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2019

Holiday

RECIPE CONTEST
WINNERS



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J. Alex Ruiz crafts a blade that will last a lifetime.

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In the Making Artisans infuse their singular creations with uncommon passion.

Story and photos by Julia Robinson

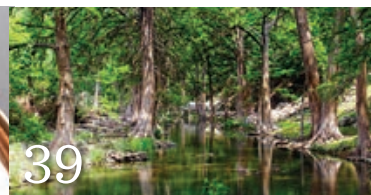


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NEXT MONTH

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By Lee Gaddis

ON THE COVER Courtney Perry's grand prizewinning recipe, *Spiced Cookie Cheesecake With Caramel Sauce*. Photo by Jody Horton

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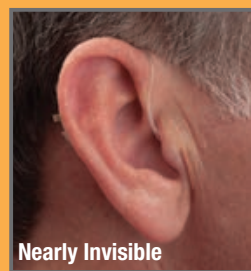
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Other Musical Greats

Chet Garner began by mentioning Willie Nelson, Janis Joplin, George Strait and Roy Orbison because they were born in small Texas towns [*Wink's Spectacle*, September 2019]. He missed the singer with by far the best voice that was born in a small Texas town—Johnny Mathis, from Gilmer. JOE E. AND SHARON MCINTYRE

Big Bend Beckons

The Window Trail is an easy hike that emanates from the Chisos Mountain Lodge and provides a truly wondrous view of the valley below. And to see Casa Grande Peak lit up at sunrise is a sight one never forgets. Thanks to E. Dan Klepper [*Big Bend's Golden Triangle*] and Joe Nick Patoski [*Which Big Bend?*] in September for their superb commentaries.

TIM O'NEIL | PAIGE BLUEBONNET EC

Definitely on my bucket list! I've been to Big Bend twice but never Fort Davis!

PATRICIA JANECEK BURT | VIA FACEBOOK

I enjoyed *Which Big Bend?*, but it needed some fact-checking. Big Bend National Park gets about 400,000

A Nod and a Wink

In 1954, I was a fourth grader in Odessa. On Saturday afternoons, my sister and I watched the only show on television, several hours of West Texas talent. Roy Orbison was on this show—if not every Saturday, close to it. We really didn't think at that time that he had talent [*Wink's Spectacle*, September 2019].

The next thing we knew, he is doing very well for himself. So much for the opinions of a 7- and 9-year-old.

NANCY LEWIS | WIMBERLEY | PEDERNALES EC



visitors annually, not 4 million. CATHRYN HOYT | BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK RIO GRANDE EC

Editor's note: Our astute readers help keep us sharp, for which we are grateful. The online version of this story has been corrected.

Point of History

As a Texas history teacher for more than 30 years, I often use *Texas Co-op Power* articles as supplementary reading in my classroom. I was excited to see the story about Gail Borden but was disappointed it did not

mention that he was one of the original 300 colonists brought by Stephen F. Austin—something your readers learned from their seventh grade teachers but probably have forgotten [*Gail Borden's Follies*, September 2019]. DONNA ENGLISH | HIGHLAND VILLAGE COSERV

Bush's Bailout

Any military pilot who read your Almanac item in Currents [September 2019] probably could correct the facts surrounding George H.W. Bush's being downed by anti-aircraft fire in 1944. Ejection seats didn't exist in 1944, so he actually went over the side (bailed out), hitting his head as he did so. WILLY CARROLL | KERRVILLE CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Sally the Mountain Lion

Fun in the Past Tense [August 2019] mentioned a mountain lion named Sally that a man

from Pearsall had kept as a pet. That man was my father, Jack "Hoss" Keith.

The bigger mountain lion in the same museum is Charlie. During breeding, Charlie killed Sally. My father was well known in the Pearsall area as an avid cat hunter with his dogs. ALLEN KEITH | BOERNE BANDERA EC

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   Texas Co-op Power



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BUTTING OUT

Only 14% of American adults smoke, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's an all-time low in the U.S.

Trying to kick the habit?

November 21 is the Great American Smokeout, an annual event since 1977 aimed at encouraging Americans to stop smoking.

HAPPENINGS

McAllen Holiday Parade

MCALLEN, the self-declared South Pole of Texas, kicks off the festive season with its **HOLIDAY PARADE**, which the city describes as the largest illuminated holiday and helium balloon parade in Texas.

The 1½-mile parade, **DECEMBER 7**, will feature more than 50 lighted floats, more than 30 inflatable character balloons and marching bands.

INFO ► (956) 681-1200, mcalleholidayparade.com

ALMANAC

50 YEARS AGO: Richard M.

Nixon became the first president to attend a regular-season NFL game while in office. Nixon sat in the stands at RFK Memorial Stadium in Washington, D.C., as the Dallas Cowboys beat the Washington Redskins 41-28 on November 16, 1969.

◀ LOOKING BACK AT SOCIETY THIS MONTH



IN THE 75 YEARS since *Texas Co-op Power* debuted in July 1944, folks like Audie Murphy and Walter Cronkite became household names, and Leonards Department Store and the National Women's Conference helped change society.

1940s

1944 Jackie Robinson, who in 1947 would become the first black player in major league baseball, is court-martialed for refusing to move to the back of a bus at Fort Hood.

1945 Audie Murphy of Kingston receives the Medal of Honor. He later becomes the most decorated U.S. soldier of World War II.



1950s

1955 Using the August 22, 1949, *Life* magazine cover of Panhandle rancher Clarence Hailey Long as its inspiration, Philip Morris creates the Marlboro Man, an advertising campaign that increased the brand's cigarette sales by 3,241%.

1958 Philanthropist Ima Hogg donates the Varner-Hogg Plantation to the state.

1960s

1960 Leonards Department Store in Fort Worth becomes the first major retailer in that city or Dallas to take down all segregationist signs and welcome African Americans.

1962 Walter Cronkite, raised in Houston, helps launch the *CBS Evening News* and serves as its news anchor until his retirement in 1981.



A Leader of Kind Strangers



IT'S HARD TO KEEP UP WITH ELLEN FULLER. "I'm a serial volunteer," she says, and her fast-paced conversation and exuberant attitude make it easy to believe she devotes boundless enthusiasm to any cause she might undertake.

These days, Fuller focuses her abundant energy on Wreaths Across America, a nationwide organization that places holiday wreaths on veterans' graves. In 2018, with Fuller as co-chair of the statewide effort, WAA collaborated with 674 groups to place 160,000 wreaths on almost one-third of veterans' graves across Texas, as featured in *TCP* in November 2018.

Fuller now serves as treasurer on WAA's national board.

"My dad passed in 2011," she says, "and he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. I visited his grave in December 2011 and wondered what kind stranger had placed a wreath on his grave."

The kind stranger was a volunteer with Wreaths Across America, an effort started in 1992 when Worcester Wreath Company of Harrington, Maine, placed extra holiday wreaths to honor those buried at Arlington. That effort evolved into the Arlington Wreath Project and ultimately into Wreaths Across America.

If you're wondering what a holiday-focused organization does year-round, bear in mind that WAA's reach in Texas has grown 30%—from 86 cemeteries in 2017 to 112 in 2018 and more for 2019. Because wreath day in 2019 is December 14, Fuller and crew will not stop counting until the very last day. Their motto is, "Any vet. Anywhere."

Besides, as Fuller, a customer of Bryan Texas Utilities, says, "Any day is a good day to thank a veteran."

INFO ► wreathscrossamerica.org



POWER OF OUR PEOPLE recognizes co-op members who improve their community's quality of life. Nominate someone by emailing people@texascooppower.com.

1970s

1971 The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, which houses more than 45 million pages of historical documents, opens on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin.

1975 Gloria Dean Randle Scott of Houston becomes the first black president of the Girl Scouts of America.

1977 The National Women's Conference takes place in Houston.

1980s

1982 Molly Ivins begins writing columns at *The Dallas Times Herald*. In syndication, her columns appeared in 350 papers across the U.S.



1987 More than 700 music fans attend Austin's inaugural South by Southwest festival, which has evolved into a major annual tech, music and media event.

1990s

1990 Marguerite Ross Barnett becomes president of the University of Houston and the first black woman to lead a major American university.

1992 Gov. Ann Richards buys the first Texas Lottery ticket, a Lone Star Millions scratch-off, at an Austin feed store.

1993 West Texas A&M University in Canyon, which previously went under several different names, adopts its current name.

2000s



2012 Big Tex, the 52-foot-tall mechanical cowboy that towered over the State Fair of Texas for 60 years, catches fire and is destroyed. His replacement debuted the next year.

IN THE making

ARTISANS
INFUSE THEIR
SINGULAR
CREATIONS
WITH
UNCOMMON
PASSION



THE MADE IN TEXAS moniker gets applied to so much more than boots, hats and Texas-shaped tchotchkes. I went in search of distinctive makers and found diverse artisans with deep thoughts about the act of creation. Whether fulfilling grand ambitions and pushing the limits of a craft or rendering spiritual communion and psychological healing, these Texans use their minds and hands to transform raw materials into objects of beauty and purpose.

This holiday season, let's remember to invest in our local makers. Here are a few from Co-op Country to get you started.

See more of **Julia Robinson's** work at juliarobinsonphoto.com.





✕ THE CHARACTER OF LEATHER ✕

ODIN CLACK wandered into a leather store one day in 2012 and exited with \$200 worth of goods and a new curiosity. He wondered if he could make a laptop sleeve from the leather and began tinkering at his dining room table. The graphic designer found a new challenge in leathercraft and was soon making wallets, belts and bags for family and friends.

“The thing I love about leather is that the way it looks to me is different from the way it will look in a year from now. How we use it affects the way it looks and feels,” Clack says. “Every dent and scratch tells a story.”

In 2018, Odin Leather Goods moved out of the family’s garage and into a workshop in Coppell, near the Tri-County Electric Cooperative service area. Odin and his wife, Rachelle, work with one shop assistant to fulfill orders for their wide range of products. “When people buy local, they know their dollars are going towards daycare and swimming lessons and supporting a local family,” Clack says. “It also trickles down because I buy my materials and hardware from other U.S. companies.”

ODINLEATHERGOODS.COM





✂ FORGED WITH HEART ✂

J. ALEX RUIZ has always loved making things with his hands. He spent his childhood sculpting and crafting historical replicas, which led him to study archaeology in college, where he discovered the tools and crafts of long ago.

A penchant for colonial-era ironwork brought him into a blacksmith shop, where he made functional ironworking tools like bladesmithing tongs, hammers and knives.

As a maker, Ruiz feels a deep kinship to those historic people we learn about through artifacts. “When I go to museums and look at historical weapons or ironwork, I like to see the flaws,” he says. “As someone who actually makes these things, I can spot if something has been broken and fixed.”

Ruiz, a member of Karnes Electric Cooperative, began teaching and performing demonstrations around Texas and earned a spot on the History Channel’s *Forged in Fire* competition, where he won \$10,000 for a medieval horseman’s battle axe. Volundr Forge is Ruiz’s business that he runs part time from his home in Adkins. It’s not uncommon for his shop to reach 120 degrees, and there is a 16-week backlog for his custom knives. “My market is the everyday guy that wants something handmade that’s going to last a lifetime,” he says.

VOLUNDRFORGE.COM



❖ JEWELRY AND TIME HEAL ALL THINGS ❖

In 2006, **TARA HUTCHINSON** was serving her 10th year as a soldier—a military police sergeant on deployment in Iraq—when a truck she was in was hit by an improvised explosive device. Hutchinson lost her right leg above the knee and suffered a traumatic brain injury that left her with muscle tremors and difficulty controlling fine motor skills.

“I couldn’t use my hands to do anything after my injury,” Hutchinson says. “I couldn’t write. I couldn’t feed myself. I had no control over my hands at all.”

The loss of a career she loved and her independence sent Hutchinson into a deep depression. “I definitely contemplated suicide on multiple occasions because I couldn’t see any kind of a worthwhile future for myself,” she says.

A physical therapist suggested she find a new hobby to help her regain muscle strength, and Hutchinson found jewelry making. “Before that, I didn’t even own any jewelry at all,” Hutchinson says. “I was in the Army and playing in the dirt with the guys.”

She took a class, and after making jewelry for six months, Hutchinson’s jerky hand movements were smoothed out. Making gave her new purpose and new hope. She spent two years researching jewelry making and became a master goldsmith.

Hutchinson runs Tara Hutch Jewelry out of her home studio in San Antonio. “Now to be able to help women feel beautiful is the most amazing thing ever,” she says. “People can take home something that reminds them that if I can make it through this hard time, anyone can.”



TARAHUTCHJEWELRY.COM

✕ THE FIBER OF OUR BEING ✕

MAURA GRACE AMBROSE studied textile design and fiber arts at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, where she found a passion for natural dyes and quilting. “The natural dyes were soft and chalky and harmonious, and it played into the poetic, beautiful parts of art,” says Ambrose, a Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member. “The colors were alive because they came from something that was alive.”

Ambrose runs Folk Fibers from her home studio in Bastrop, where she forages and tends an organic garden for plant-based dyes. It takes about 250 hours to make a bed-sized quilt with Ambrose’s process of natural dyeing and hand stitching. “I can’t compromise on the process because that’s what makes them special and makes them an heirloom,” she says.

For Ambrose, making is a creative expression, the revival of an ancient process and a way to connect to a community. “The long-term goal is to teach, spread the word and inspire others,” she says. “In those exchanges and conversations, nothing else matters. The women become so empowered to make quilts themselves.”

FOLKFIBERS.COM





✂ WORKING WITH WOOD ✂

RYAN DRAPELA grew up selling watermelons near his home in El Campo, southwest of Houston. “I was born with the hustle,” Drapela says. He sold small skateboards in third grade, duct tape wallets in middle school, and candy and jerky in high school.

“We grew up super broke,” explains Drapela, a member of Wharton County Electric Cooperative. “I started buying all my school clothes and supplies myself in the seventh grade.” Drapela walked into his high school woodshop and found a new business opportunity creating cutting boards from wood scraps. His offerings expanded to clipboards, bottle-cap tabletops and custom plaques. The orders from his Etsy store kept growing.

In May 2019, Drapela earned his degree and the title of Entrepreneur of the Year from Texas A&M University’s agriculture school. He runs Drapela Woodworks with 15 employees fulfilling 1,000 orders a week for his Man Stands docking stations. “I grew and grew from persistence and hard work, not pure talent, not pure intellectual knowledge,” he says. “Just from working harder, longer and more consistently than competitors.” For Drapela, his success is a measure of his ability to create change in the world, whether it’s a new product or jobs for the local economy. “Whatever I’m doing, it’s a way to chase my capacity,” he says.

DRAPELAWOODWORKS.COM





✕ DIVINE INTERVENTION ✕

Tucked into the gentle hills of Christoval, 20 miles south of San Angelo, you'll find the Mount Carmel Hermitage Monastery, where the **HERMITS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF MOUNT CARMEL** make breads, jellies, fudge and honey. In 1991, Father Fabian, a priest from San Angelo, founded the hermitage with \$2,000. Until 1994, he lived alone in a remote house. "He had the vision, the grace and the leap of faith to give it all up and start from zero," says Brother Martin, who joined the hermitage in 2001.

"Monks have always worked to support themselves by their own hands," Martin says. "There is a beautiful relation between making food and the idea of communion. We are making something that people are going to put into their bodies for their sustenance and enjoyment, and there's a communion of spirit there."

Today, the eight monks of the Mt. Carmel Hermitage live in silence and solitude. "Our order is a very simple order," Martin says. "We're not interested in scholarly work or writing papers or books. We just try to pray and work and maybe we do badly sometimes, but we try. We try hard."

The hermitage has a gift shop and an online store from which they ship all over the world.

CARMELITEHERMITS.ORG



BROTHER AUGUSTINE

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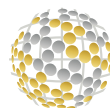
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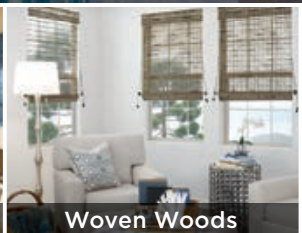
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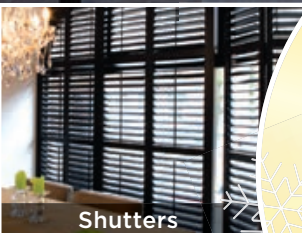
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We're Thankful for You



MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER ALAN LESLEY

WITH THANKSGIVING JUST AROUND THE CORNER, I'D LIKE TO take this opportunity to express my gratitude for your membership and support of Comanche Electric Cooperative. And this is no offhand or perfunctory thanks: Because of your connection to CECA, we are able to make our community a better place. It might sound trite if it weren't so true.

In the spirit of this month's holiday, I think it's important to let our members know just what an impact you have on our co-op and the greater community, likely in ways you may not even realize.

Youth Tour sends teens from cooperatives around Texas and the nation to Washington, D.C., each June for a week of immersion in democracy in action. The trip is life-changing for many students, and we are humbled and honored to be part of this golden opportunity.

These investments in our community wouldn't be possible without you. You empower the co-op through your membership and through your participation in and patronage of these programs. When you attend co-op events—particularly the annual meeting—and alert us to problems or give kudos, or provide suggestions online or to our employees, you help us improve our operations and, ultimately, better serve the entire membership.

Because we are locally governed, CECA has a firsthand perspective on community priorities, which enables us to make reasoned decisions about long-term and infrastructure investments, including considerations of whether certain projects are a timely fit for our membership.

I'm thankful for our board members' willingness to carve out time to attend important training sessions, participate in planning meetings and keep abreast of industry trends. Their time is well spent, as it results in better informed advisers who serve the co-op's interests in a way that our members expect and deserve.

On a more personal note, we appreciate the countless acts of kindness our lineworkers and other employees receive when they are working in severe weather or its aftermath. Our employees are thankful for your patience, care and concern while they work to restore power during prolonged outages amid challenging conditions.

CECA was established more than 80 years ago to bring electricity to our area when no one else would. The cooperative is a reflection of our community and its evolving needs. Together, let's continue making our corner of the world a better place. We can't do it without you, and for that reason and many others, we're thankful for your membership.



As a cooperative, one of our core principles is Concern for Community. While our priority is always to provide safe, reliable and affordable energy, we also seek to be a catalyst for good. We are purposeful in partnering with local groups, such as volunteer fire departments, who share our commitment to enriching our community's safety and quality of life.

Another cooperative principle we work to amplify is Education, Training and Information. We espouse this principle by working closely with area schools to provide safety demonstrations and award college scholarships, and by sponsoring some of our community's brightest young people on the annual Government-in-Action Youth Tour.

Move Over—It's the Law



WE ARE ALL THANKFUL FOR OUR CO-OP'S LINEWORKERS AND THE LONG HOURS THEY dedicate to ensuring affordable and reliable power is available around the clock. With this demanding work, safety is always the first priority because, in some cases, there are no second chances to get the job done right.

Now we have another important tool to keep our utility workers safe: the “move over/slow down” law. When you see a utility vehicle parked on the side of the road with its lights flashing, help us keep our lineworkers safe by moving over a lane or slowing down to 20 mph below the posted speed limit.

When you move over, you're giving workers the room they need to safely complete their jobs for you and other members.

We've all been careful to keep an eye out for police, firefighters, emergency medical technicians and other first responders who are on the scene of an accident. Now, with the new law in place, we should consider utility workers in the same category as all other emergency workers and first responders. After all, they are among those who move toward trouble, not away from it, to keep all of us safer.

The last thing they need to be worrying about when they are taking care of our business is a careless motorist. Common sense tells us to just move over. Now, as of September 1, the power of the law stands behind this important rule.

If you are driving on a two-lane road and you do not have an extra lane to move into, the law says you should slow down by 20 mph. A slower-moving vehicle is a safer vehicle. And keep in mind, significant fines give this law teeth.

After all, there is no price that can recoup a lost life. You don't need to ask questions or wonder what they're up to. Just move over.



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Developing De Leon Today

Breathing new life into a small town

BY SHIRLEY K. DUKES

IT CAN BE SEEN ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY—SMALL TOWNS

contracting as residents move to larger cities for jobs and other opportunities. Very few of these small towns give up without a battle, though. De Leon is one of those towns that refuses to go down without a fight.

History of De Leon

The first town lots in De Leon were sold July 7, 1881, by officials of the Texas Central Railroad, according to the Texas State Historical Association. The sale was attended by about 100 people. The town was likely named for the Leon River, which was named by Spanish explorers in 1721 in honor of Alonso De León, who had established settlements in East Texas.

With the expansion of the railroad west from Waco came settlers from several Southern states. They came to grow cotton and raise cattle. A few businesses were opened, including a general store and a commissary for the railroad. The first medical doctor arrived in 1882, and the first newspaper, the *De Leon Messenger*, was published in 1882.

In 1906, boll weevils blighted the area, and the primary cash crop transitioned from cotton to peanuts. The cultivation and marketing of peanuts changed when irrigation was introduced in 1949, and artificial drying started in 1950. The crop then could be handled in bulk rather than in sacks.

The discovery of oil led to an oil plant with storage tanks and refinery equipment. There was also a nitroglycerin plant with its own railway siding, called Torpedo Junction. Both plants shuttered with the end of the oil boom. In present-day De Leon, peanuts, pecans, peaches and melons make up much of the agricultural work.

Developing De Leon Today

In the mid-1990s, a few of the town's concerned citizens met regarding De Leon's declining population and empty buildings. In an effort to breathe new life into the rural town, they formed Developing De Leon Today.

The group meets the first Monday of each month to discuss opportunities to increase interest in the downtown area and draw in new residents and tourism. The group's completed and



The Terrill Antique Car Museum is located at 500 N. Texas St. in De Leon. Restored cars include what is likely the only coffin steam carriage still in existence, a Crow-Elkhart Cloverleaf, an REO Speedwagon 3/4-ton truck and more.

current projects include:

The Terrill Antique Car Museum. Located in downtown De Leon near the railroad tracks, the Terrill Antique Car Museum was DDT's first big project. In 2003, De Leon resident Hiram Smith contacted car collector Feltz Terrill Jr. with an idea for a museum. With the help of a group of local volunteers, an empty building was transformed into the museum, located at 500 N. Texas St. It houses an impressive pre-World War II car collection. This project put De Leon back on the map in the Texas



Stikbows Custom Cabinets & Furniture has been a De Leon favorite for 12 years. From left are Kent Methard, Rick Gore, and owners Brandon and Phillip Levens.

State Travel Guide, with the museum listed as a suggested destination in the prairies and lakes region.

Stikbows. In October 2007, Stikbows Custom Cabinets & Furniture relocated from Beattie, also in Comanche County, to De Leon. The move was by invitation from the De Leon Indus-



The De Leon Depot was recently donated by Birdsong Peanut Company to Comanche County, which gave it to the city of De Leon. Plans are to turn it into a museum and welcome center.

trial Development board, but the idea originated with DDT. Phillip and Brandon Levens reopened their cabinet shop at 291 N. Texas St. in De Leon and in the past 18 years have been commissioned to design and build as far north as Spur and as far south as Boerne.

Depot revitalization. DDT's current project involves De Leon's former train depot. Vacant for many years, the building was not level and rainwater sat beneath it. But thanks to DDT, the area is now landscaped, and runoff is diverted from the former station. The building is in the process of being leveled, and renovations will begin soon to turn the depot into a beautiful museum, welcome center and chamber of commerce office. This project is funded solely by donations and fundraisers.

Funding for DDT comes from three main sources: donations, T-shirt sales and the De Leon Market Days. Donations for Developing De Leon Today can be sent to DDT, P.O. Box 395, De Leon, Texas 76444. Destination De Leon custom T-shirts can be purchased by visiting Kindred Threads at 116 N. Texas St. in De Leon or calling (325) 370-4541. The T-shirts are also available by contacting Destination De Leon at facebook.com/DestinationDeLeon or emailing tex11jl45@gmail.com.



De Leon Market Days

Market Days began this year when Downing resident Diana Myers joined DDT. The event takes place semiannually. Spring Market Days were held in March, and the event was a happy success with many handmade items for sale, including jewelry, signs, homemade baked goods, jellies and jams, scarves, and floral arrangements.



The De Leon Christmas Market will be December 7 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the De Leon City Auditorium at 125 Texas St. Booth rentals are \$45 for a 10-by-10-foot space and can be secured by emailing dianamyers33@hotmail.com or calling (737) 215-7885.

The event will include a silent auction. Admittance for shopping is free. Start your Christmas shopping while supporting a good cause.

The Result

During the past year, De Leon has seen three new businesses open: Shuga Pops gourmet popcorn and candy shop, Kindred Threads clothing and Dollar Up Resale. Two new restaurants, Lisa's Coffeehouse and Last Chance BBQ and Grill, have also opened their doors.

"Our sleepy little town seems to be waking up," said Jerry Leonard, secretary of Developing De Leon Today.

De Leon is at the intersection of state highways 6 and 16 in Comanche County. It is home to the annual Peach and Melon Festival and the longest-running tractor pull in Texas. It is located due north of Proctor Lake, a popular recreational destination.

For more information about De Leon, visit cityofdeleon.org or Destination De Leon's Facebook page or contact the chamber of commerce at (254) 893-2083.

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but how we use them, is the true measure
of our thanksgiving.”*

—W.T. Purkiser, author



**Our offices will be closed Thursday and
Friday, November 28–29, in observance
of the Thanksgiving holiday.**

My Grandmother and LBJ

How a persuasive woman helped start the school that launched Johnson's career

BY LEE GADDIS

MY GRANDMOTHER FLORENCE CHILES was born in 1878 in Lockhart. She married John Terry Maltzberger in 1900, and they ranched the South Texas brush country in La Salle County. In the 1920s, they built a house in Cotulla and continued to operate ranches.

Florence was stylish, usually wearing hats and gloves when in public. She was Cotulla's postmaster and was respected and persuasive. She had a strong sense of right and wrong and an instinct for power. She appointed herself advocate of the local Mexican American children, and by the mid-1920s, she was actively lobbying county leaders to build a school for them.

She cared deeply for the poor in her South Texas community, who lived in very difficult conditions. There was little education or health care and no social services. Most of them labored in the fields, working cotton, beets or spinach crops. And most of them did not see a way out of poverty.

She was able to grab county leaders by the nose and persuade them to support her plan for a school. After working all of her connections, she finally focused her efforts on the county judge, G.A. Welhausen. When she played her last card—proposing to name a new school after Welhausen—

the county commissioners knew she had won. School bonds were approved in 1926, and the school was built by 1927.

In 1928, 20-year-old Lyndon B. Johnson took a break from his studies at San Marcos Teachers College, now Texas State University, and accepted a teaching job at Welhausen School to help cover his tuition expenses. He was one of five teachers and taught mathematics and history to 29 fifth, sixth and seventh graders. He was shocked at the poverty he saw and how little many of the people had.

Johnson soon made friends with my grandmother, who was known as "La Florita," and the two of them worked on improving conditions at the school. There was no playground equipment, cafeteria or school buses.

My grandmother urged Johnson to help lead the school, and he was soon promoted to principal. They encouraged Welhausen's primarily Spanish-speaking pupils to learn English and get an education, knowing that it would open

doors for them. Johnson created opportunities for his students and organized debates, spelling bees and physical education activities.

Johnson soon learned that Florence was his best champion for improving



FLORENCE MALTSBERGER



WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to see more photos from Cotulla.

school conditions. She would march into county commissioners and city council meetings and demand funds for books and equipment. They rolled their eyes when she showed up, but she usually prevailed.

She persuaded city and county leaders to dedicate a city block across the street from the school as a park. Volunteers came together and built walkways, benches and a bandstand. The park was named Florita Plaza in my grandmother's honor.

The school and park became the hub of the Mexican American community. There was a dance and celebration almost every Saturday night. Florence arranged for a surplus government building to be moved to the park, and it served as a community center where she presided over

many fundraising efforts, including a massive annual rummage sale.

Working together, Johnson and Florence became lifelong friends, though Johnson returned to college after a year in Cotulla. The two of them corresponded for years. Florence's only granddaughter, Terry Gay Puckett, attended a junior college in Washington, D.C., when Johnson was then a senator, and he showed her all the sights and even took her to Dwight Eisenhower's inauguration.

Florence spent the rest of her life advocating for the Hispanic community, often driving sick or injured people to Santa Rosa Hospital in San Antonio. She worked on immunization campaigns and food drives and twisted arms for donations. She was a great woman.

Florence died in June 1963, when Johnson was vice president. He sent a huge floral arrangement for her funeral. Five months later, in the most tragic way, he became president of the United States.

Lyndon B. Johnson with his first pupils at the Welhausen School in Cotulla in 1928.

Johnson traveled to San Marcos in 1965 to sign the Higher Education Act, which increased federal funding for universities, creating scholarships and giving low-interest loans to students. In a speech that November day, he said, "I shall never forget the faces of the boys and the girls in that little Welhausen Mexican school, and I remember even yet the pain of realizing and knowing then that college was closed to practically every one of those children because they were too poor. And I think it was then that I made up my mind that this nation could never rest while the door to knowledge remained closed to any American. So here, today, back on the campus of my youth, that door is swinging open far wider than it ever did before."

Lee Gaddis is chairman of T3, a marketing firm founded by his wife, Gay.

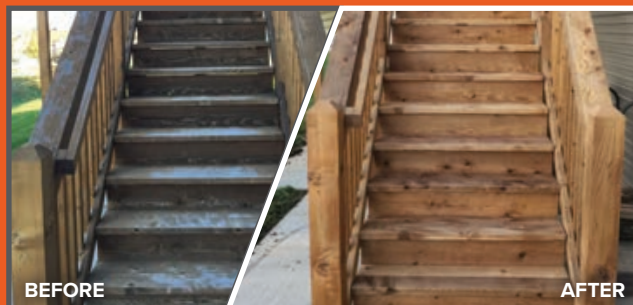


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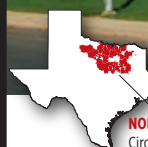
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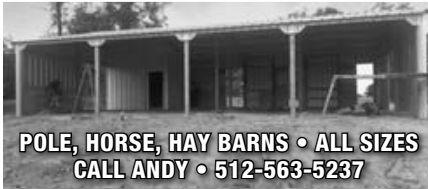
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15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
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16. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
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Karen Nejtek, Managing Editor
Date
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Alamo Survivor?

Legendary San Antonio character cast a convincing spell

BY GENE FOWLER

AS MUCH AS WE TEXANS HAVE remembered the Alamo over the past 183 years, you'd think we'd have all the facts nailed down. We don't. Historians are still uncertain about whether famed Tennessean David Crockett died during the battle or was executed afterward.

And while we know that a handful of noncombatants survived the battle, one often-told story of survival remains unconfirmed. In the 1880s and 1890s, the venerable Madam Candelaria recounted her dramatic story of attending to the deathly ill Jim Bowie as Mexican *soldados* besieged the mission-turned-fort.

In the late 1800s, a steady stream of tourists and reporters visited her San Antonio home to witness her passionate retelling. New York newspapers reported her account. Atlanta promoters sought to book her for the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition. Souvenir photographs of her dignified countenance abound.

Legend holds that in 1836, while managing a San Antonio hotel frequented by Texians, Madam Candelaria received a letter from Sam Houston asking her to nurse a typhoid-stricken Bowie. In one of her accounts, she was gathering medicinal herbs at 4 a.m. when she spied Santa Anna's approaching army and hurried to the Alamo to sound the alarm.

Probably born in 1803 as María Andrea Castañón near present-day Piedras Negras,



Madam Candelaria holds a special place in San Antonio lore.

Mexico, Madam Candelaria obtained her sobriquet from the first name of her second husband, Candelario Villanueva. A well-known San Antonio figure before her celebrity as an Alamo survivor, she operated a fandango parlor in the mid-1800s.

Memoirist Vinton Lee James described the parlor as a place "where the beaux and belles of San Antonio romped, played, and danced to the sweet strains of the orchestra and dined on the delicious dishes prepared by Señora Candelaria's own hand." In 1883, the *San Antonio Light* noted that she "keeps a stand on Military Plaza" and "would like all her old friends to give her a call."

Though Texans were divided about Candelaria's story of surviving the Alamo battle, the claim won her an annual state pension of \$150 in 1891. Historians remain

uncertain. Former Alamo curator-historian Bruce Winders says he finds her account unlikely.

The most recently published version of the *Handbook of Texas* stated that most historians believed her story. An abridged account in the online *Handbook* presents a nuanced version by three authors.

One of the three, Maria Gomez, Candelaria's great-great-granddaughter, provided historical documents in 2011 for Paula Allen's *San Antonio Express-News* history column. Among them, an 1899 Bowie genealogical text states, "A Mexican woman known as an

experienced nurse was brought into the building to attend [to Bowie] before it had been surrounded."

"My mother's sisters very often translated for Madam Candelaria," Gomez said. "They told us that she always wore a long, black apron with two pockets into which she would put money that was given to her by interested tourists."

Whether her story was true or not, her artistry inspired James to dub her "the most outstanding female character in San Antonio history."

She often spoke of Crockett before her death in 1899, recalling "lots of singing, storytelling, and some drinking" at her hotel after his arrival. "Crockett played the fiddle, and he played it well, if I am a judge of music.... He was one of the strangest men I ever saw."

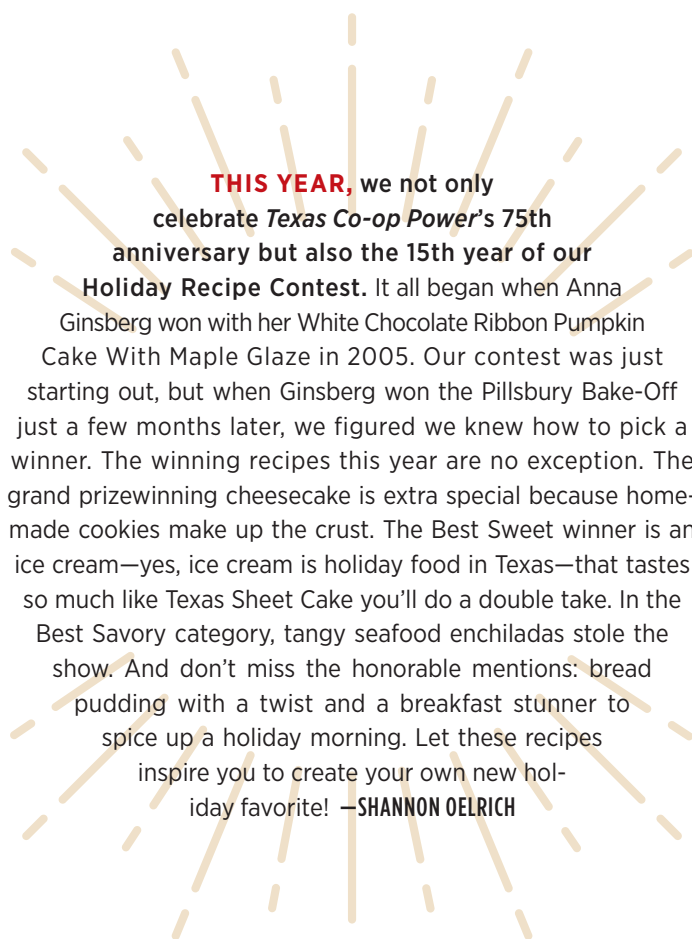
Author Gene Fowler specializes in Texas travel and history.



2019

Holiday

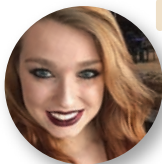
RECIPE CONTEST
WINNERS



THIS YEAR, we not only celebrate *Texas Co-op Power's* 75th anniversary but also the 15th year of our **Holiday Recipe Contest**. It all began when Anna Ginsberg won with her White Chocolate Ribbon Pumpkin Cake With Maple Glaze in 2005. Our contest was just starting out, but when Ginsberg won the Pillsbury Bake-Off just a few months later, we figured we knew how to pick a winner. The winning recipes this year are no exception. The grand prizewinning cheesecake is extra special because home-made cookies make up the crust. The Best Sweet winner is an ice cream—yes, ice cream is holiday food in Texas—that tastes so much like Texas Sheet Cake you'll do a double take. In the Best Savory category, tangy seafood enchiladas stole the show. And don't miss the honorable mentions: bread pudding with a twist and a breakfast stunner to spice up a holiday morning. Let these recipes inspire you to create your own new holiday favorite! —**SHANNON OELRICH**

\$1,000 GRAND PRIZE **Spiced Cookie** **Cheesecake With** **Caramel Sauce**

COURTNEY PERRY | TRI-COUNTY EC



"I only dived into cheesecake making a few years ago but quickly became obsessed," Perry says. "The spice cookies provide the crumbly texture you get with a traditional graham crust but have all the flavor and essence of the holidays. I wanted to create a filling that would keep people coming back for more, which meant not too much one way or another. Velvety, but not too dense. Sweet, but not overpowering. This competition definitely has given me more confidence in my baking knowing that people outside of my inner circle enjoyed it as much as I did."

SPICED COOKIES

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground allspice
- ⅛ teaspoon ground clove
- ⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 egg
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1¼ cups flour

CRUST

Spiced Cookies, crumbled

- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, melted

FILLING

- 2 eggs, separated
- 2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, softened
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1¼ teaspoons vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup sour cream
- 1½ tablespoons flour

CARAMEL SAUCE

- ½ cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons butter, cubed
- ¼ cup heavy whipping cream

- 1. SPICED COOKIES:** Using a stand mixer, beat butter and sugars until fully incorporated. Add salt and all spices. Add egg and vanilla. Beat until ingredients are fully mixed together. Add flour ¼ cup at a time until dough forms. Be sure not to overmix.
- 2.** Wrap dough in plastic wrap and allow to chill about 3 hours or until dough is no longer tacky.
- 3.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line

cookie sheets with parchment. Form chilled cookie dough into approximately 1-inch balls. Bake 17–20 minutes or until edges are golden. Remove cookies from oven and let cool on a wire rack.

4. CRUST: Line an 8-inch springform pan with parchment.

5. In a bowl, combine crumbled spiced cookies, brown sugar and salt. Stir in melted butter until crumbs are coated. Move crust mixture to springform pan and press into bottom and up sides. Set aside.

6. FILLING: Preheat or lower oven to 325 degrees. In a stand mixer, beat egg whites on high until stiff peaks form. Set aside.

7. In a separate bowl, beat cream cheese and brown sugar. Add egg yolks one at a time. Beat on high until fully incorporated. Lower speed of mixer and add vanilla, salt, sour cream and flour. Mix until just incorporated. Fold beaten egg whites into batter. Add batter to springform pan. Wrap bottom of the pan and up the sides with aluminum foil.

8. Create a water bath by putting the springform pan into a roasting pan and adding about 1 inch of hot water to the outer pan. Bake 75 minutes or until center is slightly jiggly. Turn off oven and leave oven door open about 30 minutes to allow cheesecake to cool slowly.

Remove from oven.

9. Once the cheesecake is fully cooled, cover springform pan with aluminum foil and allow cheesecake to chill in refrigerator overnight.

10. CARAMEL SAUCE: Add sugar to a saucepan over medium heat. Whisk until sugar is fully melted. Remove from heat and add butter. Whisk until incorporated. Slowly add heavy whipping cream until fully incorporated. Let cool.

11. Remove cheesecake from springform pan. Drizzle cooled caramel sauce over top of cheesecake and serve.

► Serves 12.

2019
Holiday
RECIPE CONTEST
WINNERS



\$500 BEST SWEET
**Whipped Sheet
Cake Ice Cream**

MARLON HAYGOOD | PEDERNALES EC

"This is my take on the classic Texas sheet cake," Haygood says.

"Starting with a whipped cream ice cream that I've been making for years off the advice of a good friend, I developed this decadent recipe. What I love most is that the recipe is so easy to adapt. I've added in dulce de leche, crushed candy bars, even ice cream cone pieces. It has a deliciously smooth taste that will please even the most die-hard ice cream lovers."



- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 cup sweetened condensed milk
- ¾ cup cocoa powder
- ¾ cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. In a large bowl, use a mixer on high speed to whip cream until stiff peaks form. Add sugar a small amount at a time to aid in peak formation.
 2. In a separate bowl, mix condensed milk, cocoa powder, chopped nuts and vanilla.
 3. Fold the whipped cream into the condensed milk mixture and transfer to a freezer-safe covered container. Freeze until firm, at least 24 hours.
- Serves 8-10.

\$500 BEST SAVORY
**Layered Redfish
Enchiladas**

DENISE CRANE | VICTORIA EC

"My husband and I do not eat meat (other than fish)," Crane writes.

"However, this dish has been enjoyed by many of our meat-loving friends, and literally everyone who has tried it has requested the recipe."



- 2 large redfish fillets (1-1½ pounds)
- 1 teaspoon salt, divided use
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 2 small cans (4 ounces each) mild diced green chiles, drained





- ½ cup canned black beans, drained and rinsed
 - ½ cup canned corn, drained
 - 1 pepper from can of chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, chopped (or ¾ teaspoon ground chipotle pepper)
 - 2 tablespoons lime juice
 - 1 teaspoon ground cumin
 - ½ teaspoon chili powder
 - ½ cup packed fresh cilantro, finely chopped
 - 1 cup sour cream
 - 1 jar (16 ounces) salsa verde
 - 12 corn tortillas, quartered
 - 2 cups shredded colby jack cheese, divided use
- Optional toppings: diced red onion, chopped cilantro, cotija cheese, avocado slices

1. Sprinkle redfish fillets with ¼ teaspoon salt each and let sit at room temperature 20 minutes, then lightly pat dry.
2. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat, then add fish, black pepper and garlic. Cook about 3 minutes on each side, or until cooked through.
3. Reduce heat to low, and add cream cheese, green chiles, beans, corn, chipotle, lime juice, cumin, chili powder, cilantro and remaining ½ teaspoon of salt. With a spatula or spoon, fold ingredients together in the pan while breaking apart the fillets. When all ingredients are thoroughly combined, turn off heat.
4. In a bowl, mix together the sour cream and salsa verde to make the sauce.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

5. To assemble enchiladas, spoon about 1 cup of the sauce into the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Distribute 4 of the quartered tortillas across the bottom of the dish. Spoon half of the redfish filling onto tortillas. Top with ¾ cup shredded cheese, 4 more tortillas and half of the remaining sauce. Top with all remaining filling and half of the remaining cheese. Add last 4 tortillas and all of the remaining sauce.
6. Cover pan tightly with aluminum foil and bake 30 minutes. Remove foil, add remaining cheese and bake 10–15 minutes more, until cheese is melted and bubbly. Top as desired with diced red onion, chopped cilantro, cotija cheese and avocado slices. ▶ Serves 10–12.



\$250 HONORABLE MENTION

Breakfast Campeones

VALERIE DOTY | COSERV

"I grew up in the Midwest and had never had much Mexican food," Doty says. "I had never even heard of sausage gravy or Frito pie. When I first moved to the Dallas area, I only ate Mexican food in Mexican restaurants. Slowly but surely, I've tried to add some Mexican flair to some of my dishes, and even gotten a little spicier each year. We all liked this breakfast so much... I started calling it Breakfast Campeones—breakfast of champions."



- 12 large jalapeño peppers
- 8–10 slices bacon, fried and crumbled
- 1 dozen eggs
- ½–1 teaspoon salt, to taste
- 4 green onions, chopped
- 1 cup shredded cheddar jack cheese
- 1½ teaspoons dried cilantro
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 12 slices colby jack cheese

1. Line a large rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil, shiny side down. Cut the jalapeños in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds and ribs with a grapefruit spoon. Lay the peppers on the foil, open side up.
 2. Fry bacon and remove to drain on paper towels. Remove most of the grease from the pan, then scramble the eggs in the same pan, adding salt to taste.
 3. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a mixing bowl, crumble the bacon and add scrambled eggs, green onions, shredded cheese, cilantro, cumin and oregano. Stir until everything is evenly distributed.
 4. Spoon a little of the mixture into each pepper half. Cut slices of cheese in half (making 24). Lay a half slice of cheese across the top of each stuffed pepper. Bake the peppers for 20–30 minutes, until the cheese starts to brown. Cool 5 minutes before serving.
- Serves 12.

\$250 HONORABLE MENTION

Maple Bread Pudding With Toasted Bourbon Pecans

KITTIELE POTTS | BOWIE-CASS EC

"There seems to be three things you can always find in our home: pecans, maple syrup and Texas bourbon," Potts says. "I just started combining everything until I came up with something that worked. The consensus was this was fantastic, and everyone asked for more."



PUDDING

- 4 eggs
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 1 cup lightly packed light brown sugar
- 2 cups whole milk
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- ½ cup (1 stick) salted butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 loaf French bread, torn into 1-inch pieces

MAPLE SAUCE

- 3 tablespoons salted butter
- 1 cup sugar
- ¾ cup lightly packed light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1½ cups heavy whipping cream
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

PECANS

- 3 tablespoons salted butter
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- ½ cup bourbon
- 3½ tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 cup roughly chopped pecans

1. **PUDDING:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9-by-13-inch pan.
 2. In a large bowl, whisk eggs and sugars until thoroughly combined. Add milk, cream, butter, vanilla and cinnamon, and mix well. Add bread pieces into the mixture until the liquid has been absorbed. Pour into pan.
 3. Bake approximately 55 minutes or until pudding is firm.
 4. **MAPLE SAUCE:** Melt butter in a saucepan on low heat. In a bowl, mix together sugars and cornstarch. Pour into the melted butter and continue to cook on low heat, stirring constantly until sugars are dissolved. Add in cream, maple syrup and vanilla; mix thoroughly. Set aside.
 5. **PECANS:** In a skillet on low heat, melt butter. Slowly add maple syrup and bourbon and mix well, then stir in brown sugar until sugar is dissolved. Stirring slowly, add pecans. Cook on low heat, stirring constantly, 5 minutes or until thick. Mixture can burn quickly, so do not leave unattended.
 6. To serve, cut warm bread pudding into portions and pour warm sauce over each. Top with bourbon-toasted pecans.
- Serves 12–14.

WEB EXTRAS ► Read these recipes on our website and check out the winners from all 15 years of the Holiday Recipe Contest.



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED,
YOU'LL WIN A TCP APRON!

\$100 Recipe Contest

April's recipe contest topic is **Farmers Market**. Send your favorite veggie-driven recipe made with Texas produce. The deadline is **November 10**.

ENTER ONLINE at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

Up the Creek

READERS MAKE QUITE A SPLASH this month with creeks from around Texas. Y'all sent in enough photos to make our heads swim! **GRACE FULTZ**

WEB EXTRAS ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.

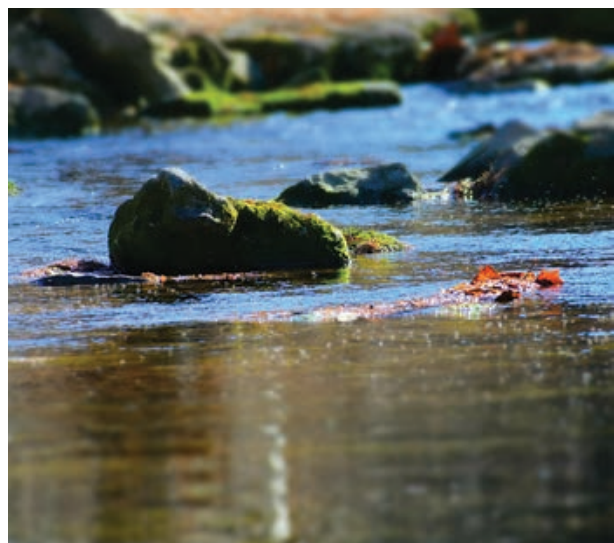


◀ **ANGIE BIRMINGHAM**, Nueces EC: Emily and Bailey the dog enjoy cool water on a hot summer day.



▲ **TIFFANY ROGERS**, Mid-South Synergy: "A hike into Pedernales Falls State Park in the fall gave a unique angle of the falls and the streams coming together."

▼ **TERESA BECKHAM**, Navasota Valley EC: A creek outside of Ingram.



▲ **TOMMIE CALFEE**, Pedernales EC: Morning light on Onion Creek.

▼ **AMANDA STAFFORD**, Nueces EC: "Colt Stafford playing in the Frio River at his family ranch in Leakey."



UPCOMING CONTESTS

MARCH FIRST RIDE	DUE NOVEMBER 10
APRIL SUNSETS	DUE DECEMBER 10
MAY FAIRS AND CARNIVALS	DUE JANUARY 10

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests.

Pick of the Month The Wall That Heals

Stephenville November 7-10
(254) 552-1222, visitstephenville.com

The mobile three-quarter-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., will be on display at Stephenville City Park. It contains more than 58,000 names, listed chronologically by day of casualty. Since its dedication in 1996, the Wall That Heals has been displayed in nearly 600 communities throughout the nation.



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November

7

Houston Piano Concert: Great Women in Music, (713) 528-2060, czechcenter.org

8

Dallas National Philanthropy Day Awards Luncheon, (972) 233-9107, afpdallas.org

Levelland [8-9] Home for the Holidays, (806) 894-4161, malleteventcenter.com

Winnsboro [8-9] Art & Wine Festival, 1-888-559-4333, winnsboroonlineguide.com

Kerrville [8-10] Kid 'N Ewe and Llamas Too Fiber Arts Festival, (830) 792-3535, kidnewe.com

9

Bryan Brazos Valley Worldfest, (979) 845-8008, brazosvalleyworldfest.org

Kyle Pie Run 5K/1K, (512) 376-8089, ftlogpierun.com

Marshall Gary P. Nunn, (903) 934-7992, memorialcityhall.com

November 8-10
Kerrville
Kid 'N Ewe and Llamas Too
Fiber Arts Festival



Mason Mason County Wild Game Dinner, (325) 347-5758, masontxcoc.com

McKinney St. Gabriel Holiday Boutique, (972) 542-7170, stgabriel.org

San Marcos Commemorative Air Force Veterans Day Hangar Dance, (512) 396-1943, centraltexaswing.org

Kingsland [9-10] Christmas Market, (325) 388-6159, kingslandcrafts.com

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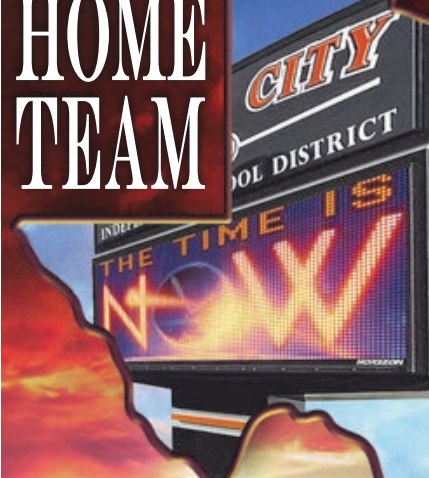
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La Vernia [9-Dec. 29] Country Christmas Ranch, (830) 534-4103, facebook.com/countrychristmasranch

16

Rosanky Rosanky Baptist Church Craft Fair, (512) 360-3968, rosankybaptistchurch.com

Stonewall Historic Williams Creek (Albert) School Open House, (830) 685-3321, historicchools.org

23

Rockdale Whistle Stop Wine Tour and Christmas Tree Lighting Festival, (512) 446-2030, rockdalechamber.com

30

Comfort Christmas in Comfort, (830) 995-3131, comfortchamber.com

Honey Grove Christmas Parade, (903) 378-7211, honeygrovechamber.org

December
5

Columbus Ladies Night Out, (979) 732-8385, columbusladiesnightout.com

La Grange Schmeckenfest, (979) 968-3017, visitlagrangetx.com

Sinton Old Fashion Christmas Market and Parade, (361) 364-2307, sintonchamber.org



December 5
Sinton
Old Fashion Christmas
Market and Parade

6

Goliad [6-7] Christmas in Goliad, (361) 645-8767, historicalgoliad.com

Pleasanton [6-7] Vintage in Verdi, (830) 570-4552, facebook.com/vintageinverdi

Waxahachie [6-7] Christmas Market & Gift Show, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

7

Fredericksburg Christmas Home Tour & Market, (830) 990-8441, pioneermuseum.net

Lockney Country Christmas Ball, (806) 983-6228

Marble Falls Market Day on Main, (830) 693-2815, marblefalls.org

Onalaska Christmas in Our Town, (936) 646-5000, cityofonalaska.us

Pittsburg Home for the Holidays, (903) 856-3621, pittsburgtexas.com

Wylie Arts Festival, (972) 516-6016, wylietexas.gov

Submit Your Event!

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event online for January by November 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar.



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Stopping by the Stagecoach

Historic Salado landmark rides again

THE YEAR IS 1861. A TALL, SILVER-HAIRED man with a grizzled face stands on the balcony of the Shady Villa Hotel in Salado. He delivers a fiery warning to fellow Texans about the perils of secession and the danger posed by the looming Civil War. After his speech, Sam Houston steps inside the two-story building, eats his supper, then heads to bed. We don't know all of the details exactly, but the fact of Houston's speech is gospel in Salado.

And here I sit in 2019, in the room where Houston supposedly slept, sipping on a bourbon Old-Fashioned and munching on a strawberry and arugula salad, as I wait for my steak and jalapeño creamed corn. Times have changed, but some things have stayed the same at the Stagecoach Inn.

Erected just before Houston's speech, the building is the oldest in town. It was a stop for cowboys on the Chisholm Trail and for stagecoaches. Legend holds that guests included Gen. George A. Custer and Charles Goodnight. Even Sam Bass and Jesse James reportedly stayed the night. In Texas, only San Antonio's Menger Hotel has been accommodating travelers longer. And the Menger doesn't have the legend that a nearby cave holds Spanish gold.

In 1943, Dion and Ruth Van Bibber purchased the property and renamed it the Stagecoach Inn, using delicious food and Southern hospitality to attract travelers. Ruth Van Bibber added the restaurant's prix fixe menu consisting of dishes prepared fresh and recited by the waitstaff; there was no written menu. Tomato aspic (think tangy Jell-O), hush puppies, an



Chet imagines a coach ride into Salado.

entree of the day and a strawberry kiss for dessert.

The Stagecoach gained national recognition, helped along by features in *Life* magazine in 1957 and in *Time* in 1966. However, by the early 2000s, postponed maintenance and endless construction on Interstate 35 dealt a serious blow to the inn and restaurant.

In 2016, a group purchased the failing property, shuttering the Stagecoach for the first time before pouring resources into renovating the property. They reopened in 2018.

One summer night, I arrived close to dinnertime, eager to experience the hotel's new chapter. The appearance of the historic two-story building offered a comforting assurance that the new owners respect the hotel's past. After I checked into my room, which was appointed in a midcentury modern style, I walked past the pool crowded with sunbathers and headed for the restaurant. The updated dining room had a historic chic vibe and included classic and modern rooms. With

its huge fireplace, the expansive bar looked like a West Texas hunting lodge.

I settled in for dinner, and the food hit all the right spots. I had no choice but to order the signature strawberry kiss dessert—because if something has been on the menu for almost 75 years, it has to be good. It arrived with a base of baked meringue topped with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and covered in glazed fresh strawberries. After the first bite, I closed my eyes and felt my blood sugar spike to delicious heights.

As I savored the last bite, one of the new owners came out, and we chatted about the Stagecoach's transformation. He described the details of the restoration, and I asked him if he found the Spanish gold buried in that cave. He cracked a smile and said with a Texas-sized wink, "How do you think we paid for all of this?"

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

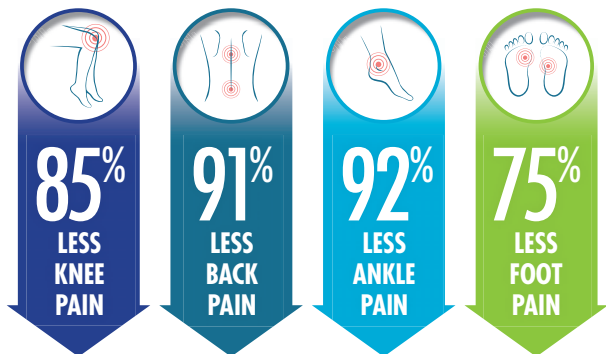
 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video of his visit to Salado's Stagecoach Inn.

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