

THE BIG HEARTS OF
WILDLIFE REHABBERS

THE JAZZ OF
BOOTS DOUGLAS

WHAT LOVE
LOOKS LIKE

Texas Co-op Power

FOR TRINITY VALLEY EC MEMBERS

FEBRUARY 2026

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The choicest cheesecakes
of Co-op Country



TRINITY
VALLEY EC
NEWS

SEE PAGE 16

Throw Yourself a Bone

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The very best hunting knives possess a perfect balance of form and function. They're carefully constructed from fine materials, but also have that little something extra to connect the owner with nature.

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This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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February 2026



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06 From Posts to Pillars

Border towns sprang to life from Rio Grande fortifications that are still finding new uses.

*By Eileen Mattei
Illustration by Bonnie Hofkin*

Giving a Hoot

Texas' sick and injured critters depend on a corps of passionate volunteers.

*By Martha Deeringer
Photos by Tiffany Hofeldt*

ON THE COVER
Lemon Cheesecake from the kitchen of Vianney Rodriguez, TCP's food editor.
Photo by Jason David Page

ABOVE
Bones, an opossum at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo, gets snuggles from Mariah Thompson.
Photo by Tiffany Hofeldt

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By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers



All-white sports leagues in the South became integrated within two years of Texas Western's 1966 championship.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Significant Milestones

THE FIRST NEGRO HISTORY WEEK, the predecessor of Black History Month, took place 100 years ago this month, in February 1926. Its creator, Carter G. Woodson, is considered the Father of Black History.

March 19 will mark 60 years since Texas Western College (now the University of Texas at El Paso) pulled off a landmark victory over basketball powerhouse Kentucky in the NCAA national title game. The Miners were the first championship team to start five Black players.

The first African American to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps is considered to be Texan Alfred Masters of Palestine, who was sworn in June 1, 1942—after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order to desegregate the armed forces. But in 1776, John "Keto" Martin, an enslaved man in Delaware, was recruited into the Continental Marines to fight the British.

TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Don't Skimp on Shrimp

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Making a Splash

RECOMMENDED READING

"Caring about animals is contagious." So says an animal rescuer from the last time we wrote about these champions of the natural world. Check out *Wildlife Ambassadors* from May 2012.



ENTER
ONLINE



\$3.2 Million

Total value of scholarships awarded to more than 1,400 students by Texas' electric cooperatives for the 2025-26 school year. That funding is mostly made possible by legislation allowing co-ops to use unclaimed capital credits for this purpose.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The perfect Valentine's gift is ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our December prompt: **Dear Santa, I would like ...**

Every child in this world to get at least one gift from you and a warm meal.

SHERRY VEGA
BLUEBONNET EC
BASTROP

For every family to be together, safe and full of love this Christmas.

RAIHAN KHONDKER
PEDERNALES EC
LEANDER

A cheeseburger, tater tots and a frosty mug of A&W root beer from the Hi-D-Ho Drive In in Lubbock (1964).

TOMMY NOVAK
SOUTH PLAINS EC
SHALLOWATER

To be free of cancer. Can he do that?
SUSAN HOOLE DAUGHERTY
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.



ROBERT NEUBECKER

DECEMBER 2025 Turn of Fortune

“This has got to be my all-time favorite story. Gloria and Hector López have shown how life should be.”

MARTHA GARCIA
NUECES EC
EDINBURG

The Serendipity of TCP

The December issue blew my mind!

After reading *The Best Food I've Ever Had at a Fair Is ... [Currents]*, I told my wife about the Frito pie comment from Robin Perry. I described the Frito pie I used to buy for a quarter during school lunch as a kid in Levelland after walking to some department store. But I couldn't remember the name of the store.

Genie Ballew's letter on the next page mentioning G.F. Wacker rang that bell!

Gary Alan Henson
CoServ
Lewisville

Prayers Continue

I wonder what terrible memories these kind people have to live with after seeing what they've seen [*Giving Thanks*, November 2025]. I still pray for them.

Anita Frye
Via Facebook



ERICH SCHLEGE

Brick by Brick

I spent over nine years (2013–22) traveling the state (all 254 counties) photographing over 5,000 old churches and schools. There were many that I didn't have names for, and El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús was one of those.

I photographed it in 2015 and labeled it “Ruidosa—old adobe church.” Thanks to *The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road* [December 2025], I now have a name for it.

Someday I hope to write a book, and you just made my research a bit easier. Perhaps someday I can participate in an Adobe Day.

Cheryl Schwartz
Nueces EC
Port Aransas

Breakfast Patrol

I discovered this delicacy on New Year's Day 1986 as a rookie police officer [*Our Kind of Weird*, December 2025]. Each New Year's Day, our chaplain and his wife invited officers to their house and treated us to a come-and-go breakfast. This was one of the delicious entrées we were served.

Joe Lasater
United Cooperative Services
Glen Rose

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

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

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NEW MEXICO

TEXAS

Chaparral

El Paso
Fort Bliss

Marfa

Rio Grande

Lajitas

Del Rio

MEXICO

Eagle Pass
Fort Duncan

Laredo
Fort McIntosh



Border towns sprang to life from Rio Grande fortifications that are still finding new uses

From Posts to Pillars

BY EILEEN MATTEI
ILLUSTRATION BY BONNIE HOFKIN

When Anthony Knopp first came to the campus of Texas Southmost College in 1976, his office was in an old barrack, and some faculty members lived in single-story, 100-year-old former military buildings, recalls the retired history professor.

While the old structures lacked modern amenities, Knopp made the most of teaching at a historic site. "When studying U.S. history, particularly relations with Mexico and 20th-century wars," he says, "I was able to connect students to what was here at Fort Brown."

Today, a former 48-bed hospital houses the college president's offices on the campus in Brownsville, in the Rio Grande Valley. Fort Brown's hospital annex (built in 1868), commissary (1904), guardhouse and morgue (1870) support various college departments.

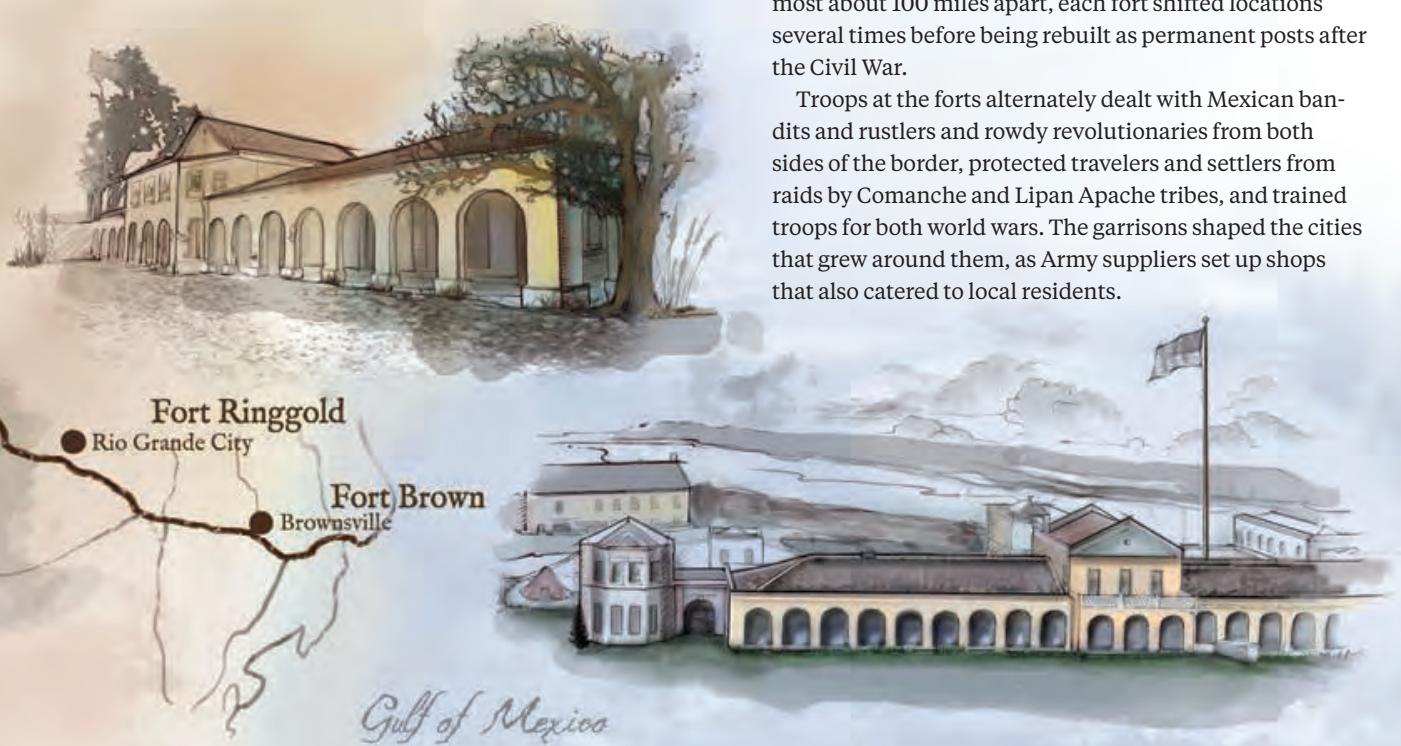
Fort Brown and four other U.S. Army forts, established along the Rio Grande in the years after Texas became a state in 1845, endured for decades as military installations.

Unlike Texas frontier forts of the 1800s, such as Fort Concho in San Angelo and Fort McKavett in Menard County, which were rapidly abandoned as the frontier moved west, the border forts in Brownsville, Rio Grande City, Laredo and Eagle Pass remained defensive posts, off and on, for nearly 100 years. Fort Bliss in El Paso is still in use.

Today—178 years after the Mexican-American War—repurposed buildings from these border forts contribute to the vitality and identity of those Texas towns. Retaining their 1800s ambiance, the former Army headquarters, barracks and hospitals serve as schools, colleges, museums and parks.

The border forts had much in common, each named for veterans of the Mexican-American War, fought immediately following Texas statehood. At Rio Grande crossings, most about 100 miles apart, each fort shifted locations several times before being rebuilt as permanent posts after the Civil War.

Troops at the forts alternately dealt with Mexican bandits and rustlers and rowdy revolutionaries from both sides of the border, protected travelers and settlers from raids by Comanche and Lipan Apache tribes, and trained troops for both world wars. The garrisons shaped the cities that grew around them, as Army suppliers set up shops that also catered to local residents.





COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

ABOVE Troops perform drills in the late 1800s at Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City.

LEFT Much of the Fort Brown site serves as the campus of Texas Southmost College in Brownsville.

Fort Brown

Count riverboat pilot Mifflin Kenedy among the early merchants who cashed in on Army contracts. He ferried troops and equipment from Fort Brown, near the Gulf Coast, up the Rio Grande during the Mexican-American War.

He later started a steamboat company, married a wealthy widow and acquired hundreds of thousands of acres. He is the namesake of the Kenedy Ranch, the town of Kenedy and Kenedy County.

Fort Brown evolved from a star-shaped earthen fort to a commanding presence after the Civil War, when 70 buildings were erected of locally made border brick. With wide arches fronting shaded breezeways, Fort Brown's 1869 hospital (said to be the most beautiful hospital in the Army) was of crucial importance during epidemics of yellow fever and cholera as the only hospital in Cameron County until 1909.

Quartermasters negotiated contracts with local businesses for goods and services such as beans, flour, coffee pots and hay for horses. Although a brick wall separated the town from Fort Brown and its palm-lined parade grounds, traffic flowed between them.

"Interactions resulted in marriages," Knopp says. "Married soldiers either stayed in the area or returned."

Fort Brown provided several forms of entertainment for the town: parades, concerts and sporting activities. Sunday afternoon polo matches, a cavalry favorite, drew locals as did concerts at the post bandstand, held twice a week.

A tree-shaded "lovers' lane" curled between the fort and the river. Troops marched in local parades and Charro Days celebrations. Off-duty troops ate at local restaurants. The officers' club hosted dances while enlisted men attended dances on the patio of El Jardin Hotel. Soldiers' sisters and daughters met and married local men, too.

Deactivated in 1944 when the last U.S.-based mounted soldiers left, Fort Brown almost immediately started a new life as part of what is now Texas Southmost College. New campus construction echoes the border brick architecture of bygone days.

Fort Brown tours, arranged by the Brownsville Historical Association, link the past to its visible remnants.

Fort Ringgold

Upriver at Rio Grande City, Fort Ringgold followed Fort Brown's trajectory. Veterans of the Mexican-American War went into business, not always successfully.

Capt. Forbes Britton and partners failed at making their Rio Grande City riverboat landing a major stop for Kenedy's steamboats. But construction booms after the Civil War and continuing through World War I boosted the local economy.

At Fort Ringgold, barracks, a jail, an arched brick hospital and officers' quarters surrounded a parade ground, which was larger than a football field.

"The parade ground gives a real picture of what Fort Ringgold looked like 150 years ago, about 1870," says Aminta Reyna Alaniz, a Rio Grande City historian and tour guide. The post bugler played reveille and taps in front of a megaphone longer than 5 feet on the parade ground, signaling the troops as well as townsfolk.

Alaniz identifies 17 fort buildings—from the guardhouse and bakery to warehouses and six barracks—that are today used by the Rio Grande City Grulla Independent School District.

The school district purchased the fort's 325 acres and buildings in 1947 with plans for an education complex and park. Along F Troop and 12th Cavalry streets, tan- and white-painted brick buildings house registration, curriculum and instruction units.

Near a two-story enlisted cavalry barracks that once housed about 100 soldiers (and later was used as an elementary school), girls played softball on a recent Sunday afternoon. The expansive parade ground hosts marching band practice and school Christmas displays.

Until recently, Alaniz says, an electronic sound system broadcast a digital bugle call morning and night. But even those echoes have ended.

Fort McIntosh

Fort McIntosh was built at a long-established Rio Grande crossing in 1849, opposite a former Spanish presidio. Laredo grew along with the fort, which held as many as 400 soldiers



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
A colorized postcard from the early 1900s shows barracks at Fort McIntosh in Laredo. An 1850s engraving of Fort Duncan near Eagle Pass. Fort Bliss in El Paso, with the Franklin Mountains in the background.

on over 400 acres with a requisite hospital, jail, barracks and cemetery.

In 1946, the International Boundary and Water Commission and the city of Laredo divided up the former fort. The city created what is now the Fort McIntosh campus of Laredo College in 1947.

Inside the Fort McIntosh Historic District, streets are named for post commanders and soldiers. The brick hospital has become Laredo College's purchasing department. The former officers' quarters houses the campus student ministry, and the old commandant's house became a museum furnished with Victorian-era pieces.

The bakery is occupied by a customs brokers association. Other refurbished McIntosh campus buildings are used for classrooms. The cemetery is empty, the remains relocated.

Fort Duncan

In Eagle Pass, Fort Duncan, constructed across from what was then a tiny Mexican village, was home for infantry troops in 1851 and a mounted rifles unit in 1856.

Buffalo soldiers, all-Black units created after the Civil War, were assigned to Fort Duncan, considered a safe stopping point for travelers on the California road. Before and during World War I, some 16,000 troops trained at Fort Duncan.



The town of Eagle Pass took over the fort property in 1938, creating a public park and loaning it back to the Army during World War II. Today the post headquarters is the Fort Duncan Museum, and seven other original buildings have been restored and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Fort Bliss

In 1848, more than 400 miles up the Rio Grande, a fifth border fort was established at El Paso. It too moved locations multiple times as El Paso flourished around it.

Hoping to remain prosperous, the residents in 1890 purchased and donated land for a permanent Army post, which remains active today.

Unlike the other forts in this list, Fort Bliss grew after World War II. It now covers 1.1 million acres of Texas and New Mexico and is among America's largest Army posts, home to about 20,000 troops.

Replicas of Fort Bliss' early adobe buildings were constructed for the fort's centennial in 1948 and house a museum, which is open to the public.

But at the other four border forts, troops and time marched on. Swords were beaten into street signs. Some of those streets are named for the soldiers who shaped those towns' histories. ■





BY MARTHA DEERING
PHOTOS BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

GIVING A HOOT

Texas' sick and injured critters depend on a corps of passionate volunteers

One night in 2024, a couple traveling a Panhandle highway couldn't avoid hitting a coyote that darted in front of them. The animal was alive but wedged in the car's grille.

After the couple called 911, the sheriff, fire department and Texas Highway Patrol all responded. They could do little more than use their vehicles to shield the car until a wildlife rehabber arrived and carefully removed the injured animal.

It had sustained a minor pelvic fracture and a broken hind leg, which required surgery. But the coyote made a full recovery and has since been released—thanks to a village of kindhearted people, including the team at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo.

We've all had our encounters with wildlife.

Maybe a bird just flew into your patio door and fell to the ground, looking dazed. Or maybe you discovered a tiny spotted fawn nestled among the zinnias in your flower bed. Did your dog bring you a gift of a baby bunny?

If so, passionate and knowledgeable people scattered around Texas know just what to do.

Wildlife rehabilitators are folks with big, soft hearts. They're volunteers who do not receive a single dime for their work and spend countless hours administering special diets and medications, most of which they pay for themselves. Wildlife rehabilitators cannot legally charge for their services, relying instead on donations and fundraising. Their reward comes when a recovered animal returns to its place in the natural world.

A recent Texas Parks and Wildlife Department study found that 40% of fawns brought in for care were actually uninjured and an even larger percentage of baby birds are "kidnapped" by animal lovers who are only trying to help.

LEFT Captain Jack, an Eastern screech owl, is a permanent resident at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo. He can't be released into the wild because of his limited vision.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Polly is a badger who refuses to return to the wild whenever staffers release her. Stephanie Brady, the director at Wild West, holds Magee, a skunk who serves as an ambassador for the facility. Stella, another ambassador, is a Virginia opossum raised by humans. A 3-month-old bobcat that was part of a litter of five abandoned by their mother and awaiting release.





LEFT A gray fox named Lincoln has bonded with Brady.

or orphaned animals find that these rescue efforts are therapeutic and beneficial to their own normal trauma responses,” DJ says. “Our entire family pitches in under my supervision to help with caring for the animals and with the rewarding moments when they spread their wings and soar again.”

Since she has children at home, DJ doesn’t rehabilitate animals at greater risk to contract rabies, such as bats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons and skunks. One of her main concerns for wild creatures is damage done by insect spray and rat poison, which

can end up killing or injuring beneficial animals, such as songbirds and owls.

Haley Caswell, general manager of Buck Wild Rescue in Ingram, has been overrun since the catastrophic flooding there in July 2025. The small clinic has outdoor enclosures, and the owner, Katie Buck, lives on the property so someone is always there.

“One of the greatest challenges we face in rehab is determining an animal’s true need for help, pertaining mostly to baby animals,” Caswell says.

Another challenge is people who hurt themselves trying to help an animal.

“The first thing someone should consider if a wild animal needs help is personal safety,” Caswell says. “Wildlife can carry zoonotic diseases and may pose a risk of injury through bites, kicks and scratches. Some general signs to look for are parasites, animals covered in bugs and symptoms of dehydration—dull/dry fur, wrinkled skin and emaciation. If a baby animal has been picked up by a dog or cat, we always recommend bringing it [baby animal] in for antibiotics.”

Buck Wild is one of few rescues licensed to take in and rehabilitate most types of wildlife. They serve several counties spanning hundreds of miles. Each year they take in hundreds of orphaned, sick and injured critters, providing them with a safe environment and around-the-clock care. They also care for surrendered pets, which are kept separate from wildlife.

All donations go directly to animal care; they have no paid employees. Buck Wild requires three shifts of volunteers

DJ (last name withheld to protect her privacy since she works out of her home) has been licensed since 1999 and owns a rehabilitation facility in North Texas. Her whole family helps out with critter care.

“I have paid my kids in popcorn and Popsicles to go out and capture grasshoppers, june bugs or moths for the insect-eating animals in our care,” DJ says with a laugh.

She cautions fellow Texans.

“If someone finds wildlife on the ground,” she says, “I tell them to observe it from a distance first. If there is obvious blood or the animal is weak, it probably needs help, but if it is sitting normally and is bright-eyed, it’s best to leave it alone.”

Some baby birds leave the nest as fledglings and hop around on the ground, where their parents continue to feed them for several days before they take flight. Fawns are stashed somewhere safe by their mothers, who will return at dusk to feed them.

In Texas, as in almost any other state, wildlife rehabilitators are required to have state or federal permits issued by the TPWD and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Applicants in Texas must complete training and submit a letter of recommendation from a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or veterinarian. The TPWD website lists 160 licensed rehabbers across the state.

DJ lives with dozens of animals she has taken in plus her children, several of them adopted. Some of these children have been through their own traumas.

“Kids who have survived trauma and then help with hurt



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

If you find a wild animal that you suspect is sick or injured, don't approach it unless you know it's safe. Most mammals in Texas can carry rabies.

Observe from a distance: Does it appear to be injured or bleeding? If not, it's probably best to leave it be. Either way, don't give it food or water. Leave that to the pros.

If the critter does appear to need help, find a list of licensed wildlife rehabbers in your county by visiting tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/rehab/list. They may be able to pick up the animal without you having to do so yourself.

each day to meet the needs of their animals. They strive for minimal human contact with wildlife to ensure successful integration back into nature.

"Every species has different milestones through our rehab program," Caswell says, "from the hand-feeding incubator stage, to an intermediate weaning enclosure, to a fully outdoor enclosure where we ensure it has met the species-specific requirements of self-sufficiency."

Wild West in Amarillo was formed after founder Stephanie Brady rehabilitated over 200 animals in five months. Her 17 years of experience as a veterinary technician led her to realize that a home-based operation would not be big enough to handle the demand.

In 2016, a donated double-wide trailer on 5 acres made it possible for her to open the first wildlife rehabilitation center in the area. The venture has grown like broomweeds in a wet Texas spring. In 2024, with the help of 51 volunteers, Wild West cared for 3,128 wild animals—porcupines, coyotes, bobcats, a marmoset, and countless other mammals and birds.

"All rehabilitators are in constant need of medications, species-specific formulas, feeding syringes and nipples, blankets, towels, and further training," Brady says.

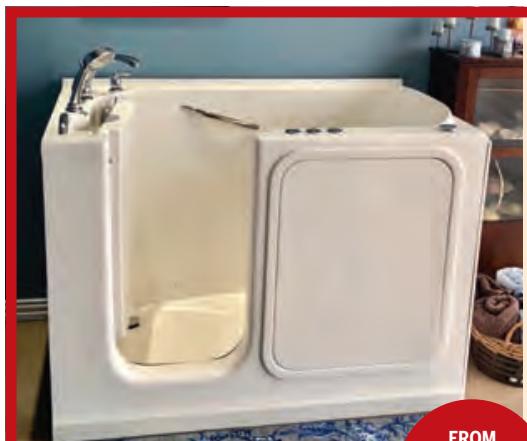
Caring for wildlife is an endless challenge, and unlike pets, they don't necessarily show appreciation for your help or love you back. It's a one-sided labor of love with nature's wild creatures.

"Releasing wildlife is altruistic," DJ says. "Your patients bite, scratch, vomit and poop on you in thanks, but the soar, the hop, the scramble and climb away is life-giving to the world we want to gift to our children. After all, this is God's world." ■



TOP Jessica Hammonds cuddles Polly, who came to the center from Oklahoma.

ABOVE A litter of bobcats discovered in a shed that was being torn down.



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The Texas charm
swings freely from the
heart-shaped frame!

Kick up your boots in true Texas style with this stunning pendant that's expertly hand-crafted of solid sterling silver and lavishly plated in gleaming 18K gold. The silhouette of Texas sits at the center of this dazzling design, and tooled leather-inspired details add a true cowgirl look you can be proud to show off. A genuine diamond in a heart-shaped setting is cleverly placed over the spot where Austin, the capital of the state, is located on the map, showing your heart is never far from your roots. The Texas charm swings perfectly over a heart frame that features even more tooled leather-style accents for an authentic touch. Delicately engraved on the back of the pendant is the message, "You can take the girl out of Texas, But not the Texas out of the Girl." This pendant suspends perfectly from an 18" chain with a 2" extension.

A REMARKABLE VALUE NOT FOUND IN STORES

Expertly handcrafted, this pendant is a remarkable value at just \$149.99*, payable in 5 easy installments of \$30 each, and it's backed by our 120-day full-money-back guarantee. The "Heart of Texas" Women's Diamond Pendant arrives in a velvet jewelry pouch and box that are perfect for gift-giving or safekeeping, along with a Certificate of Authenticity, so it's ready to give as a beautiful gift or to add to your personal fine jewelry collection. To order, send no money now; just mail the Priority Reservation. This gorgeous pendant is only available from The Bradford Exchange. Don't miss out—order today!



Engraved on the
back with a
heartfelt sentiment

Order Today at bradfordexchange.com/332192

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Yes! Please reserve the *Heart of Texas* Women's Diamond Pendant for me as described in this announcement.

*Plus a total of \$16 shipping and service, plus sales tax; see bradfordexchange.com. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of your jewelry after we receive your initial deposit. Sales subject to product availability and order acceptance.

PRIORITY RESERVATION

SEND NO MONEY NOW

Signature _____

Mrs. Mr. Ms. _____

Name (Please Print Clearly) _____

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City _____

State _____ Zip _____

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TO SHOP

01-33219-002-E54801



MESSAGE
FROM
GENERAL
MANAGER/
CEO
JEFF LANE

Keeping Electricity Rates Competitive, and Fair

2026 MARKS THE 88TH YEAR of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative and its predecessors, Kaufman County EC and New Era EC, powering the residents of our part of northeast Texas. The world has changed a lot in that time, but one thing we are proud of is our commitment to serving TVEC members with the same pioneering spirit and commitment to the values that launched the electric cooperative movement all those decades ago.

It is written into our mission statement: At Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, we are committed to our member-owners to deliver safe and reliable electric power at a competitive price, with a strong emphasis on member service, community and sound business practices.

As we prepare to implement the second part of last year's rate increase, I thought it would be a good time to share how rates are formulated.

As you may have noticed on your bill, our basic residential rates are quite simple. There is the fixed monthly customer charge and a per kilowatt-hour charge based on energy consumption.

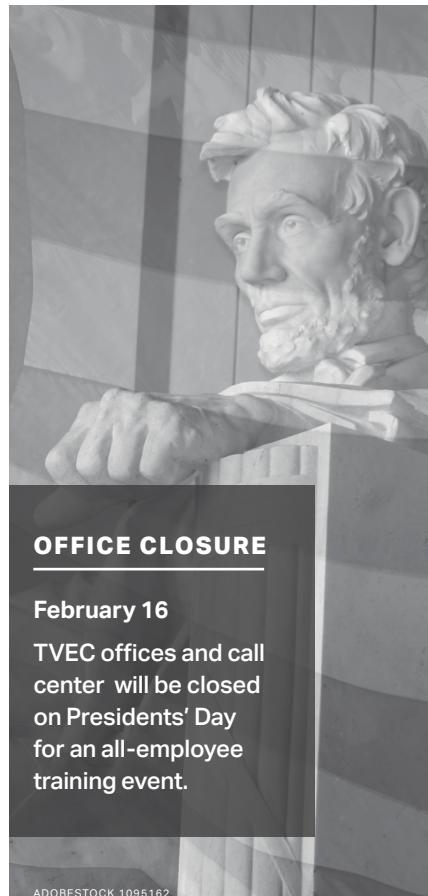
Behind the numbers, however, a lot of effort has gone into making those rates as fair as possible. The philosophy is that each member's cost should fairly reflect the cost of providing their service.

Customer Charge: This fixed charge, which will be set at \$30.75 beginning with bills mailed in April, is aimed at covering most of the co-op's operating expenses. From the trucks and infrastructure to personnel and supplies, we do our best to spend these dollars in a way that maximizes our ability to serve you well.

Energy Consumption: The current consumption rate for residential power is \$0.10968 per kilowatt-hour. That amount covers the costs of purchasing wholesale power, as well as a small portion that goes to operations.

And while it is simple math, small changes in either part of the rate can make big changes in how the overall cost of power is spread among members. That means a great deal of number-crunching, endless spreadsheets of past data and future cost projections went into the new rate, which we hope will be steady for a while.

The bottom line is that with everything included, at 1,000 kWh, our rate is just over \$0.14 per kWh, still well below the average Texas rate in the \$0.15 range as of this writing. Find more information about TVEC's rate structure at tvec.net/rates. ■



OFFICE CLOSURE

February 16

TVEC offices and call center will be closed on Presidents' Day for an all-employee training event.



POWER TIP

The dryer lint trap is an important energy saver, so make sure to clean it before each load.



BE COOL WITH SPACE HEATERS

Space heaters are meant to provide supplemental heat, not replace your home's heating system. If used incorrectly, space heaters can pose fire and burn risks.

Heed these rules for portable heater use:

Read and follow the manufacturer's warnings and the operation and care guidelines before using a space heater.

Space heaters need space. Keep them at least 3 feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, drapes and furniture.

Never use space heaters around unsupervised children or pets.

Always turn the heater off and unplug it when leaving the room or going to sleep.

Plug space heaters directly into an outlet. Do not use an extension cord.

Trinity Valley EC encourages you to always practice safety.

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

CONTACT US

1800 E. Highway 243

Kaufman, Texas

Local (972) 932-2214

Toll-Free 1-800-766-9576

Web tvec.net

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Outage Hotline Numbers

For information and to report outages, please call us.

TOLL-FREE
1-800-967-9324

AUTOMATED ASSISTANCE
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



Here.
For You. FLOYD CHOYCE



Five Decades of Co-op Commitment

Field Inspector Floyd Choyce's commitment to history brings a valuable perspective.

IN MUCH OF THE KAUFMAN AREA, there are a few people that are known for their association with Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, but none more so than Floyd Choyce, a field inspector in the engineering department. He has worked at the co-op for most of his life, a 53-year run that makes him the most tenured employee currently working. That also means he has been working these lines for more than half of the existence of the co-op itself.

A lifelong Kaufman resident and Kaufman High School graduate, Choyce is also known as a keen keeper of the city's history. He is rarely without a camera, and he has an encyclopedic knowledge of just about everything and everyone in town. At least that is the impression you'll get in a conversation.

But more importantly, he is keen to keep a sense of the past alive as time, and generations, pass away.

"My mother was a musician at the church and my dad was a deacon. They had all of these associations with other people especially the other Black farmers all around," Choyce said. "My family was always involved on the ground and I go out now and I'm amazed at how much is still here, still visible and that is something that I can still kind of keep alive."

Keeping track of history is one thing, but keeping up with the times is another. The co-op's growth, as well as the dramatic

technological shifts over the last five decades has meant that Choyce's curiosity and knack for keeping up with things has been a career asset.

"For as long as I can remember, working for the light company, that always puts you in a special place in the community," Choyce said. "And in the business community that is part of it, everyone knows we have to be a little bit ahead of the times



Floyd Choyce (center) has spent five decades serving TVEC members



Reflecting his career, Choyce's training and development opportunities have included technical skills, leadership and teamwork.

with seeing what is coming down the road. Now there are some things we've wanted to do fifteen years ago with some newer systems or the way a line needs to go, but the planning eventually pays off and when the time is right you know what to do. The target is always moving, but we stay focused."

As the industry and technology has changed, so has employee training and education. Choyce remembered that his first day on the job was straight to a job site, and it wasn't until later that he was among the first at the co-op to go for more formal technical education.

"My first day I went out with Kirby McClanahan, and it was an underground service they were putting in," he said. "In those days we didn't have our own trenching machine so we had to wait on Robinson's Electric to come out with the machine and we would finish it out with trench shovels, that was the training. Then the second day I was on an overhead crew with Carlos Potter and now whenever I go to Canton I pass by that house and I can remember it like it was yesterday."

A short time later, the co-op sent Choyce to Texas Electric Cooperatives lineman training. The industry was becoming more standardized, more technical and more safety-conscious.

"I went through the class, and I remember the guy told us, 'You've got a certificate as a lineman, you have the paperwork to be a lineman and you know what to do to be a lineman, but you have to go back to your company and do the work to really be a lineman.' And that was true, you always learn more doing the work than at school," he said. "That is what the old guys called me, too, a book lineman."

As opportunities came up for advancement or some new opportunity, Choyce has always been willing to step up. And over the years, the readiness to learn has given him a broad appreciation for what the co-op means for both the community and for his fellow employees.

"I was trained by some of the guys who were here when the co-op started — The original bunch that came in around 1940 and I had direct contact with that generation," Choyce said. "When I look at some of the old maps and easements, there is a lot

in there that ties to places I've been or the people that lived there or worked that land. I can remember being in the last group, with my family, picking cotton by hand out off of what is now Fair Road and Highway 175, and things that aren't there anymore. And now I'm going through there with everything on GPS and putting data into the computer in a truck with air conditioning, but really the co-op is still all about the people and doing a good job."

Just as Choyce embodies the co-op spirit at work, he lives it out in other parts of life as well. He is an active grandfather, busy church volunteer and has been known to grow some of the best tomatoes around. He served two terms on the Kaufman City Council as well as a variety of other community functions.

"People in the community know that co-op people are involved and so that puts you in a special place," Choyce said. "And so committees at the school or things they are trying to get done, you get the opportunity to serve. That is always something that the co-op has been about is being active in the community."

With no retirement date on the calendar, Choyce said he isn't sure what the future holds but he is still enjoying the work.

"It is different now, where I used to enjoy just being in the safety meetings with the crews or things like that, a lot of what they have to talk about has changed from how we did things," he said. "And some guys want to leave work at work but you might see me wearing a TVEC shirt any time and you know sometimes people have questions. I always think about what Ray Raymond would tell us, that if people are talking to us, it is the same as they are talking to him. He was the CEO, but it was just as important for us to let members know that we work for them and we are there to listen to whatever they need to say."

That kind of commitment to serving members has served Choyce well as an employee, and it has made an immeasurable impact for TVEC members for more than five decades. ■



Floyd Choyce spent the first part of his career as a lineman at Kaufman County Electric Co-op, which became TVEC in 1997.



NAPA74/ISTOCK.COM

Member Service Minute



Types of Heat Pumps



TVEC MANAGER
OF DER & GRID
INTEGRATION
CHRIS WALKER

HEAT PUMPS CAN be an energy-efficient heating and cooling option since they move heat from one place to another rather than generate it by burning fuel. There are three main types of heat pump systems to consider, each with benefits and drawbacks, depending on your needs and location.

Use the following information from the Department of Energy and *Consumer Reports* to begin determining which heat pump system is best suited for your home.

Air-Source

- ▶ These are the most commonly used heat pumps.
- ▶ They move heat rather than converting it from a fuel like combustion heating systems do.
- ▶ Air-source pumps can reduce heating costs by about 50% when compared to baseboard heaters or electric furnaces.
- ▶ They represent a legitimate space-heating alternative in colder regions with newer, more efficient systems.

Geothermal

- ▶ These are more expensive to install but provide more energy savings for heating and cooling.
- ▶ Geothermal systems move heat through pipes buried underground.
- ▶ When compared to a conventional heating system, they can reduce energy use by 25%–50%.
- ▶ They're effective in extreme climates but aren't ideal for smaller lots and certain soil conditions

Ductless Mini-Split

- ▶ Mini-split systems are easier to install, quiet and small in size.
- ▶ They're good for heating and cooling individual rooms or small spaces.
- ▶ There's no energy loss through ductwork, which accounts for more than 30% of a typical home's heating and cooling energy use.
- ▶ Installation can be pricey. ■

Maribel Olivares

Career at the co-op

Four Years in TVEC Member Services.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I enjoy talking to members, especially the ones I see on a regular basis who like to come by and say hello.

What is the key to providing great service?

I try to make sure that, when we have finished something, the member has everything they need, even the things they don't know they will need. I want them to be taken care of.

One thing you'd like to remind members about?

The SmartHub app. As much as I enjoy seeing members here in the office, we still have a lot of people who ask about other ways to pay. It is so easy to use, but it is easy to forget that you have it available when you only need it once a month.

INSULATE YOUR ELECTRIC WATER HEATER TANK

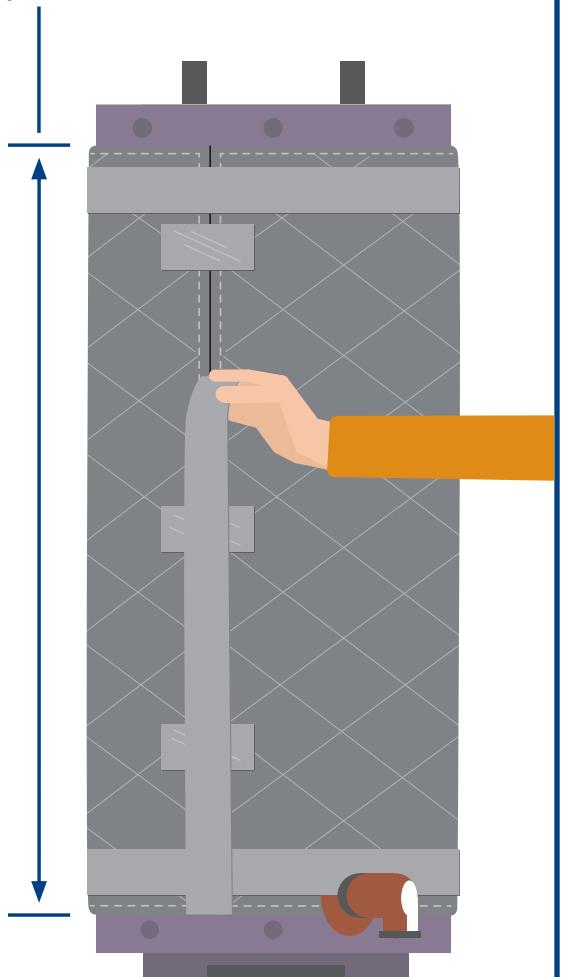
MATERIALS

- ▶ Water Heater Blanket
- ▶ Scissors
- ▶ Duct Tape

STEPS

- 1 Turn off the electric water heater at the breaker panel.
- 2 Measure the height of the water heater and cut the blanket to fit if necessary.
- 3 Leave the top of the water heater open.
- 4 Wrap the blanket around the water heater and temporarily tape it in place. Position the blanket so that the ends do not come together over the access panels on the side of the tank.
- 5 Mark the areas, then cut holes where controls are located. For electric water heaters, there will be two panels on the side of the tank. Mark the area where the pressure relief valve and pipe are located. This will be a pipe that protrudes from the side of the water heater.
- 6 Adhere the blanket. Be careful to line up the cut out areas and then tape it permanently in place.
- 7 Turn the water heater back on.

Cover the whole tank except temperature and pressure valve and drain.



SAFETY NOTE

Don't set the thermostat above 130 degrees on the electric water heater with an insulating jacket or blanket; the wiring may overheat.



Pop's Brings More Than Chicken in Chandler

THERE ARE AT LEAST three Pop's Honey Fried Chicken restaurants in the East Texas region, but they each have their own colors, logos and style. One thing they do have in common is a reliably good and fast lunch with cafeteria-style service that can satisfy the needs of a solitary service man or a whole line crew.

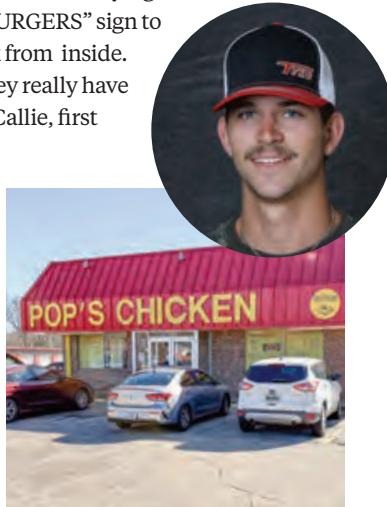
The Chandler version of Pop's stands out without trying to be fancy, with a bright yellow "CHICKEN & BURGERS" sign to welcome you in. There is a lot more to pick from inside.

"It is something a little different, and they really have a little bit of everything," said Michael McCallie, first class lineman.

Fresh cooked entrees are available as well, with burgers, fish and salads and a variety of sides and vegetables on the menu.

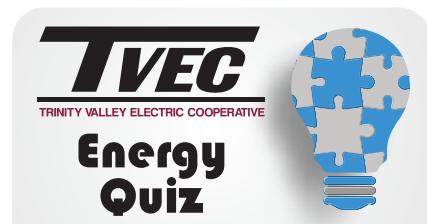
"I get the quesadillas, which is kind of a hidden thing but the chicken is good too," McCallie said.

Pop's is located at 944 E. Hwy. 31 in Chandler. You can find them online with a quick search for Pops Honey Fried Chandler 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 February 27 to receive a \$100 credit on your electric bill. Don't miss out—you could be our winner.



In what year did the U.S. become a net energy exporter?

- A. 2002
- B. 1977
- C. 1996
- D. 2019

Win \$100!

<https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/us-energy-facts/>

Send your answer and contact information to contest@tvec.coop or contact TVEC Member Services by February 28.

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.

January Energy Quiz: Electric Rates

THE COST OF LIVING varies throughout the country for a lot of reasons. Electricity prices are also mixed, with market conditions, regulation, generation fuel costs and more affecting consumers' pocketbooks.

September 2025 data showed the highest rates in Hawaii (\$0.39/kWh) with California, Connecticut and Massachusetts all over \$0.30/kWh.

Texas ranked 28th at \$0.15/kWh. Nevada had the best rates at just under \$0.12/kWh.

Congratulations to our December Energy Quiz winner, Don Morton, of Palestine.

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



DECEMBER 2025 Operation Round Up Awards

TVEC
Charitable Foundation



Grants

Caring for America, Inc.	\$1,000
Forney Food Pantry	\$2,500
Go Harvest Ministries	\$2,500
In His Hands Children's Home	\$4,000
John Bunker Sands Wetland Center	\$2,500
Kaufman County Children's Shelter	\$4,000
Liberty Baptist Church	\$4,000

Thank you

DID YOU KNOW?

Over \$4.7
Million in
Grants
Awarded
Since 2013

How the Program Works

- Each monthly bill is rounded up to the next whole dollar
- The maximum contribution in a year is \$11.88
- Funds are distributed through the TVEC Charitable Foundation
- Nonprofits apply for grants and are reviewed by an independent board

Do you know a high school senior who lives in the TVEC service area?

They can win up to a \$1,000 scholarship!

TVEC
TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Apply online by
March 30 at 5 p.m.**



2026 SCHOLARSHIPS

Learn more at tvec.net/scholarship

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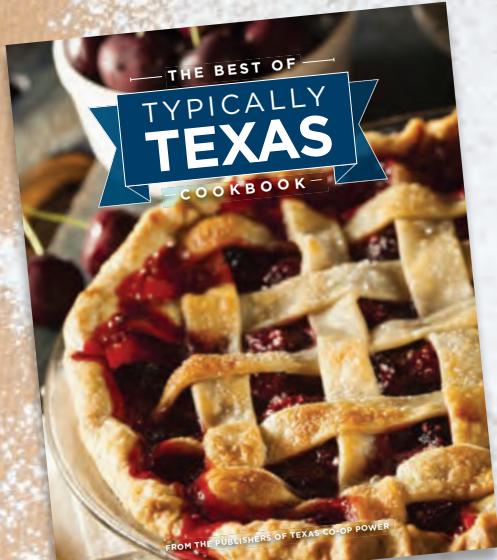


If you are buying as an investment, a gift, or just safeguarding your cash, this is the perfect way to do so! We are looking forward to EARNING your business, not just gaining it!



SUPREME COIN AND BULLION

Your future self will thank you



Give friends and family the Best of Texas.

Texas Co-op Power presents a collection of best-loved recipes from two of our most popular cookbooks ever, the *Typically Texas Cookbook* and *The Second Typically Texas Cookbook*.

This **cookbook** is filled with more than 700 recipes, including more than 300 dessert recipes.

Order online at TexasCoopPower.com and put *The Best of Typically Texas Cookbook* in your kitchen for only \$29.95 (price includes tax, shipping and handling).

To order by mail, send a check or money order payable to TEC for \$29.95 to Best of Typically Texas Cookbook, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701.

From the publishers of **Texas Coop Power**

Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

\$29.95



Boots Across Texas

The best jazz musician, arranger and bandleader you've never heard of

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY KIRSTEN ULVE

MOST DISCUSSIONS OF the Temple jazz scene in the early 20th century—if indeed there are such discussions or there was a jazz scene to discuss—begin and end with Scott Joplin.

Joplin, a Texan and the acknowledged king of ragtime music, was in Temple for at least a short while in 1896 as a member of the Texas Medley Quartet and published three of his very early compositions while in the Central Texas city.

But the discussion ought to include Clifford “Boots” Douglas, who was born in Temple 12 years later. Douglas took up the drums when he was 15 and would go on to become the best jazz musician and arranger you’ve never heard of.

In 1926 he took his talents to San Antonio, where his first gig was with Millard

McNeal’s Southern Melody Boys. He formed his own band, Boots and His Buddies, soon after.

“Although born the same year as fellow San Antonio bandleader Don Albert, we know far, far less about Boots Douglas and his band than we do Albert. That’s because Boots made the mistake of being born in Temple, Texas, instead of New Orleans,” wrote a blogger for *Wired for Sound*. “The fact that Boots’ early Bluebird sessions were sometimes as good or better than Albert’s Vocalion session from the same time frame was of no apparent concern to jazz historians.”

The band was usually billed as Boots and His 13 Buddies, though sometimes circumstances reduced him to 11 Buddies. The name very likely came from

a popular comic strip of the day called *Boots and Her Buddies*.

Boots’ band was what’s known as a territory band—dance bands, usually consisting of a dozen or so musicians, that crisscrossed specific regions of the U.S. from the 1920s through the 1960s, performing popular songs of the day. They played one-nighters six or seven nights a week, at venues like meeting and dance halls and hotel ballrooms.

Jazz historians have called these bands the cover bands of their day and credit them with bringing popular music to places that national booking agents ignored.

In this era, San Antonio was a regular stop for the major record labels’ field trips to record regional artists and genres. Boots and His Buddies recorded 42 sides for the RCA Victor/Bluebird Records label in San Antonio between 1935 and 1938.

Texas writer and jazz scholar Dave Oliphant, who is responsible for much of what little we know about Douglas, notes that Boots and His Buddies was unlike other jazz groups or individual artists from Texas because they “never left the state for fame in Kansas City, New York, Chicago or Los Angeles.”

But the band did occasionally play outside the state. A Paris, Texas, newspaper from July 1937 noted, “The Douglas band comes to Paris from engagements at the Kit Kat Klub, St. Louis; the Grand Terrace Café, Chicago; and from recent fill-in spots in Dallas’s Chez Maurice.”

Boots and His Buddies continued to tour, almost exclusively in Texas, through the 1940s before Douglas called it quits and moved to Los Angeles in 1950.

He continued to play part time in California, until he didn’t. The *Handbook of Texas* notes that Social Security death records list a Clifford Douglas, who was born September 7, 1906, in Texas and died October 27, 2000, in Los Angeles. ■

Cheesecake

Massively delicious delights that are well worth the effort

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

This is everything I want in a cheesecake. I want a buttery crust, a thick filling and a pop of tartness from citrus. I topped mine with freshly whipped cream, but lemon curd, fresh berries, a jam or candied lemon would all be delicious too. Please note: Cheesecakes take a lot of time. Allow yourself a day and a half from start to serving.



Lemon Cheesecake

CRUST

2 cups shortbread cookie crumbs
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, melted

FILLING

4 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1 cup sugar
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon lemon zest
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons flour
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 teaspoon lemon extract
8-10 drops yellow food color
5 eggs, room temperature
1 cup whipped cream, for topping
1 lemon, thinly sliced, seeds removed, for garnish

- 1. CRUST** Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat a 10-inch springform pan with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a medium bowl, combine cookie crumbs, sugar and butter. Press into bottom of prepared pan. Bake 10 minutes, then allow to cool.
- 3. FILLING** In a bowl, beat cream cheese and sugar on medium speed until smooth. Reduce speed to low and beat in heavy cream, lemon zest and juice, flour, and vanilla and lemon extracts. Add food color, starting with 8 drops, but adding up to 2 more to achieve desired color. Add eggs and beat on low until just combined.
- 4.** Place springform pan on a baking sheet. Carefully pour filling over crust. Bake 60-70 minutes or until center is almost set.
- 5.** Remove from oven and allow to cool completely. Refrigerate overnight.
- 6.** Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
- 7.** Top with whipped cream and lemon slices.

SERVES 12

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



Cinnamon Roll Cheesecake

MARIJA DIMITROVSKA
NUECES EC

This one is for my cinnamon roll lovers. All the flavors of the delicious pastry baked into a cheesecake is simply genius. I'll be whipping this one up regularly.

CRUST

1½ cups graham cracker crumbs
¼ cup brown sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, melted

CINNAMON SWIRL

1 cup brown sugar
½ cup flour
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
½ cup (½ stick) butter, melted

FILLING

4 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1 cup brown sugar
¼ cup sugar
½ cup sour cream
4 eggs, room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon salt
Cream cheese frosting (optional)

1. CRUST Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a medium bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, brown sugar and cinnamon. Stir to combine. Stir in melted butter. Press mixture into bottom of a 9-inch springform pan.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

\$500 WINNER

Lime Cheesecake With Caramelized Mangoes

ROSE M. DAILEY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC



Dailey developed this recipe when she had a surplus of mangoes, and it is a delight. I had never caramelized mangoes before—what a pop of flavor!



CRUST

1¼ cups graham cracker crumbs
2 tablespoons sugar
4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, melted

FILLING

3 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1 cup sour cream
1 can sweetened condensed milk (14 ounces)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 eggs
2 tablespoons lime zest
¼ cup lime juice

CARAMELIZED MANGOES

½ cup sugar
¼ cup water
1 tablespoon (½ stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
5 cups chopped mango

1. CRUST Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray.

2. In a medium bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, sugar and melted butter. Press crumb mixture evenly over bottom and up the side of prepared pan. Bake 5–6 minutes, then allow to cool.

3. FILLING Reduce oven to 325 degrees. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese and sour cream on medium speed until fluffy. Gradually add sweetened condensed milk, beating until smooth. Add vanilla and eggs, and beat on low until combined, scraping down sides of bowl. Add lime zest and juice, and beat on low until combined. Pour into prepared pan.

4. Bake 1 hour. Remove from oven and place pan on a cooling rack for an additional hour. Refrigerate at least 6 hours, until firm.

5. Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.

6. CARAMELIZED MANGOES Combine sugar and water in a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Cook until sugar dissolves. Continue cooking 3 minutes or until golden; do not stir. Add butter to pan and stir to combine.

7. Reduce heat to medium. Add mango to pan, gently stirring to coat. Cook 10 minutes or until mango is lightly browned, stirring frequently. Allow to cool and serve cheesecake topped with mangoes.

SERVES 12

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

DON'T SKIMP ON SHRIMP DUE FEB 10

No state produces more shrimp than Texas—2 million pounds a year. How do you like yours? Our favorite shrimp recipe will win \$500 and appear in the July issue.

UPCOMING: AFTER-SCHOOL SNACKS DUE MAR 10



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ONLINE

RECIPES CONTINUED

2. Bake 10 minutes. Allow to cool. Once cool enough to handle, wrap the bottom of the pan with a few layers of foil.

3. CINNAMON SWIRL In another bowl, stir together brown sugar, flour and cinnamon. Stir in melted butter. The mixture will be thick and gooey. Set aside.

4. FILLING Beat cream cheese on medium speed 2–3 minutes, until smooth. Add brown sugar and sugar, and continue beating an additional 2 minutes, scraping down sides as needed. Add sour cream and beat until incorporated.

5. Add eggs one at time and beat on low until combined, scraping down sides of bowl. Gently stir in vanilla and salt.

6. Pour $\frac{1}{3}$ of filling over cooled crust. Gently spread $\frac{1}{3}$ of prepared cinnamon swirl over filling. Repeat this process until you have poured all the filling and top off with the last of the swirl.

7. Place springform pan in a large roasting pan. Add hot water to roasting pan halfway up side of springform pan to form a water bath. Carefully place in oven and bake 60–70 minutes. At this point, the cheesecake will be slightly jiggly to the touch, but the edges will be set. Turn off oven and allow cheesecake to cool in the oven 30 minutes. Then remove roasting pan from oven.

8. Allow to cool completely before removing cheesecake from water bath. Refrigerate at least 4 hours or overnight. When ready to serve, run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.

9. Top with cream cheese frosting, if desired.

SERVES 12

Chocolate Amaretto Cheesecake With Raspberries

GLENDA PEIRSON
PEDERNALES EC

Chocolate + Amaretto + Raspberries? Sign me up! This cheesecake can be enjoyed all year. It's perfect for date night, Valentine's Day, entertaining or a girls' night in.

CHEESECAKE

1½ cups crushed chocolate cookies or chocolate graham crackers
3 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1½ cups sugar
1 cup cottage cheese
½ cup plus 3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons flour
¼ cup amaretto, or 2 teaspoons almond extract
2 tablespoons vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon salt
4 eggs, room temperature
½ cup semisweet chocolate chips

FROSTING

½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
¾ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
3 cups powdered sugar
½ cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract



½ cup raspberry jam

1 pint raspberries

1. CHEESECAKE Preheat oven to 315 degrees. Coat bottom and sides of a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. Sprinkle crushed cookie crumbs on bottom of pan.

2. BEAT cream cheese on medium speed until smooth. Add sugar, cottage cheese, cocoa powder, flour, amaretto or almond extract, vanilla, and salt. Beat on low until smooth. Add eggs and beat on low until combined. Stir in chocolate chips.

3. SLOWLY pour mixture over crumbs in prepared pan. Bake on middle rack 75 minutes. Remove from oven, allow to cool on a rack and refrigerate overnight.

4. FROSTING In a large bowl, stir together melted butter and cocoa powder until evenly mixed. Add in powdered sugar and milk. Beat on low until smooth and easily spread. Stir in vanilla.

5. RUN a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.

6. SPREAD raspberry jam on top, leaving about a 1-inch border around the edge. Pipe frosting to make a border around the top and bottom of cheesecake. Top with raspberries.

SERVES 12

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

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals

In a quaint village, nestled between rolling hills, I lived a young woman with a deep appreciation for gemstones. Her grandmother gifted her a delicate cross pendant adorned with opals. The opals shimmered with a mesmerizing play of colors, reflecting hues of blues, greens, and fiery oranges. Her grandmother shared the legend of the opals, believed to bring hope, purity, and luck to those who wore them.

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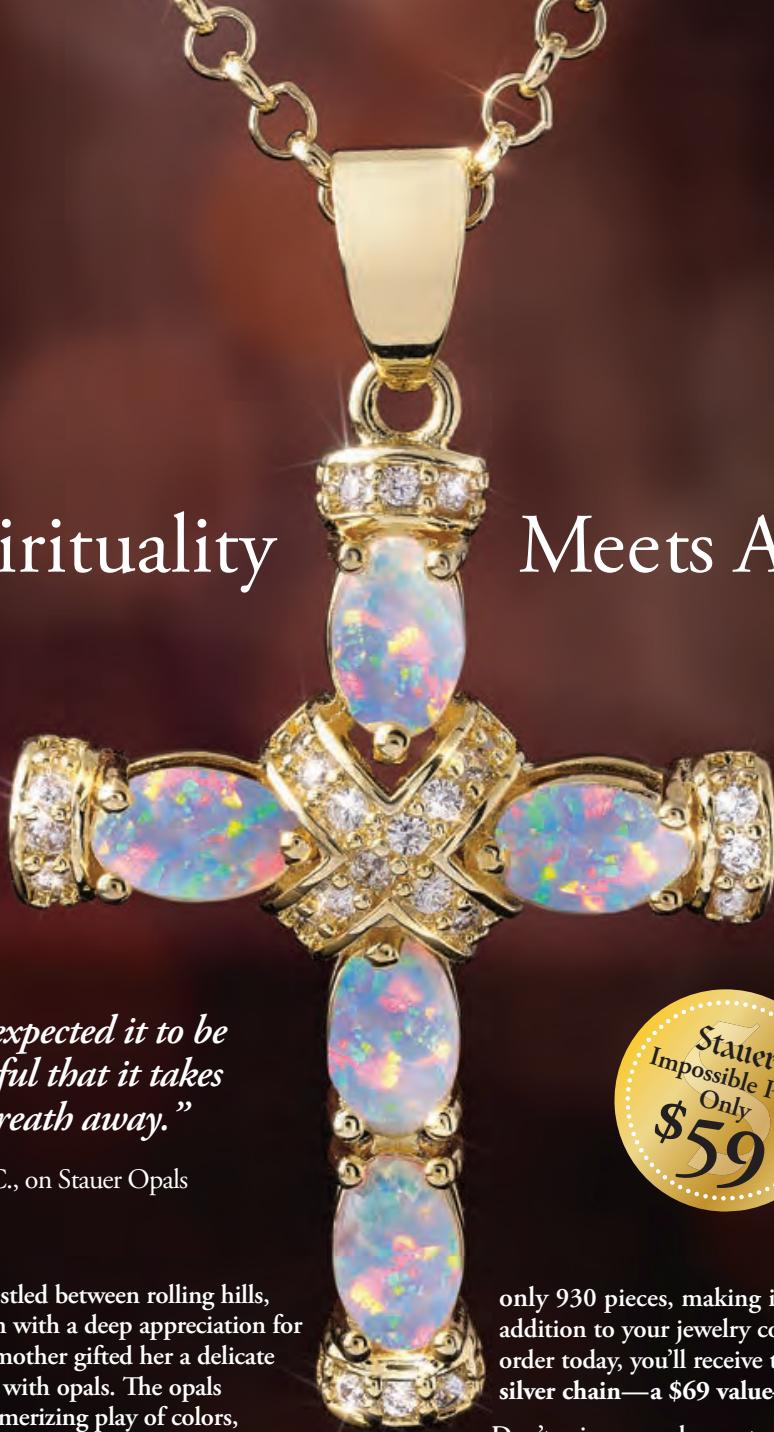
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Honky-Tonk Heaven

The humble dance hall in Helotes where legends broke in their boots

BY CHET GARNER

IF TEXAS DANCE HALLS had a Mount Rushmore, this iconic honky-tonk would be chiseled in. From the outside, it looks like the kind of roadside stop where you'd grab a cold Coke and a bag of pork rinds. But step inside, and you'll quickly realize you've entered a shrine to Texas country music that's been making boots scoot since 1942.

John T. Floore's Country Store—known to most simply as "Floore's"—sits near the north end of the Helotes historic district just outside San Antonio. It isn't so much a "store" as a dance hall that's hosted everyone from Hank Williams to Kacey Musgraves. In fact, the legend of "Shotgun Willie" Nelson was born on this stage, where he carved out his new persona and found a lifelong following.

The walls are lined with photos that make up a who's who of country music spanning nine decades, while the boots hanging from the rafters whisper the stories of generations of Texans who've danced the night away.

When I visited, the street was filled with pickup trucks as the smell of brisket drifted on the Hill Country breeze. Inside, I ordered a plate of tamales (a Floore's specialty) and an ice-cold longneck, served just the way Texas law requires.

By the time the band struck its first chord, the dance floor was packed with folks two-stepping like they'd been practicing for years. I tried to keep up but mostly looked like a confused armadillo on roller skates.

What makes Floore's special isn't just the music or the food—it's the feeling that you're standing in the middle of Texas history that's still alive and kicking. It's a place where past and present two-step together under the same neon lights. ■

ABOVE Chet grabs a prime parking spot at John T. Floore's Country Store.

TOP Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

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

FEBRUARY

6

Grand Prairie [6-8, 13-15, 21-22] **Lunar New Year**, (972) 975-5100, asiatimessquare.com

7

North Zulch **Volunteer Fire Department Chili Cook-Off**, (979) 488-9214, northzulchvfd.org

Palestine **Mardi Gras Parade**, 1-800-659-3484, visitpalestine.com

10

Fort Worth [10-15] **Six**, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

13

Boerne [13-14] **Chocolate Walk**, (830) 248-1635, ci.boerne.tx.us

14

Chappell Hill **Wine & Chocolate Stroll**, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

Grapevine **Sweetheart Wine Train**, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Valentine **Valentine's in Valentine**, valentineinvalentinetx.com

15

Fredericksburg **Lindsay and Jason**, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

16

Brenham [16-21] **Fortnightly Club Used Book Sale**, (979) 525-7414, facebook.com/ther fortnightlyclub

20

Brenham [20-21] Friendship Quilt Guild Quilt Show, (979) 525-1128, friendshipquiltguild.com

21

Spicewood Stars, Spurs & Illusions: The Art of Texas Magic, (512) 264-2820, spicewoodarts.org

24

Gonzales 100th Anniversary Organ Concert, (830) 672-3521, gonzalesprestexas.com

27

La Grange [27-28] Colorado Valley Quilt Guild Quilt Show, coloradovalleyqg.com

Washington [27-28] Texas Independence Day Celebration, (936) 878-2214, wheretexasbecametexas.org

28

Boerne 1940s Night at the USO Gala, (512) 693-8382, vfw688.org

Conroe Arbor Day, (936) 539-7824, mcmga.com

MARCH

1

Corsicana Living History Event, (903) 875-7438, pearcemuseum.com

5

Corsicana Divas of Soul, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

6

Spicewood Blue Water Highway, (512) 264-2820, spicewoodarts.org

Submit Your Event

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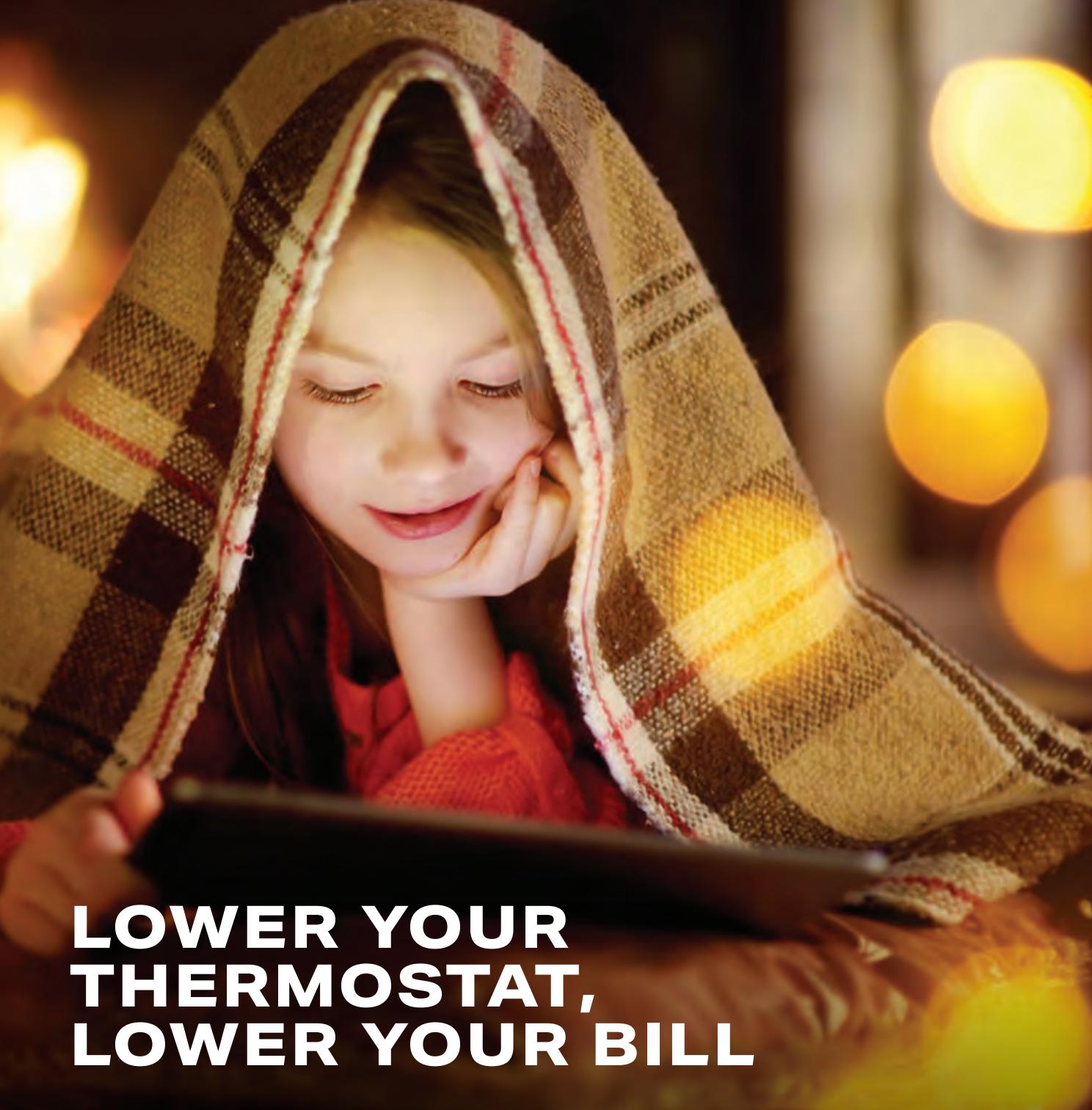


Hit the Road Event Calendar

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From the Oil Fields

It's dangerous work. Those who choose this profession are bold, risking their own safety to fuel the world. Their tireless pursuit energizes homes and businesses, keeps trucks delivering goods across the country, and provides a wide variety of products. This month we salute those in search of black gold.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 JAMIE VAZQUEZ
PEDERNALES EC

"The sunset on a few jack-up rigs waiting for work in Galveston."

2 MIKE PALMER
FORT BELKNAP EC

"My grandfather Tobe Palmer, center, far back, pulling an oil well near Electra around 1918."

3 GARY BAKER
MIDSOUTH EC

"Looking for Texas tea in the moonlight."

4 DAFFANA GRAY
PEDERNALES EC

"My youngest brother, Eric Gray, operations supervisor for a major oil and gas operations company."



Upcoming Contests

DUE FEB 10 Making a Splash

DUE MAR 10 Seasoned Snaps

DUE APR 10 Underwater Life



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more From the Oil Fields photos from readers.



What Love Looks Like

In sickness and in health—in a tiny Hill Country cabin

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS
ILLUSTRATION BY PETE LLOYD

FOR MANY OF THEIR nearly seven decades together, Cicero and Olla Rust lived in a comfortable home on their Blanco County ranch.

But when Olla became sick in her last years, caring for both her and a large house became too much. So Cicero sold the house and moved a one-room cabin onto their land.

“That’s one good woman!” Cicero exclaimed after I arrived for an afternoon visit. In bed lay his wife, a mere shadow of the strong woman she’d once been. A woman who had chopped cedar, corralled cattle and worked their land as good as any ranch hand.

Now she lay on her side, knees drawn, arms across her stomach, her head on a pillow. A cotton sheet lay tousled to one side.

Cicero and Olla met in 1935 in the Hill Country. Her father forbade the romance, but a year later, Olla told Cicero that she wanted to get married.

Secretly, they agreed to meet in Johnson City on a stormy night in May 1936. But Olla’s father kept her after dark doing chores. By the time the couple finally arrived at the judge’s home, it was 11:30 p.m. So Cicero had to “run the JP out of bed” to perform the ceremony.

During their first nine years together, the couple lived in a run-down, one-room sharecropper’s cabin. To make money, they chopped cedar and sold three stacked cords for \$5. Determined to do better, they saved their money, bought two milk cows and sold cream.

“That Depression learned me a lot,” said Cicero, 90, dressed in his trademark denim overalls, his white hair bare of the usual gimme cap. “It learned me that you can live without some things.”

In 1947, the Rusts bought 160 acres in Blanco County. Two years later, they purchased 117 more. In 1950, Olla bore their only child, C.A. Rust III.

While we visited, I glanced now and then at Olla, 91, who lay staring at the wall. Three times a week, a home health care worker bathed and fed her. A physical therapist came, too. But it’s Cicero—her devoted partner in life—who tended to all her needs.

For a while, Olla lived in a nursing home. But when staff used restraints to keep her in bed, Cicero brought his wife back home to the one-room cabin. He learned the correct way to lift her, bathe her, what to feed her and when.

“I can take care of her myself,” Cicero said. “And I still ranch, too.”

As I drove away, my eyes teared up as I thought about Olla and Cicero—about the vastness and strength of a love that endures and refuses to give up. That tenderly cares and nurtures, even when the caring can’t be returned. That selflessly trades the luxuries of a spacious home for a simple cabin.

Now *that’s* true love straight from the heart. ■

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