodeo. "Biggest crowd we ever had," recalls boyhood pal Bobby Clark.

With the exception of cotton crops, I learned that conversation is O'Donnell's main byproduct. And the easiest way for a stranger to be assured a generous helping of the latter is to bring up the name Dan Blocker.

"There was once some talk about a billboard," Clark says, "but the more we thought about it, the more convinced we were that Dan wouldn't care much for the idea."



## LONG BEFORE ROSWELL

THE STORY WAS right there on the front page of *The Dallas Morning News* in April 1897, so it had to be true, right?

S. E. Haydon, the paper's longtime correspondent, had written of an "airship" that flew over the North Texas community of Aurora before crashing into Judge Proctor's windmill and exploding. Aluminum-like debris, Haydon wrote, was scattered everywhere, destroying the judge's water tank and ruining his prized flower garden.

Bear in mind, this report was filed a decade before the Wright brothers got their rickety plane off the ground at Kitty Hawk and predated, by half a century, that famous Roswell, New Mexico, report of the ranchland UFO crash that became the gold standard of otherworldly tales.

And the Aurora story got even better. The child-sized pilot of the craft had been killed in the crash, and kind citizens of the community saw to it that he was given a proper burial in the nearby cemetery the following day. The grave was marked by a large rock featuring a quickly sketched image of "a cigar-shaped ship with three circular windows."

Today a historical marker stands at the entrance to the cemetery, recalling the event.

Is the recounting true or false? People have been asking for over a century. Some say Haydon had a habit of telling whoppers when there was no real news to report and he just invented the spaceman's visit.

But as late as 1973, an aviation journalist named Bill Case visited the community and tracked down a 98-year-old local who recalled visiting the crash site as a child, even viewing the "torn-up body" of the spacecraft's pilot.

At the time, the makeshift headstone was still in place. Case even took a picture of it. But soon after his article was published, the marker vanished. Today, no one in Aurora is certain of the exact location of the infamous grave.

Legendary investigative reporter Jim Marrs, who spent his career researching the strange and spooky, says he was, for years, "undecided" on the matter. In time, however, he found the story compelling enough to produce a full-length documentary on the alleged crash.

"What ultimately got me off-center on the matter," he says, "was seeing the actual edition of the paper in which Haydon's story was published. It wasn't even the lead story that day. Among numerous accounts of strange sightings was one from nearby Stephenville, headlined The Great Aerial Wanderer. In all, the newspaper published 16 stories about UFO sightings that day, from as far south as Austin and north into Oklahoma."

Something, he was convinced, really did happen in Aurora.



## MAGIC AT MARY'S CAFE

**NEITHER A FOOD CRITIC** nor avowed foodie, fine dining and haute cuisine are foreign to my vocabulary. That said, it is my humble opinion that the Michelin Guide folks have missed a bet. Or maybe they just have something against chicken-fried steak.

In the tiny hamlet of Strawn, just 90 minutes southwest of Dallas, is the mother church of the popular comfort food. At Mary's Cafe every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas, the service station-turned-eatery is jam-packed. The gravel parking lot is filled with traveling biker clubs, church groups or a busload of young athletes in search of a post-game meal.

Owner Mary Tretter estimates that over 90% of her customers are from out of town, arriving from as far away as New Mexico, Colorado and Georgia. Some come wearing the Mary's Cafe T-shirts they purchased on a previous visit.

And while the menu is lengthy and varied, it is the king-sized chicken-fried steak with a bowl of cream gravy and a mound of french fries that is most often requested. Annually, Tretter orders over 48,000 pounds of cutlets that are pounded, floured and cooked into her signature dish.

But don't bother asking for the recipe. It is so heavily guarded that she requires her 30 employees to sign a non-disclosure agreement before stepping into her kitchen. All she will admit is that her chicken-fried steaks are cooked on a flat-iron griddle rather than heavily battered and actually fried.





Tretter was 14 when she started working there as a waitress and dishwasher. The place was known as the Polka Dot then and was struggling mightily. The local bank, preparing to take it over, asked Tretter if she might be interested in buying it. At the time she was neither business savvy nor much of a cook but bought the little 89-seat restaurant. That was in 1986.

She changed the name, hired a staff and went to work. In her fourth decade of ownership, seating capacity is 300—and getting a table isn’t without a little wait.

And Tretter gives “hands-on” new meaning. She takes Wednesdays off to spend time with her grandkids. The rest of the week she’s in the kitchen cooking or out on the floor, greeting customers and taking orders.

“Our goal,” she says, “is simple: Fill the plate with good food, make it look nice and keep the customers happy. If they leave here hungry, it’s their fault.”



## FLEETING VICTORY

I’VE ALWAYS LOVED the scene in the movie *The Big Chill* when a reporter explains that he’d just been assigned to do a feature on a blind baton twirler. When asked where in the world such story ideas come from, he shrugs and answers, “Just good investigative reporting.”

Personally, I prefer the magic of dumb luck.

To wit: I was awaiting a flight home from Houston, reading the sports section of the local paper, when a small item caught my eye. Asherton High School, it noted, had just won its first basketball game in years. The final sentence added that the same school’s football team currently owned the nation’s longest losing streak.

Two things immediately occurred to me. First, I had to figure out where Asherton was. Second, what publication would be interested in a story on such a historically hapless team?

The editor of *Parade* magazine bit, and I was soon off to deep South Texas. By the time I arrived, the Trojans had lost 40 football games in a row. A few years earlier, they had endured an entire season without scoring a single point.

Yet what I found was light-years from what I’d expected. A migrant worker community, it was virtually deserted since most families had not yet returned home from following the northern harvests.

The school was in disrepair, jagged cracks in its old brick walls, the 500-seat stadium in worse shape. There was little grass and a huge ant bed spread across the 50-yard line. The scoreboard was a hand-me-down, donated by neighboring Carrizo Springs. A 24-year-old teacher, Terry Harlin, who never played the game, had agreed to coach since no one else wanted the job. School officials agreed to add \$600 to his salary for the extra work.

Thus, the story was not one of laughable ineptness but, rather, a courageous quest against impossible odds.

Readers took the plight of the Trojans to heart. Envelopes bearing small donations began arriving from across the nation. A Houston sporting goods company donated shoulder pads and helmets. Inmates of a Georgia prison adopted Asherton as “their team.”

And in the first game of the 1972 season, Asherton won, defeating rival Crystal City 12-6. A film crew, dispatched from a Houston TV station, was there to record the historic event.

The cheers, however, didn’t last. In 1999 the Texas Education Agency ordered Asherton High to close, citing its troubled history of financial insolvency. The students bade their old school goodbye and enrolled in the nearby Carrizo Springs Independent School District.

• • •

**THERE ARE ENDLESS** other nifty towns, like Study Butte, home of the last one-room school in Texas; Luckenbach, where legendary owner-mayor Hondo Crouch held court; Terlingua and its annual chili cook-off; and Cisco, where Conrad Hilton bought his first hotel and Santa Claus robbed the bank.

Get out your map. ■



Youth Tour sends teens to Washington, D.C.,  
where bonds form and horizons expand

# SITES *and* INSIGHTS

BY CLAIRE STEVENS

**O**n the drive from her home outside Kerrville to a hotel in Austin, high school junior Ella Robbins had butterflies. She was excited about her upcoming adventure, for sure.

“But I was mostly nervous,” Robbins says. “I didn’t know anybody, and I was really nervous about what people were going to think of me and just self-conscious.”

The nerves lingered as she arrived and checked in June 15, 2025, for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C. Everyone was friendly, Robbins recalls, though some teens kept to themselves, scrolling on their phones. But the 143 strangers were all about to board the same flight to the nation’s capital, where everything would change.

In D.C., Robbins marveled at the towering stained-glass windows of the National Cathedral and felt awe when she

looked out from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and saw the reflection of the Washington Monument. But what really changed her trip was the second day, when she found herself in a bus seat across from Sierra Nickel of Uvalde.

“As soon as I started talking to her, it was really great,” Robbins says. She can’t quite remember what they talked about in that first conversation where they clicked so easily, maybe Taylor Swift—who else?—but the two became fast friends. Robbins soon found herself getting lost in the excitement and packed schedule of the trip, frequently with Nickel at her side.

“I kind of stopped worrying about what people were thinking of me,” Robbins says.

For 60 years, electric cooperatives across Texas have sent high school students to Washington for this all-expenses-paid



week of sightseeing and learning. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience in which little moments—like that one on the bus—lead to unexpected memories and friendships.

With growing confidence, Robbins, sent by Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, and her new friend, sent by Medina Electric Cooperative, explored the monuments and memorials of the National Mall, museums and Capitol Hill. At the Capitol, Robbins was able to do what she'd come here for.

In U.S. Rep. August Pfluger's office, Robbins got a peek into the day-to-day functions of a congressional office.

She wanted to ask about the process of applying for disability insurance and legislation relating to service dogs. The topic was close to her heart—her father is blind and uses a guide dog. She was concerned about his difficulty securing resources and the hostility he sometimes faces when bringing his dog into public spaces. At the Capitol, she shared her ideas with one of Pfluger's aides.

"He was actually interested in having a conversation, and that was really nice. I was informing him of some

OPPOSITE Students representing five electric cooperatives at the National Mall on their first day in Washington, D.C. Fifty-eight Texas co-ops sent teens on Youth Tour.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Texas students participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Ella Robbins from Heart of Texas EC holds up her Youth Tour challenge coin, which students were awarded for going above and beyond.



CLAIRE STEVENS | TEC



SAMANTHA BRYANT | TEC

things, and he was telling me more about the legislative side," Robbins says. "He says they try and pass lots and lots of bills, and occasionally they'll just get one or two. It's just a very difficult process. I didn't realize."

That was one learning opportunity among many. Some students sat down with and heard from survivors at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Participants had the opportunity to obtain a library card at the Library of Congress, visited George Washington's home at Mount Vernon and danced together in front of the White House.

On the last day in D.C., they toured Arlington National Cemetery, where they witnessed a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"That was one of the reasons I wanted to go, was to honor our fallen soldiers who didn't get recognized," says James Bell of Aspermont, one of four Texas students selected to lay the wreath. "My great-grandparents were buried at the Arlington cemetery, so that was awesome, to have that much of an honor to do that where they're buried."

The cemetery requires silence at the tomb, a memorial for fallen U.S. soldiers whose remains have not been identified. In a solemn ceremony, Bell and the three other students stepped in sync with one of the tomb's guards before placing a wreath of red and white flowers in front of the marble monument.

"Laying the wreath was amazing," says Bell, who was sponsored by Big Country Electric Cooperative. Watching Bell was his brother, Jack, who had gone on the tour two years before, and his uncle, a retired Army chief warrant officer, both of whom unexpectedly showed up at the ceremony. "It was a really big surprise."

By the time the teens boarded the flight home, the early nerves were nowhere to be seen. No longer strangers, they left with unexpected bonds that span the state.

"My favorite part—it sounds cliché—it's the people," says Eli Felcman, a delegate from Concho Valley Electric Cooperative. "I met lifelong friends." ■

## Ready To Hit the Road?

For more information on Youth Tour and how you can apply, contact your electric cooperative.



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MESSAGE  
FROM  
GENERAL  
MANAGER/  
CEO

JEFF LANE

## Reflecting on Progress, Planning for the Future

**AS WE BEGIN** another year, I want to express gratitude for you, the members of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, for your continued trust and support. Our cooperative was built on the promise of people coming together to improve the quality of life in their communities, and that promise still guides everything we do today.

Each decision—whether it’s about delivering reliable electricity, innovating for the future or advocating for smart energy policies—comes back to one simple question: How will this benefit you, our member?

The past year has been marked by meaningful progress, both in strengthening our local system and in working at the national level to influence energy policies that directly affect reliability and affordability.

Over the past year, electric co-ops across the country came together for advocacy efforts on the Environmental Protection Agency’s power plant rule. As originally written, the rule would have forced a rapid shift away from always-available power generation resources, threatening the accessibility of a diverse fuel supply that ensures reliability.

Renewable energy sources are an essential and growing part of our energy future, but we also know that the demand for electricity is rising rapidly, and natural gas, coal and nuclear remain essential for ensuring power is available around the clock.

As we collaborated and engaged with policymakers alongside other cooperatives, we pressed for a

more balanced approach to generating power—one that supports clean energy innovation while still recognizing the role of traditional resources.

Modernizing federal permitting to strengthen the grid and meet growing demand is another area we’re working on. This year, electric co-ops helped move the needle on permitting reform, advocating for policies that make the process faster, more predictable and more efficient.

Achievements like these are not just wins in Austin and Washington—they’re wins for TVEC members like you.

In addition to advocacy efforts, we’re proactively preparing for the future by investing in new technologies and programs that improve service. With advanced monitoring systems, we’re better equipped to identify issues before they occur.

As we look ahead to a new year, I see challenges and opportunities on the horizon. The energy industry is undergoing significant change driven by rising demand for electricity, new tools and technologies, and federal energy policies.

I’m confident that with the dedication of TVEC employees and the continued support of our members, we are well-positioned to adapt and meet challenges head-on. Through it all, our promise to you remains steadfast: reliable power for today—and tomorrow. ■



TVEC | DON JOHNSON





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## Use Batteries Safely

**BATTERIES ARE SO** commonplace these days that it can be easy to forget they can be dangerous if mishandled. Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative wants to remind members to keep safety in mind when storing, using and disposing of batteries.

Use the correct size and type of battery needed for each device, and be sure to insert batteries with the positive and negative terminals properly aligned.

Store batteries in a dry, secure location that's kept at normal room temperature. Batteries exposed to extreme heat can leak.

Be sure to store batteries in a safe location inaccessible to children. It's also important to check the covers of battery compartments to ensure they're closed and functioning properly to prevent access by children.

If a child swallows a battery, it's serious. A swallowed battery can get stuck or cause tissue burns or other damage to the esophagus or digestive tract. If you suspect someone has swallowed a battery of any kind, immediately call the 24-hour National Battery Ingestion Hotline at 1-800-498-8666.

Some batteries, such as button batteries, are quite small and could be mistaken for pills or candy. Hearing aid batteries are particularly small. Do not place them anywhere close to medicine or food storage.

Also, remember to promptly remove and safely dispose of dead batteries. Used batteries have been known to leak, so it's best to safely dispose of them right away.

Don't mix old and new batteries because doing so could cause battery leakage or rupture. It's best to replace all the batteries in a device at the same time.

Rechargeable, lithium, lithium-ion and zinc-air batteries should be recycled. It's a good idea to get into a habit of putting old batteries in a plastic bag that can be sealed and delivered to a battery recycling center. To find a battery recycling location near you, visit [call2recycle.org](http://call2recycle.org). ■

## Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative

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### CONTACT US

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Kaufman, Texas

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**Toll-Free** 1-800-766-9576

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1-800-720-3584

### 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.

### VISIT US ONLINE

[tvec.net](http://tvec.net)





Here.  
For You.      Tony Watson

## A Career in Service

Assistant GM/COO Watson's 42 years leave him optimistic for the co-op's future

**IF THERE IS** a lesson to be learned from Tony Watson's 42-year career at Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, it may be that persistence pays off.

While looking for a job opportunity close to home and more fitting for his soon-to-be growing family, Watson made a regular stop by New Era Electric Co-op to see if could get his foot in the door. That tenacity led to a long tenure and career path that resulted in his current role as assistant general manager and chief operating officer.

"I was working a lot of extra shifts at Guardian Glass in Corsicana and not home enough since I was just married. At least twice a week I'd stop and talk to Jerry Smiley who was the line superintendent," Watson said. "He finally said he was hiring two hands for summer. By the end of summer he let the crew vote on who to keep on and thankfully they kept me."

The full story starts years earlier, when Watson worked summer breaks from Athens High School assisting surveyor Gerald Carter and learning a set of skills that would come in handy later on in his career.

"Gerald was one of the best bosses I ever had and he taught me so much about working and surveying," Watson said. "I was able to move into some different roles at the co-op in staking and engineering that having that spatial awareness and things like easements and all that, it really all comes together when

you can put what you've learned into a new opportunity."

Before surveying, Watson's knack for working with people came from seeing firsthand what it took to maintain community and customer relationships as he worked in the Athens



Watson (right) started his career started on line crews before working in substations and engineering.



Feed and Seed store operated by his parents John and Marie Watson.

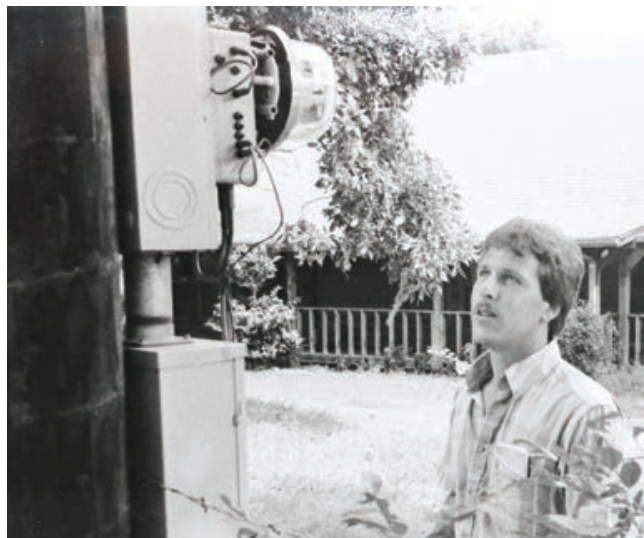
“As soon as I was old enough to lift a sack of feed, I was put to work. We would go down after school and on weekends and unload boxcars and load feed into people’s cars,” he said. “I guess I kind of got my feel for the public at that point early in life.”

At the TVEC Annual Membership Meeting in October, Watson announced that he would be retiring from the co-op in early 2026, but that hasn’t dampened his enthusiasm for TVEC and the co-op way of doing business moving forward.

“You know, electric rates are going to go up just because the cost of everything goes up, but that is true for everyone. What I think is different for us is that we are local, we are working for our neighbors, and we really work hard to be more than just who you pay your bill to,” Watson said. “I think that we have to keep telling people that they are a part owner of this and that really does mean a lot that the goal of the business is not just to make money. Our employees put their heart and soul into a lot of what they do, so even when comments get negative or people are unhappy about something, we are still here to serve all the members as best we can. Come talk to us and most of the time we can work on the problem and take those negative things and use them to make things work better for everybody.”

Having local employees can certainly make a difference for co-op members, but in a business like electric utilities, the rapid change of technology has a big impact on reliability and cost — the things that mean the most for consumers on a daily basis. And though his career may be ending, Watson sees a positive trend for TVEC as new technologies come online.

“I’ve always wanted to learn as much as I can about how things work and what kinds of things we could be doing. That is how I ended up moving around in the co-op from being a



Watson’s 42 years of experience and local connection bring together expertise and a passion for serving TVEC members.

lineman to working on substations and eventually to being over these other things, just by being willing to jump out there and learn,” he said. “There is always going to be the real hard work of picking up lines after a storm or getting out there to get things back working, but we’ve come a long way in how we work and being willing to learn and change how we do things to get better. But the technology is driving that in a lot of ways to help us back-feed lines around damage or locate where things are down or what the problem is before we get there. It lets our crews work smarter and safer to make those outage time much shorter than they used to be.”

Since the co-op’s inception in 1938, there has been a long line of local employees leading the way. And while he may not be the first one to call for TVEC questions after February, Watson said the co-op spirit will continue into retirement.

“I think that is part of the personality and culture of the people who end up working here at the co-op. You end up with people who care about what is going on and care about the co-op tremendously,” he said. “Between all of the older linemen that trained me when I started and people like Gary Hurse, who really took the time to teach me and encouraged me to pursue classes and education that would be helpful, the members all benefit from all of that. We still we have a lot of great employees that come from local backgrounds that are putting in that effort. So I may not be the one everyone can call anymore, but I will always do what I can to help members.” ■



In his annual address at the TVEC Annual Meeting, Watson updated members on operations and announced his retirement in early 2026.



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TVEC MANAGER  
OF DER & GRID  
INTEGRATION

**CHRIS WALKER**

## Properly Sizing Your HVAC Unit

**AN IMPROPERLY SIZED** heater or air conditioner can wreak havoc on your home, causing your system to “short cycle”—continuously turn on and off—or run constantly. However, a properly sized one can maintain comfort, increase energy efficiency

and provide years of service.

**Here are some factors to consider when choosing an HVAC system that works best for your home.**

**Size matters.** The square footage of your home can help determine the load capacity of your HVAC unit, but it shouldn't be the only factor considered when reviewing unit sizes. Enlist the help of a licensed professional to choose the best unit for your home. 170685001

**Geographical location.** The region in which your home is located will factor into how much capacity you need per square foot. A system running in a hot, humid climate will need more British thermal units than a system running in a dry, cool climate.

**Home orientation.** How sunlight hits your home during different times of the day impacts the load capacity required to properly heat or cool your home.

**Insulation effectiveness.** The better insulated your home is, the less heating or cooling power it will need to stay at the desired temperature.

Other factors that affect HVAC size requirements include ceiling height, ductwork, heat-generating appliances, home façade and occupancy. A good baseline for determining the size of the air conditioner needed is square footage of the home multiplied by 20. The result is the number of British thermal units you'll need.

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative—your trusted energy partner—is happy to help you determine how each of these factors affect your system's load capacity. ■

Member  
Service  
Minute



## Linda Hinson

**Career at the co-op: 20 years,  
all in Member Services**

**What do you enjoy most about  
your job?**

I'm a people person so I love visiting with people who come in and helping people with whatever thing they are dealing with.

**What is the key to providing  
great service?**

The co-op is different because members have a voice and we really work hard to serve them well. I think being personable and available makes a huge difference. And always have a smile, because, even on the phone that can make a difference for someone.

**One thing you'd like to remind  
members about?**

Just that we have offices here for you to come in and talk to us. SmartHub and the phone are great, but remember we are here for you. You don't find that just everywhere but it can be valuable for a lot of people. ■



## How Old Are Your Wires?



**OUR HOMES ARE** a lot like us. They age just like we do, and like us, some signs of aging can be seen and some cannot. Just as we need to get regular checkups, our homes also require periodic inspections.

Electrical problems can cause fires and serious or fatal electric shocks. You should take electrical issues seriously and take action immediately.

When it comes to the electrical system in our homes, it's important to contact a qualified electrician if you experience any of the following:

- ▶ Circuits trip or fuses blow frequently.
- ▶ You get a shock when you touch an electronic or outlet.
- ▶ Outlets are warm to the touch.
- ▶ Appliances shut off when you turn on a light.
- ▶ Lights flicker.
- ▶ A burning smell or popping or sizzling sound is coming from electronics.

Those symptoms are associated with the following problems.

**Electric overload:** If you have an older home, it may not be up to the electric demands of today's appliances. If the electric system in your home becomes overloaded, it can cause shocks or a fire. You may need an electrician to update your wiring or your electric service.

**Short circuits:** A short circuit occurs when electricity leaks out of the path wires set for it. This often happens when insulation deteriorates or is damaged. A short circuit can cause an electric arc, which could start a fire.

**Ground fault:** In a ground fault, electricity is not leaking aimlessly. It is headed places, and that place is the ground. Electricity will get to the ground the quickest way possible, even if that means traveling through a human body. An electrician can install ground-fault circuit interrupters, which detect and prevent these situations. You should have GFCIs in areas where water and electricity could meet, such as bathrooms and kitchens.

A qualified electrician can tell you more about electric hazards and provide solutions specific to your home. ■

## Electrical Safety Tips for Pets

**WE OFTEN CONSIDER** pets to be unaware of the dangers posed by plugs, wires and other electrical devices in our homes. Here are some ways to keep pets safe from electrical hazards.

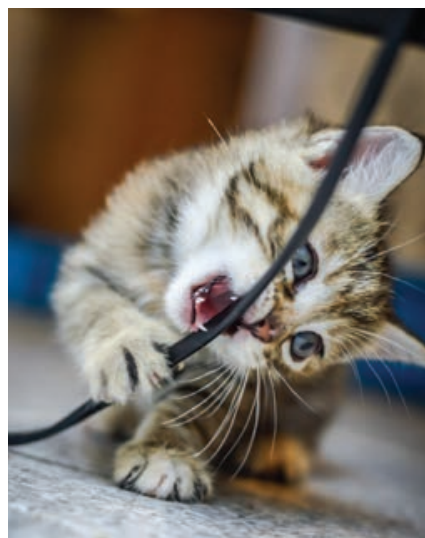
Keep power cords and wires out of pets' reach. Particularly for puppies, kittens and small mammals like rabbits, electrical cords seem like a nice chew toy. This can lead to mouth burns, lethal shocks, other injuries or even fires.

For extra cord care, replace exposed cords with chew-resistant ones and routinely check and repair damaged cords and wires. Pet-safe bitter sprays can also be applied to cords as a temporary deterrent for determined chewers.

Turn off electrical items, such as lamps, fans, irons or heaters when not in use. In addition, avoid placing electrical items near bathtubs or sinks. Curious cats may be tempted to knock items off the counter.

Be cautious with heating pads and electric blankets. Many pets enjoy the warmth of these items, but they can overheat or cause burns if left unattended. Always supervise pets when using these items and turn them off when not needed.

When in doubt, look at your electrical setup through the eyes of your furry friends to keep them safe. Your pets will thank you. ■





## The Red Barn Has Much More Than Ham

WHILE IT SHARES ITS NAME WITH a few other fine smoked meat sellers in Texas and Oklahoma, the Robertson's Hams location on Interstate 20 south of Wills Point is about as local as you can get. From the non-digital gas pumps out front to the patina of use on the furniture, there is no doubt that this is a place that will serve up plenty of stories with the sandwiches and baked goods.

"I like their hamburgers, and they get local beef and process that so it is good and hand made," said Mack Brewer, journeyman lineman. "They've been there a long time and it is always good."

On the weekends, fried seafood is also on order, but be advised to be there when they start serving around 4:30 p.m. or you may have to wait a few minutes.

"They have shrimp, hushpuppies and all the fixings, and it is definitely worth trying if you like fish," Brewer said.

The store also includes a selection of specialty foods, jerky and, of course, ham.

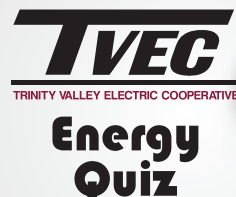
Robertson's is located at 28323 Interstate 20, Wills Point, TX. That is at the intersection of I-20 and Farm-to-Market Road 47 in Van Zandt County.

Find them online at [robertsonswp.com](http://robertsonswp.com). ■



## 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 January 31 to receive a \$100 credit on your electric bill. Don't miss out—you could be our winner.



What state has the highest average retail electricity price?

- A. Vermont
- B. California
- C. Hawaii
- D. Alaska

[eia.gov/state/rankings/#/series/31](http://eia.gov/state/rankings/#/series/31)

Win **\$100!**

Send your answer and contact information to [contest@tvec.coop](mailto:contest@tvec.coop) or contact TVEC Member Services by January 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** issue.

## December Energy Quiz: Nuclear Energy

NUCLEAR POWER generation fell out of favor after the infamous Three Mile Island incident, Chernobyl and safety concerns. Now, increasing demand from data centers powering internet cloud services and artificial intelligence is leading to renewed interest in the technology.

Currently about 19% of U.S. power generation comes from nuclear power plants.

Congratulations to our November Energy Quiz winner, Jeana Cunningham, of Mabank.

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



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## NOVEMBER 2025 Operation Round Up Awards



**Thank you for turning your coins into change!**



### Grants

Children's Advocacy Center for Kaufman County	\$5,000
East Texas Crisis Center, Inc.	\$7,000
Forney Education Foundation	\$3,000
Henderson County Rainbow Room	\$3,000
Hidden Acres, Inc. Foundation	\$3,000
One Man's Treasure	\$5,000
REACH Child Placing Agency	\$5,000
Scurry Rosser Education Foundation	\$3,500
SocialWorx Advocacy Group	\$1,000

### Bill Payment Assistance

Serenity Corner	\$3,000
-----------------	---------

### Fire Department Donations

**57 Local Fire Departments (\$2,500 Each)**  
**\$142,500 Total**

*See website for full list of fire departments*

### Food Pantry Assistance

Kaufman Christian Help Center	\$3,000
Payne Springs Methodist Church Food Pantry	\$3,000
St. Charles Borromeo Food Pantry (Mabank)	\$3,000



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Let this necklace be your own love story, a testament to the beauty of companionship and the joy of finding

your perfect match. Embrace the romance and elegance of a bygone era with our Two Heart Necklace, a treasure to cherish for a lifetime.

Falling in love costs nothing but the value is priceless. Showing your love with this two hearts set costs next to nothing and the feeling you will get when wearing it or giving it to your love will certainly be priceless.

### Two Hearts Collection

A. Bracelet (13 3/4 ctw)	<del>\$299</del>	\$39* + S&P	<b>Save \$260</b>
B. Necklace (2 1/8 ctw)	<del>\$199</del>	\$39* + S&P	<b>Save \$160</b>
C. Earrings (4 1/4 ctw)	<del>\$229</del>	\$39* + S&P	<b>Save \$190</b>
Necklace, Bracelet & Earrings	<del>\$727</del>	\$79* + S&P	<b>Save \$648</b>

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# Doctoring Reality

Frontier physicians relied on confidence more than credentials

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

**BECOMING A DOCTOR** was a lot simpler in frontier times, when you didn't have to go to school for a long time or even know much about medicine. You could just call yourself a doctor. And if your first consideration was to cause no harm and you were blessed with at least a modicum of common sense, other people would call you a doctor too.

"Dr." John F. Webber is a case in point. Born in Vermont and a veteran of the War of 1812, Webber settled in Stephen F. Austin's colony, in what was then Mexico, by 1824.

Along with Texas chronicler Noah Smithwick and two other men, Webber took part in a tobacco-smuggling operation farther south in Mexico. Webber wasn't a trained doctor, but he played

one to avoid answering a bunch of annoying questions about the nature of his visit. Posing as a doctor was easier than explaining 1,000 pounds of leaf tobacco to the authorities.

In one town Webber advertised his services as a physician. Smithwick was fairly fluent in Spanish, so he accompanied the "doctor" as he tended to patients. "With an air of importance that would have done credit to a professional, Webber noted the symptoms, shaking his head, knitting his brows, and otherwise impressing the patient with the seriousness of his condition," Smithwick later wrote.

Smithwick and Webber had a sampling of medicines, mostly quinine, calomel and tartar emetic, a poisonous compound that some brave souls took to induce

vomiting; it made Webber's patients feel different, if not better. "The doctor's fame went abroad, and he soon had a large practice, same as imposters of the present day," Smithwick wrote.

Smithwick also knew the inventor Gail Borden Jr. before Borden patented the process for making condensed milk and became known as Dairyman to the World. They knew each other first in San Felipe and later in Burnet County, where Smithwick operated a mill.

Borden was looking for gold on Sandy Creek and also advertising himself as a doctor when he stayed a few days with Smithwick and described to his host how he practiced medicine. "It is no use to be a doctor unless you put on the airs of one," he said. "Nine times out of 10 sickness is caused by overeating, or eating unwholesome food, but a patient gets angry if you tell him so; you must humor him."

Borden humored his patients by administering tiny bits of calomel with enough starch to turn it into a pellet. He glazed the pellets with sugar to make the medicine taste more like a doughnut. Borden said most people who abstained from "hurtful articles of food" felt better as a result.

Unlike Borden or Webber, Dr. Johnson Calhoun Hunter, a native of South Carolina and one of the Old Three Hundred colonists, received a diploma in medicine around 1805, when he was just 18. He was in Texas, in what is now Harris County, by the early 1820s with his wife and the first five of their eventual 11 children. He did a lot more than doctoring when he got here.

Historian Mike Cox wrote that Hunter "could deliver a baby, ride a plow, go hungry, trade with the Indians, run a traverse, pilot a scow, adjudicate a case ... cut a bull, teach a school ... and deliver mail."

They don't make general practitioners like that anymore. ■



# Ooodles of Noodles

Heaps of flavor that will keep your forks twirling

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

My friends are always nervous about inviting me to a meal because I cook for a living, but that's exactly why you should invite me. I will never turn down being cooked for. I was recently invited to dinner and served this deliciousness. I immediately asked for the recipe, because I had to share with y'all.

## Ginger Pork Noodles

**1 package rice noodles (14 ounces)**  
**½ cup soy sauce**  
**¼ cup light brown sugar**  
**¼ cup rice vinegar**  
**1 tablespoon chili garlic sauce**  
**1 tablespoon minced ginger**  
**1 tablespoon olive oil**  
**2 cloves garlic, minced**  
**2 pounds lean ground pork**  
**2 tablespoons water**  
**1 tablespoon cornstarch**  
**1 cup shredded carrots**  
**1 cucumber, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced**  
**Sesame seeds, for garnish**  
**Fresh cilantro, for garnish**  
**Lime wedges, for garnish**

1. Cook noodles according to package directions and set aside.
2. In a bowl, whisk together soy sauce, brown sugar, rice vinegar, chili garlic sauce and ginger. Set aside.
3. Heat oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Cook garlic and pork, breaking up with a spoon, until fully cooked, about 7 minutes.
4. Reduce heat to low and stir in prepared sauce. Simmer 3 minutes.
5. While the pork simmers, whisk together water and cornstarch in a small bowl until well blended. Stir into pork and continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, until sauce thickens.
6. Stir in cooked noodles. Serve warm, topped with carrots and cucumbers. Garnish with sesame seeds, cilantro and lime wedges.

**SERVES 4**

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







## Garlic Spaghetti

JANET EAKINS  
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

We all need a go-to recipe in our back pocket for when the to-do list is never-ending, the kids are starving and you must get dinner on the table. This garlic spaghetti is quick and easy, but it packs a punch in the flavor department. Some nights, a bowl of pasta like this is just what we need.

**8 ounces uncooked spaghetti**  
**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**2 tablespoons minced garlic**  
**2 tablespoons minced parsley**  
**1 tablespoon lemon zest**  
**¼ teaspoon salt**  
**⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper**  
**¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes**  
**½ cup crumbled feta cheese**

1. Cook spaghetti according to package directions, reserving ½ cup of pasta water when draining.
2. In the same pot, heat oil over medium-high. Add garlic and cook 30 seconds.
3. Stir in pasta water, parsley, lemon zest and spaghetti and toss to coat. Season with salt, pepper and red pepper flakes. Stir in feta.

**SERVES 4**

**\$500 WINNER**

## Slow Cooker Chicken Lo Mein

JENNY ZACHMAN-REICHARDT  
HAMILTON COUNTY EC



Pull out those slow cookers, and get to tossing this lo mein together! I loved-loved this recipe and plan to make it on repeat. And don't let me find you skimping on the baby bok choy—it's the star of this dish.



**1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**1 teaspoon ground black pepper**  
**¾ cup low-sodium chicken broth**  
**3 tablespoons oyster sauce**  
**2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce**  
**3 teaspoons hoisin sauce**  
**2 teaspoons honey**  
**2 cloves garlic, minced**  
**½ tablespoon minced ginger**  
**½ teaspoon red pepper flakes**  
**1 package lo mein noodles (8 ounces)**  
**2 tablespoons cornstarch**  
**3 tablespoons cold water**  
**2 cups sliced baby bok choy, washed**  
**1 red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced**  
**½ cup matchstick carrots**  
**Sesame seeds, for garnish**

1. Lightly coat a 4- to 5-quart slow cooker with cooking spray. Add chicken and season with salt and pepper.
2. In a bowl, whisk together chicken broth, oyster sauce, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, honey, garlic, ginger and red pepper flakes. Pour over chicken and stir to coat evenly.
3. Cook on high 1½–2 hours or on low 3–4 hours. Meanwhile, cook noodles according to package directions and set aside.
4. Remove chicken from slow cooker and shred or dice. In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and water, and stir into remaining sauce in slow cooker.
5. Return chicken to slow cooker and add baby bok choy, bell pepper and carrots. Stir to combine. Cover and cook on high an additional 20–30 minutes or until sauce thickens.
6. Stir in noodles. Serve warm, garnished with sesame seeds.

**SERVES 6**

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**THE ART OF THE SANDWICH** DUE JAN 10

Can you stack, spread and spice your way to a masterpiece between bread? Your best sandwich could win \$500.

**UPCOMING: DON'T SKIMP ON SHRIMP** DUE FEB 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >





# SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our **Sedona Turquoise Collection**. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## A Tip of the Hat to Paris

France's Eiffel Tower is taller and older, sure, but it's rather bare

BY CHET GARNER

**NOT EVERYTHING IS BIGGER** in Texas. Case in point: our Eiffel Tower in our Paris. But that didn't stop me from breaking out my beret and heading to the Northeast Texas "City of Love" to see our rendition of France's most famous landmark.

The French built theirs of iron in 1889 for the world's fair. Texans—never ones to sit quietly while another Paris hogs the spotlight—answered in 1993 with a scaled-down steel replica that has way more Texas swagger.

I rolled into town craving a crêpe and a glass of wine, but those had to wait. First stop was my *petit* pilgrimage to the petite tower. I found it standing proudly on the south side of town, wedged between the civic center and the impressive Red River Valley Veterans Memorial.

I wasn't alone. Dozens of folks were lined up for their chance at the ultimate French-Texan selfie.

Of course, the first thing anyone notices is the bright red cowboy hat perched on top. It wasn't there originally. Locals say that after rival Paris, Tennessee, built a tower a smidge taller, Texans did what Texans do—we added a hat and claimed victory.

With the topper, our tower clocks in at 65 feet, proudly earning the title of second-tallest Eiffel Tower in a city named Paris. (The French original stands about 16 times that height at more than 1,000 feet, so first place wasn't exactly in reach.)

Up close, it looks a bit like a radio antenna's artsy cousin who studied abroad, but the vibe is pure Parisian picnic. Families sprawled in the grass, kids craned their necks to the top, and couples kissed beneath its steel beams as if the Seine were flowing nearby.

So if you find yourself in Northeast Texas, make the detour. And remember—when in Paris (Texas), the dress code is cowboy casual. ■

ABOVE Chet lands in Paris—no passport required.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's 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.

## JANUARY

8

**Dallas [8–11] Hadestown: Teen Edition**, (214) 526-4076, [juniorplayers.org](http://juniorplayers.org)

10

**Amarillo Serenading the High Plains**, (806) 376-8782, [amarillosymphony.org](http://amarillosymphony.org)

**Corsicana Mimosas at the Market**, (903) 654-4850, [visitcorsicana.com](http://visitcorsicana.com)

**Palestine [10–11, 17–18, 24–25, 31–Feb. 1] Faire of Champions**, [contact@faireofchampions.com](mailto:contact@faireofchampions.com), [faireofchampions.com](http://faireofchampions.com)

15

**Lufkin T.G. Sheppard**, (936) 633-5454, [angelinaarts.org](http://angelinaarts.org)

16

**Galveston [16–17] Yaga's Chili Quest, Beers & Cheers**; (409) 770-0999; [yagaschiliquest.com](http://yagaschiliquest.com)

**Lubbock [16–18] Water for Elephants**, (806) 792-8339, [americantheatreguild.com](http://americantheatreguild.com)

17

**Brenham Uptown Swirl**, (979) 337-7239, [downtownbrenham.com](http://downtownbrenham.com)

**El Paso Veterans Create**, (915) 533-0048, [tomlea.com](http://tomlea.com)

**Fredericksburg Book Festival**, (830) 997-6513, [fredericksburgbookfestival.org](http://fredericksburgbookfestival.org)

**Gonzales Come and Take It Makers Market**, (830) 888-6800, [bit.ly/makersmarket26](http://bit.ly/makersmarket26)

**Plano [17–18] Dallas Area Train Show**, (214) 906-8092, [dfwtrainshow.com](http://dfwtrainshow.com)



18

**Fredericksburg** Texas  
Guitar Quartet, fredericksburg  
musicclub.com

19

**Elgin** Martin Luther King Jr.  
Walk, (512) 281-5724,  
elgintexas.gov

22

**El Paso** Tom Lea's *Twelve  
Travelers Through the  
Pass of the North Exhibit  
Opening*, (915) 533-0048,  
tomlea.com

**Fort Worth** Mah Jongg  
Tournament, (817) 335-3525,  
thewomansclubfw.com

**Paris** [22-24] Tower  
City Comedy Festival,  
(903) 785-5233, towercity  
comedyfestival.com

24

**Jefferson** Queen Mab Ball,  
(903) 240-6809,  
mardigrasupriver.com

29

**Brenham** [29-Feb. 1,  
5-8, 12-15] Ken Ludwig's  
*Dear Jack, Dear Louise*,  
(979) 830-8358,  
unitybrenham.org

## FEBRUARY

4

**Laredo** [4-7] Birding  
Festival, (956) 964-4102,  
laredobirdingfestival.org

6

**Lufkin** The Jazz Legacy  
Project Presents the  
Life & Music of Billie Holiday,  
(936) 633-5454,  
angelinaarts.org

### TCP Submit Your Event

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

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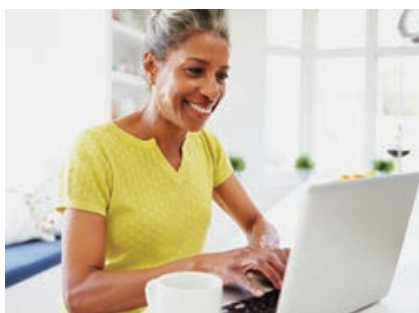
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# Snakes Alive!

Not to get you rattled, but off the beaten path you'll find more than a few snakes in the grass. These readers took their chances and didn't roll snake eyes. We've balanced the scales, and the winners were so close, they may strike!

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

**1 ALAN ABAIR**  
COSERV

A western diamondback rattlesnake.

**2 JOSHUA TREVINO**  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

A Sunda Island pit viper.

**3 CHARLES BAXTER**  
COSERV

"An eastern racer under a crape myrtle tree in Argyle."

**4 SHARON CARTER**  
PEDERNALES EC

"I saw this beauty resting in the woods next to my Wimberley home."



2



3



4

## Upcoming Contests

**CAUGHT NAPPING** DUE JAN 10  
**MAKING A SPLASH** DUE FEB 10  
**SEASONED SNAPS** DUE MAR 10



**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Snakes Alive! photos from readers.





## Fortune Knocks

Scottish tradition holds that good luck comes through the front door on New Year's

AS TOLD BY RON RUSSELL  
TO ANNA RUSSELL  
ILLUSTRATION BY TARA JACOBY

IN THE SUMMER of 1954, when my family's neighbor Brad Proctor asked me to help with farm work, I did not know it would lead to me becoming a first footer.

I pedaled my bike 1 ½ miles to help Brad put up hay. From then on, year-round, every afternoon, I milked cows and mucked stalls.

His mother-in-law, Mrs. Harris, lived with them. And whenever I ventured into the kitchen for a drink, Mrs. Harris told me tales of her youth in Scotland. Eventually, they decided to move Mrs. Harris to a nearby, almost secluded, house.

A few days before the end of the year, I stopped for another visit with Mrs. Harris. She clasped my hand. "I want you to be my first footer," she said.

Well, I knew a lot about farm life, farm animals and an abundance of chores.

However, I had no idea how to be a first footer. I did not want to insult Mrs. Harris. I squirmed before I asked, "Please, what is a first footer?"

"My great-great-great-grandparents passed the Scottish tradition through the family to me," she said, explaining that a tall, dark-haired man must be the first to set foot in a house in the new year. "Because you are a dark-haired man, when ..."

I interrupted her. "But I'm only 14 years old. That leaves me out."

Mrs. Harris raised her hand to stop me. "The worst is for a woman to be my first visitor. Oh, Lordy, that'd guarantee bad luck all year." She looked me up and down as she nodded her head. "Now, if you had red or blond hair, fear would shiver me with alarm at the sight of you on New Year's Day."

She chuckled. "However you do qualify. You're the size of a man, and you have dark hair, so when your foot hits my threshold, you will bring me good fortune for the coming year."

She winked. "Best you bring a gift, say bread, salt or coal. OK?"

When I got home, Mom listened to Mrs. Harris' proposal to me. Then she said, "We have Scottish blood, too. Remember the cabbage, carrot and onion soup that we eat at noon each New Year's Day? It's also a custom that my Scottish ancestors practiced."

"Why cabbage? I hate cabbage."

"Cabbage represents abundance to some people." Mom elbowed me aside to remove bread from the oven.

I did not want to take Mrs. Harris a lump of coal or a piece of firewood. And my Grandpa Ed would not like me taking his whiskey bottle. Ah, the perfect gift was on the kitchen counter.

Allowing that Mrs. Harris would be awake at 9 o'clock on New Year's morning, I knocked on the door. Her wide grin almost stretched to the door sills.

She waved me in. I handed her a loaf of Mom's fresh-baked bread.

I am a first footer! ■



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