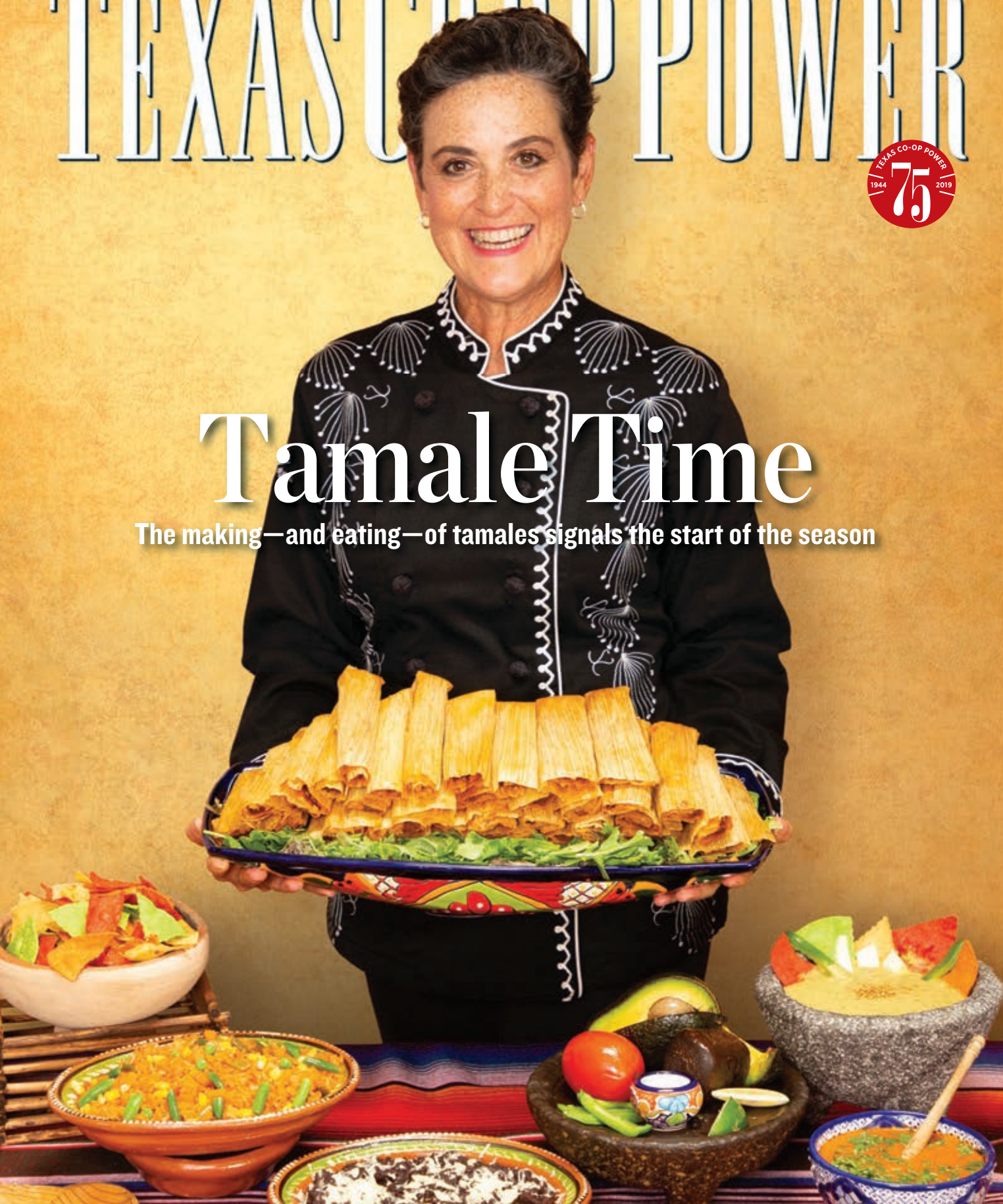


TEXAS CO-OP POWER



Tamale Time

The making—and eating—of tamales signals the start of the season





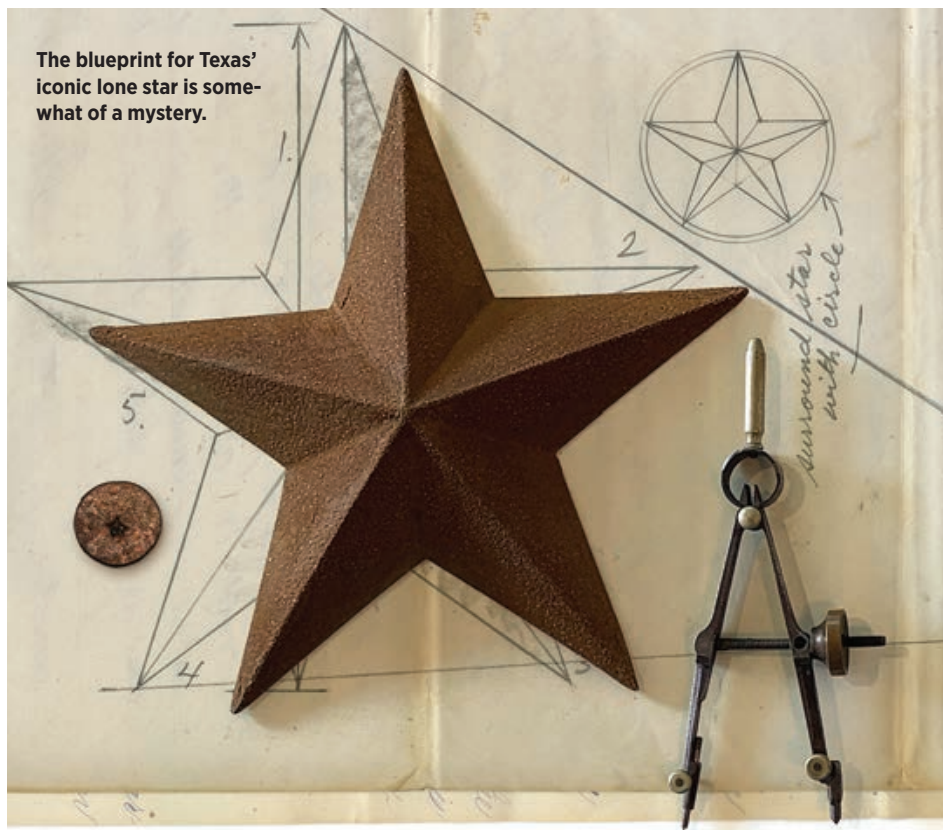
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The blueprint for Texas' iconic lone star is somewhat of a mystery.

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NEXT MONTH

Texas Feels a Draft Craft breweries bring entertainment and economic opportunity to communities.



STAR: JACK MOLLOY. BEER: MAXY M | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



ON THE COVER Celia Galindo helps continue a tamalada tradition started by her grandmother in 1949 in Brownsville. Photo by John Faulk

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Your VFD Might Need You

In my lifetime, I've been a member of five volunteer fire departments [*Putting Others First*, October 2019]. More than once, I've been the only firefighter responding to a fire or wreck in our district, having to rely on manpower and equipment from a neighboring community to assist.

Chances are good your local volunteer fire department needs you. Check it out—you might be glad you did.

DOUG EARNEST | CHANDLER
TRINITY VALLEY EC

Fateful Connection to REA

My father, Walter Smith, joined the Rural Electrification Administration in 1949 as a young electrical engineer [*Our Fearless Forefather*, August 2019]. By 1951, he was running electric service into the Missouri Ozarks for the REA. Family folklore says that Dad attended an REA conference in Salt Lake City in June 1951 and was scheduled to return home on a flight with his REA co-workers.

However, I was born in Missouri while Dad was at the conference, so when a seat opened up on an earlier flight, the REA group nominated Dad to return home early to greet his newborn son. As a result, Dad was



Remembering Cliburn

In 1959, I was a senior at the El Dorado, Arkansas, high school.

Van Cliburn had just won the International Tchaikovsky

Competition in Moscow

[*Charming the Soviets*, October 2019]. True to his previously scheduled performances, he played to a full house in El Dorado.

DEPHANIE CATES | LIBERTY HILL | PEDERNALES EC



not on United Airlines Flight 610 when it crashed, killing six REA employees, including George Haggard.

I suspect that Mr. Haggard, as a top REA administrator at the conference, probably had a hand in getting Dad on that earlier flight.

ROD SMITH | NEW BRAUNFELS
PEDERNALES EC

Before He Went Uptown

The lanky, bespectacled, rather shy young man strumming a cheap guitar in my Grandmother "Honey" Elliott's rooming house in Pecos in the early 1950s was known to us only as Uncle Joe's helper. Uncle Joe was an entomologist sent by the Texas ag department to inspect the insect population. The easygoing musician was tasked

with catching and counting bugs.

Every evening after supper, we would gather in the kitchen for an impromptu concert. I was about 8, and this was just a normal grandparent visit for me.

A few years later, when he topped the charts, I realized I had spent the summer with Roy Orbison [*Wink's Spectacle*, September 2019]. Ain't Texas grand?

BRUCE BREEN | MCLEAN
GREENBELT EC

Childhood in the Big Bend

As a young kid who grew up in Coleman, we had many wonderful trips to Alpine, Marfa and the Big Bend—great folks and amazing scenery for sure [*Big Bend's Golden Triangle*, September 2019]. My father was a dentist in Coleman for many years and, in the early 1980s, even opened up a small dental office in Alpine for a couple days a week.

TOMMY WHITE | ALLEN
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Fit to a Tee

By the Numbers [Currents item about the odds of a hole-in-one, September 2019] had an extra special meaning to me. My 16-year-old grandson Clayton had just gotten a hole-in-one in his Farmington, Arkansas, high school golf tournament.

HELEN MCCAMEY | WILLS POINT
TRINITY VALLEY EC

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Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

New Year's Eve Party in Itasca

Three artists with impressive musical bloodlines will provide the entertainment for a **NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY in ITASCA**. Whey Jennings, grandson of Waylon Jennings, was born and raised in Grand Prairie. Thomas Gabriel is the oldest grandchild of Johnny and June Carter Cash. And Cagney Frizzell, named after James Cagney, is Lefty Frizzell's nephew.

Guests are welcome to bring their own food and beverages to the HILCO Civic & Event Center party **DECEMBER 31**.

The event will include a 50-50 raffle and drawings for other items. Tickets start at \$20. For \$40, guests get a meet and greet with the musicians.

HILCO Electric Cooperative built the Central Texas venue last year and hosts about 10 community events per month.

INFO ▶ (214) 212-5798, bit.ly/NYEItasca



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▶ Find more happenings online.

PHILANTHROPY

Strong Libraries

The Tocker Foundation can help make your library better. Grants support new furniture, electronic gaming, Wi-Fi hot spots, digital literacy, computers and even playgrounds. Books, too, of course.

Find more information at tocker.org. All applicants must contact Karin Gerstenhaber before applying for a grant. Application deadline is January 15.

ALMANAC

CO-OPS ARE BORN

The cooperative movement turns 175 years old December 21. On that date in 1844, 28 workers opened a cooperative store in Rochdale, England. Initially, the store carried four key items: butter, sugar, flour and oatmeal.

◀ LOOKING BACK AT ARTS AND FASHION THIS MONTH



IN THE 75 YEARS since *Texas Co-op Power* debuted in July 1944, Texas and Texans have left an indelible mark in film, theater, literature and fashion—from Charlie Dunn to Sissy Spacek.

1940s

1945 Charlie Dunn, bootmaker to the stars, begins his career at Capitol Saddlery in Austin.

1948 *Red River*, a fictional account of the first cattle drive on the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Kansas starring John Wayne, is released.

1948 James A. Michener, who spent the final years of his life in Austin, wins a Pulitzer Prize for his book *Tales of the South Pacific*.

1950s

1952 Dancer and actress Cyd Charisse of Amarillo achieves star status opposite Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*.

1956 Grace Kelly marries Prince Rainier III of Monaco. Her bridesmaids' dresses are designed by Neiman Marcus of Dallas.



1960s

1960 John Wayne's *The Alamo* is released.

1966 Katherine Anne Porter, who was born in Indian Creek, wins the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *The Collected Stories*.

1968 Poet and artist Consuelo "Chelo" González Amezcua has a solo exhibition at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio. It's the first time she is recognized for her brand of Texas filigree art.

Elf in Kaufman Has His Own Toy Story

WHEN JERRY REICHERT sees a 2-by-12-by-12-inch board at a construction site, he knows it is likely to end up on the scrap pile. That is fine with him because the scrap fits into his plans for Christmas.

“When I see that piece of lumber,” Reichert says, “I see a toy.” Actually, he sees one of 22 varieties of toys. These comprise the 5,000 wooden playthings made each year by volunteers at Hobby Crafters and distributed to children in North Texas by more than 20 churches and charities.

Reichert and his wife, Wilda, live in Kaufman and have been members of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative since the early 1970s. Two or three days a week, Reichert, 81, drives more than an hour to the Hobby Crafters workshop in Garland where he holds the unofficial title of head elf. “I took over from the guy who founded it,” Reichert says. “That was 38 years ago.”

Hobby Crafters was founded in 1944 by Dallas physician Arch McNeill, who organized friends and patients to produce toys for underprivileged children. Reichert took over in 1981 at McNeill’s request. “It’s always been strictly volunteer,” Reichert says. “You can look at my checkbook and see for yourself.” Reichert retired in 1997 from his 39-year career selling electronics for Toshiba.

The Hobby Crafters workshop houses 39 machines, including a variety of power saws and sanders, but not every one of the 40 volunteers needs to operate a power tool. “I tell people if they can lay a form on a board and draw a line around it, they’re hired,” Reichert says.

INFO ► hobbycrafters.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

1974 Wichita Falls’ Tommy Tune, actor, dancer, singer, choreographer and director, wins the first of his 10 Tony Awards—best featured actor in a musical, for *Seesaw*.

1974 Cadillac Ranch is created outside Amarillo.



1980s

1980 Comer Cottrell Jr. relocates Pro-Line Corporation, maker of Jheri curl hair products, to Dallas. It becomes the largest black-owned firm in the Southwest.

1981 Sissy Spacek of Quitman wins the best actress Academy Award for her portrayal of Loretta Lynn in *Coal Miner’s Daughter*.

1986 Larry McMurtry of Archer City wins the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *Lonesome Dove*.

1990s

1990 *Friday Night Lights* by H.G. Bissinger is published. It is adapted into a movie of the same name in 2004 and leads to a widely acclaimed TV series that ran 2006–2011.

1996 The first Texas Book Festival takes place, in Austin.

1997 Arlen isn’t on the Texas map, but when the animated TV series *King of the Hill* debuts, the characters make it feel like it could be the next town over.

2000s

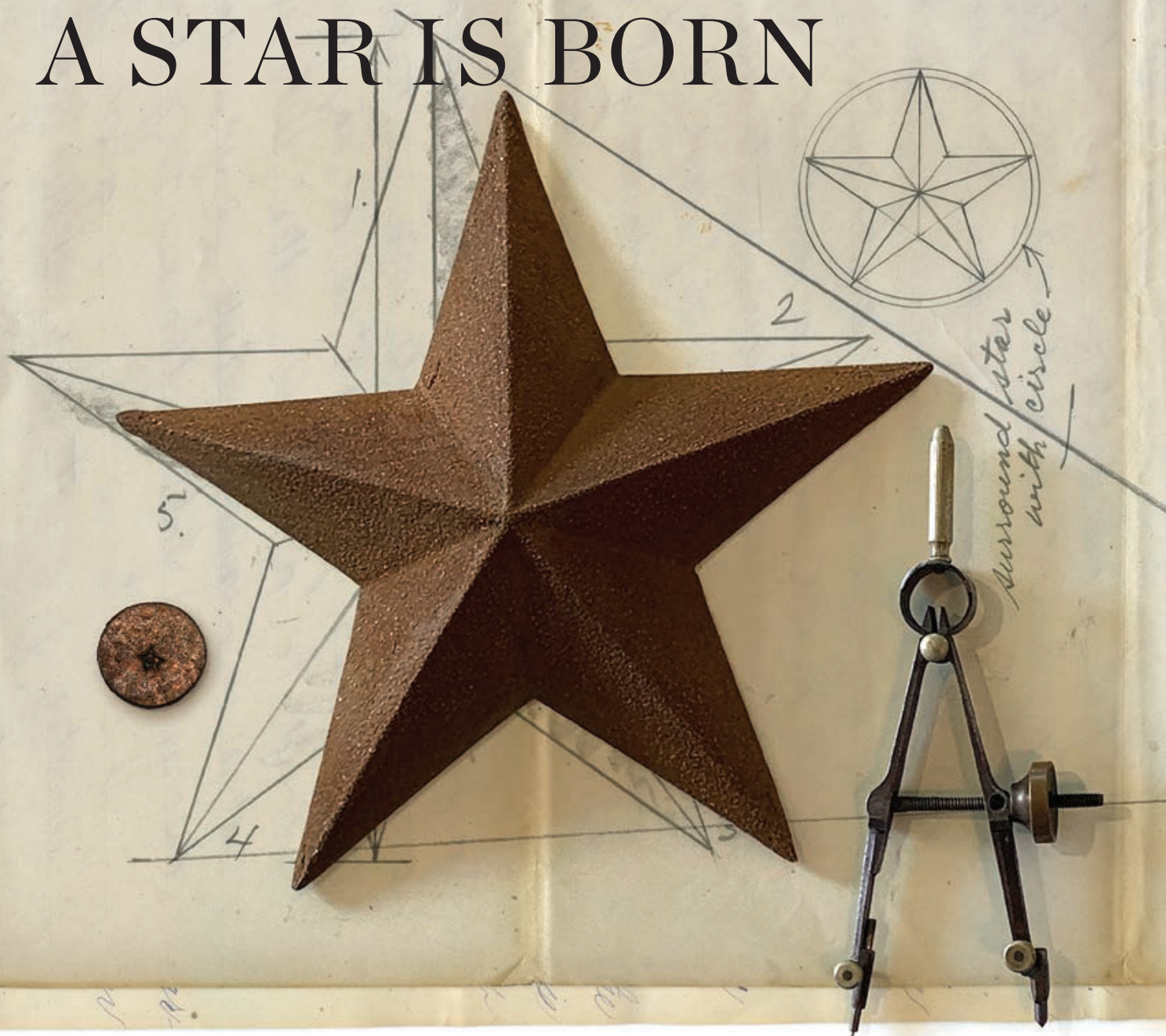


2002 Kendra Scott starts her eponymous jewelry company in a spare bedroom of her Austin home.

2003 Robert A. Caro wins a Pulitzer Prize in biography for *Master of the Senate*, one of four biographical volumes he’s written about Lyndon B. Johnson.

2013 The first episode of HGTV’s *Fixer Upper*, shot in Waco, airs.

A STAR IS BORN



Texas' iconic lone star might trace origins to 1817 Mexican coins

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

A lone star adorns the Texas state flag and the state seal. It appears on the U.S. Mint's Texas commemorative quarter, and it is the state's official gemstone cut. Texas is the Lone Star State because we Texans are proud of our beginnings as an independent republic. According to history and mythology, nothing symbolizes Texas' spirit more eloquently than a lone five-pointed star.

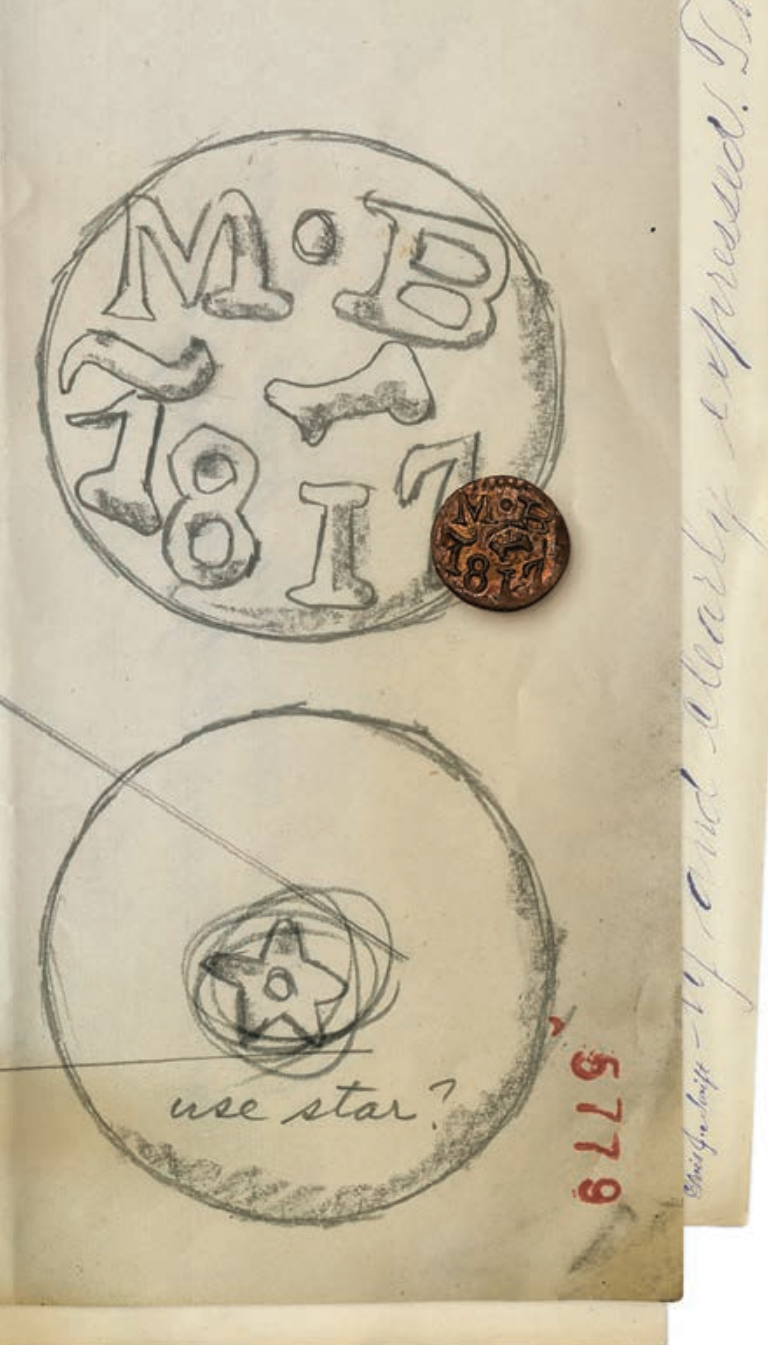
But who first came up with the idea of the lone star, and who was the first person to use the lone star as a symbol of Texas?

A lone star showed up as a symbol of Texas as early as 1819 on the flag of the ill-fated Long Expedition, an early attempt by Anglo Americans, led by James Long, to wrest control of Texas from Spain. That flag, believed to be the first Texas flag to feature a single star, incorporated 13 alternating red and white stripes with a single white star in the upper left corner. Eli Harris, a

frontier Texas printer and a leader of the Long Expedition, believed he invented the symbol and wrote to Texas President Mirabeau Lamar to that effect in 1841. "I established the flag which you now use," he wrote. "I was proud of being the man to establish the star and flag of Texas."

George Childress, author of the Texas Declaration of Independence, adopted a resolution at the general convention of the provisional government in 1836 resolving that "a single star of five points, either of gold or silver, be adopted as the peculiar emblem of this republic." The Texas Congress officially adopted the current lone star flag on January 25, 1839.

According to Houston numismatist James Bevill, the lone star—five-pointed with a dot in the middle—originated with an obscure San Antonio minter in 1817 when the central government in Mexico authorized a series of coins to be minted in San Antonio for local use.



In his 2009 book, *Paper Republic: The Struggle for Money, Credit and Independence in the Republic of Texas*, Bevill wrote that the star on the reverse side of the humble *jola* “brings us back to the very essence of Texas symbolism.” (Jola is Spanish slang for a coin of small denomination.)

Acting Spanish Gov. Manuel Pardo received authorization from Mexico City to strike small copper coins for San Antonio (then known as San Fernando de Bexar) and selected Manuel Barrera, a local merchant and administrator, to produce 8,000 jolas. These were worth $\frac{1}{2}$ real, which would be about a nickel today. The copper jolas measured 15–20 millimeters in diameter with the minter’s initials and “ $\frac{1}{2}$ ” on the obverse, or front of the coin. On the reverse was a five-pointed star with a raised dot in the center.

“It’s hard to say where the influence for a lone star came from,” Bevill says. “These were Spanish coins, after all. We don’t know if the design was done by Barrera or his helper or maybe the *alcalde*. But that was the first time the lone star representing what is today Texas first appeared.”

The Mexican government withdrew Barrera’s authority to mint the coins after about 20 months, possibly because minting coins in 1817 was difficult and the volume required presented a challenge. Barrera would have been using a steel die, or mold, to strike an imprint on the blank copper planchet (metal disc from which coins are made) with a hammer. The authority to mint the coins went to José Antonio de la Garza in 1818.

No records confirm how many jolas Barrera and Garza actually minted, but only nine of the crude coins survived. A collector found five of the nine 1817 jolas in 2004 in a coin shop.

The 1817 jolas preceded the Long Expedition by two years and the Texas revolution by almost two decades. So what did the lone star flag and emblem represent before it represented Texas as an independent republic?

According to Alamo historian and curator Bruce Winders, in vexillology—the study of flags—stars traditionally represented kingdoms or sovereigns until the end of the 18th century, when the star became a symbol of republican ideology and thus a good fit for the fledgling Texas government.

But, Winders noted, before Texas was the Lone Star State, it shared a flag—and a star—with the Mexican province of Coahuila. That flag was green, white and red with two gold stars in the middle of a white stripe.

“Prior to the Texas revolution, the Texas star flew alongside the star of Coahuila because Texas lacked a sufficient population for separate statehood as established by the Constitution of 1824,” Winders wrote in an email. “Officials designated it the Department of Texas and attached it to Coahuila for purposes of governance.”

Bevill says the lone star on the jolas might have carried the same symbolism as the flag. “There were Americans in San Antonio de Bexar who thought of Texas as having a separate identity from Mexico,” he explained.

The idea of a Lone Star State might have been a case of Eli Harris and George Childress thinking alike, but Bevill’s research makes it clear that the 1817 and 1818 coins with the five-pointed star and the distinctive raised dot in the middle created the first imprint of a lone star on Texas, the country and the world.

Clay Coppedge, a member of Bartlett EC, lives near Walburg.



BY EILEEN MATTEI
PHOTOS BY JOHN FAULK



MAKING
TAMALES
IS A HOLIDAY
TRADITION,
THOUGH
EATING
THEM NEVER
ENDS

Once upon a time, tamales appeared only at big family Christmas gatherings and special occasions in the Rio Grande Valley. Besides being tasty treats, aromatic tamales link multiple generations with memories of happy times together.

Tamales were already on the menu in Mexico and Central America 7,000 years ago, prepared for ceremonies and armies on the move. Then and now, making tamales—spiced corn dough holding a filling of meats or vegetables or sweet fruits—is a complicated, labor-intensive process. That often prompts a *tamalada*—a lively gathering of friends and family toiling in the kitchen preparing dozens and dozens of tamales.

Starting in 1949, Celia Champion would gather 20–25 female friends and relatives for a tamalada at her Brownsville home as Christmas approached. The women—*tamaleras* for a day—would make as many as 240 dozen tamales. Wearing multicolored smock aprons and white chef hats, they spread out to workstations around the house to peel garlic, grind spices, stir the *masa* (corn dough) and grind up the slow-cooked pork shoulders. Others would spread the masa on softened corn husks, top it with meat or beans and three raisins, representing the three wise men, before snugging the corn husk around it all and freezing the raw tamales.



Family snapshots show the tamalada tradition that Celia Champion started in 1949. Opposite, from left: Champion's daughter, Chickie Samano; great-granddaughter Karolina Rodero; and granddaughter Celia Galindo with a portrait of the family's matriarch.

MAKING TAMALES IS A COMPLICATED, LABOR-INTENSIVE PROCESS. THAT OFTEN PROMPTS A TAMLADA—A LIVELY GATHERING OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY TOILING IN THE KITCHEN PREPARING DOZENS AND DOZENS OF TAMALES.



Left: A Celia Champion tamalada. Above, from left: Tanya, Dora and Ana de Alba sample savory, fresh tamales prepared by De Alba Bakery using family recipes.

Seventy years later, her daughter, Chickie Samano, and her freckled, curly-haired granddaughter Celia Galindo continue the unbroken tamalada tradition. Two original tamaleras (one 104 years old) attended the six-hour work party in 2018, when the fourth generation included a 12-year-old and Champion's great-granddaughter. "Once you are in, it's till death do we part," Samano says.

"When my grandmother was alive, we would go to the Matamoros *mercado* to get the best leaves, meat and spices," Galindo recalls. "Now my cousin Cookie peels the garlic. My friend comes from Seguin with the meat grinder. I grind the spices in a blender." Nevertheless, she treasures her inherited 200-year-old stone *molcajete*, worn shiny from decades of grinding spices.

Champion's original tamalada required arduous labor to make

nearly 3,000 tamales. That prompted another tradition. "After making the first few dozen, we drink planter's punch, and the mariachis arrive. Then the *gritos* [celebratory shouts] get louder," Samano explains. "Mother was a party animal, always cooking. On her deathbed, she made me promise we would keep the tamalada."

But traditions adapt to the times, so the tamalada now gathers in Galindo's catering business kitchen. "The ladies want to do less and party more, so we make about 50–60 dozen tamales," she says. Still, that's 720 tamales. The women and their families eat the tamales at a Christmas Eve open house, on the religious feast of Candelaria on February 2 and later that month during Charro Days, a celebration of binational cultures and traditions.

The tamaleras also meet on January 6, Three Kings Day or the Epiphany, to eat the wreath-shaped sweet bread called *rosca*



Below: A De Alba Bakery tamale with shredded beef and green tomatillo salsa is wrapped in masa and a banana leaf. Bottom: A vegetable Oaxacan tamale at De Alba includes zucchini, corn, carrots, peas, onion and a bit of mozzarella cheese.



de reyes. The three who find baby Jesus dolls in their slices take charge of organizing the next tamalada.

Luis Reyes became part of a tamale-making team as a boy, joining cousins, parents, aunts and uncles, all under the direction of his grandmother. “Tamale making is an all-day activity. The whole family works together before Christmas,” says Reyes, communications manager for Magic Valley Electric Cooperative in Mercedes.

“Now the family is so big we make tamales twice a year,” he says. “My grandmother loves the American tradition of a family Thanksgiving. She blended that with the Mexican tradition of family tamale making, so we have tamales with the turkey at Thanksgiving.”

Rio Grande Valley parents once warned their unruly children: “Behave or the only thing you will unwrap at Christmas will be a tamale.” Sure, Christmas still finds Hispanic families at feasts anchored by mountains of beef, pork, chicken and bean tamales. But people readily acknowledge that making tamales at home is a time-consuming, fading art, while the convenience of buying ready-made ones is priceless. Hundreds of dozens of the foil-wrapped packets of tamales sell on a daily basis at various commercial tamale-making kitchens, like the one the de Alba family runs in Pharr.

Inside De Alba Bakery, smiles of a happy crowd get wider as the tamale aroma envelops them. They know from experience the subtly spiced masa of the tamales is as soft as butter and surrounds a savory filling inside the wrapper. De Alba makes 14 different types of tamales, from perennial favorites pork and chicken to Oaxacan vegetarian and bean or combos like cheese paired with jalapeno, beans, pork or chicken.

To satisfy a sweet tooth, De Alba Bakery makes a fudgy Mexican chocolate tamale that comes with Kahlúa sauce as well as a not-too-sweet vanilla-butter tamale common in central Mexico and a scrumptious raisin and cinnamon tamale. As a bakery, it also has shelves brimming with fresh Mexican pastries: *empanadas*, *conchas* and *hornitos*.

Ana de Alba’s grandmother made tortillas and tamales in a



DE ALBA BAKERY'S CHICKEN TAMALES

20–30 corn husks

4 cups water

5 pounds whole chicken (skinless and cut up)

1 onion, cut in half

6 cloves garlic

1 tablespoon salt

1–1½ teaspoons powdered cumin, to taste

1–1½ teaspoons ground black pepper, to taste

5 pounds prepared De Alba tamale dough (available at dealbakery.com), divided use

1. Soak corn husks in a container of hot water 1–2 hours to make them pliable. Keep them submerged.
2. Boil 4 cups water in a pot. Add chicken, onion, garlic and salt. Reduce to medium-low heat and simmer 30 minutes or until cooked. Remove chicken from broth, cool, debone and shred or cut up. In a blender, mix the leftover broth with 2 tablespoons of tamale dough (also called masa). Pour broth mixture back into pot and add meat, cumin

and black pepper. Stir and simmer 15–20 minutes to thicken the filling mixture.

3. Drain corn husks and stand them in a container with narrow ends up. Husks have a rough and smooth side. Spread dough on the smooth side, starting in the middle, about 3–4 inches from the bottom—the wider end—and then spread to the bottom and sides. This should be a thin layer of dough, about ⅛ inch thick. Spoon 2–3 tablespoons of meat mixture. After spreading meat mixture onto dough, you can add optional ingredients before rolling it. Optional ingredients include corn, squash, roasted peppers and cheese. Roll husk over from one side to the other and overlap. Now fold top of husk down and squeeze bottom of tamale. Every tamale can be individually tied with string or left-over thin strips of husk. Also, tamales can be tied in bundles of a half-dozen.

4. Position tamales, folded part down, in a steamer basket that is deep enough. If not, just lay on basket carefully with folded points facing down. Position basket in pot with 2–3 inches of water and bring to a boil then cover well with tightfitting lid. Lower heat and steam on medium-low for 1 hour. If necessary, add more water during the cooking process but let the tamales steam an extra 15 minutes to make up for lost heat.

5. Turn off heat and let tamales set, covered, 10 minutes before handling to avoid breaking them.

► Makes 20–30 tamales.

COOK'S TIP For better, fresher flavor, uncooked tamales can be kept frozen and cooked as needed.

small San Benito shop in the 1960s. Her parents expanded that into De Alba Bakery in the 1980s and soon after made tamales available year-round. Today, she is CEO of the bakery, which has two Valley locations, an online store and a staff that has spanned four generations of the de Alba family.

“We’re so blessed to have the border next door to get all the quality, natural ingredients we want—corn leaves, dried chile pods and spices,” de Alba says. The kitchen crew makes the masa from scratch, cooking dried corn for one to two hours before grinding it. Spices and chiles are added to the cooked meats and other fillings, which with the masa are fed into equipment that forms the tamales. Hand wrapping the corn husk around the tamale is the final step.

“Our tamales are stuffed with more meat than the industry average,” de Alba says. “Pleasing our customer comes first, and the bottom line takes care of itself.” In the same vein, De Alba Bakery limits what it ships coast to coast from its website and through Amazon. “Some things won’t ship well without preservatives, and we won’t use them.”

The bakery sells about 50–100 dozen daily, but during the hol-

iday season, it switches to double shifts and brings in additional equipment to meet the demand for thousands of dozens of tamales. Orders for 10–20 dozen are common, although some customers request 100–200 dozen tamales for parties.

“Winter Texans were asking for beef tamales, so we decided to try it,” de Alba says. Dora de Alba, Ana’s mother, who is in charge of tamale quality control and recipe innovation, perfected the beef brisket tamale.

“Mom knew that Mexican women love cooking. She was the first one to provide made-from-scratch masa for sale. That made it simple for women to take prepared masa home and make tamales with their kids without slaving all day,” Ana de Alba says. Making it even easier, De Alba Bakery offers recipes for tamales and other treats in their online blog and stocks cumin, oregano, anise and chiles in the bakery.

“Everybody has become accustomed to eating fresh tamales for lunch and dinner all year long,” she adds. “Tamales are faster than hamburgers and taste better, too.”

Eileen Mattei, a Nueces EC member, is a Texas master naturalist in Harlingen.

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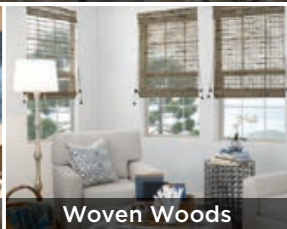


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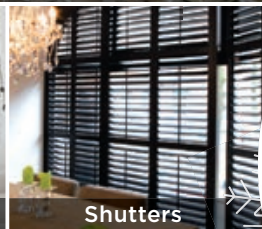
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Give the Gift of Time



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER ALAN LESLEY

MANY OF US HAVE THAT ONE family member—or maybe even a few—who, when asked what items are on his or her Christmas wish list, invariably answers, “I have everything I need.” This well-intentioned reply can frustrate a desire to cross a name off your list or check a box during the frenzied run-up to the holiday. But it’s also an opportunity to present a loved one with a more meaningful gift.

Time spent completing an errand or task that might be impractical or difficult for a relative or friend is a way to express affection without resorting to the often-impersonal gesture of pulling an item off a store shelf in defeat.

Tasks like changing the filter in a heating system; replacing batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors; or caulking around windows can help make someone’s home safer or shave a few dollars off an electric bill. While you’re at it, make lunch or bring a baked good. The trinity of time together, a needed home repair or chore accomplished, and a homemade treat or

meal is a tough one to improve upon, as gifts go.

CECA also appreciates the gift of your time. Whether it’s spent in attendance at the annual meeting, where we get valuable feedback on how to continually improve our processes and operations, or it’s a moment taken to alert us to a problem you notice with a power line or meter, those small yet meaningful measures of your time allow CECA to thrive. Your willingness to engage with the co-op and frequent role as our eyes and ears in the field enable us to maintain a level of service that we’re proud of.

So why not extend that tradition of providing gifts of time and service to those closest to you this year? Take a look around an older relative’s home for any leaky faucets or outdoor lightbulbs that need replacing. Check for loose door or window locks, or clean an out-of-reach window. Your thoughtful gift will keep on giving, as it makes someone’s life that much easier or safer.

From all of us at your electric cooperative, merry Christmas and happy holidays.





Merry Christmas

CECA will be closed Tuesday–Wednesday, December 24–25, for Christmas and Wednesday, January 1, for New Year's Day.



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Early Office: Monday, Wednesday
and Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.;
closed 1–2 p.m.

Eastland Office: Tuesday and
Thursday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

General Manager

Alan Lesley

Board of Directors

Randy Denning, District 1
Pete McDougal, District 2
Ruby Solomon, District 3
Monty Carlisle, District 4
Troy Stewart, District 5
Loren Stroebel, District 6
Phil Taylor, District 7

Report an Outage

CECA crews are available 24/7 in the
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Celebrating New Beginnings



Whether it's a new car, home, office or even just a new pair of boots, celebrating beginnings is a blessing and a joy. CECA celebrated its new office twice in October: at the open house and at the 81st annual meeting.

Open House

CECA hosted an open house September 30 for its new headquarters building at 349 Industrial Blvd. in Comanche. Some 150 people packed the complex to catch a glimpse of the new building and view the new technology the cooperative has implemented.

For more than 60 years, CECA made its home at its facility on West Wrights Avenue. However, with the growing demands of an ever-changing industry, the co-op outgrew that building. "We simply don't have the space," said Alan Lesley, CECA general manager. "And there is no room left for expansion."

To alleviate the overcrowding, CECA purchased and rebuilt the old Sidran building on Industrial Boulevard. The new facility affords space for all employees and has room for growth. Multiple safety features incorporated into the facility's design help ensure the integrity of the grid.

Visitors to the open house were treated to a tour of the new facility and a delicious chili-cheese hot dog luncheon.



A party is a party, regardless of age. Fernanda and Everly enjoy the festivities at the open house.





The Sam Whiskey Band entertains members prior to CECA's annual meeting.



A little putting practice and a lot of popcorn make for a fun time.

Annual Meeting

What began as a cold and blustery weekend turned pleasant just in time for CECA's 81st annual meeting October 12. Members and their families and guests met at the new headquarters in Comanche for entertainment by the Sam Whiskey Band, a health fair, popcorn and other refreshments, and a little mini-golf on the putting green.

The purpose of the meeting, attended by 211 members, was to elect directors for three districts. Three incumbent board members were reelected for an additional term: Ruby Solomon, District 3; Troy Stewart, District 5; and



Above: CECA employees were on hand with seven all-terrain vehicles to transport members from the parking lot to the covered meeting area.



Left: State Rep. J.D. Sheffield speaks to the membership about bills that did and didn't pass in the latest legislative session.

Loren Stroebel, District 6.

General Manager Alan Lesley spoke to the membership about challenges to the grid and to the electric utility industry as a whole. "From changes in the way our electricity is generated to changes in technologies designed to provide more reliable delivery, every day we wrestle with how best to adapt to an industry that is continually transforming," Lesley said. He also spoke of the technology incorporated into the new building and the necessity for it.

State Rep. J.D. Sheffield spoke about potential legislative changes that could impact rural communities, including prospective bills affecting property taxes, health care, agriculture, school funding and eminent domain. He closed with the newly expanded "move over" law, crediting CECA's Shorty Hatley for his input in getting the new safety law started.

At the meeting, five employees received pins honoring employment milestones. Jennifer Hanson and Shelley Thedford received 20-year pins, and Ryan Harris, Shane Kinnamon and Brandon Kidwell received five-year pins.

After a drawing for door prizes, the morning closed with 523 attendees enjoying a delicious lunch of fried catfish and chicken strips catered by Catfish Corner of Abilene.



More than 200 CECA members attended the meeting at the new headquarters.



Members enjoy heaping plates of catfish and chicken strips freshly cooked by Catfish Corner of Abilene.



Companies participating in the health fair included AccelHealth, Comanche County Medical Center, Rising Star Nursing Center, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Adult Protective Services, Cornerstone Community Action Agency and the Ark.



State Rep. J.D. Sheffield, left, and Larry “Shorty” Hatley.

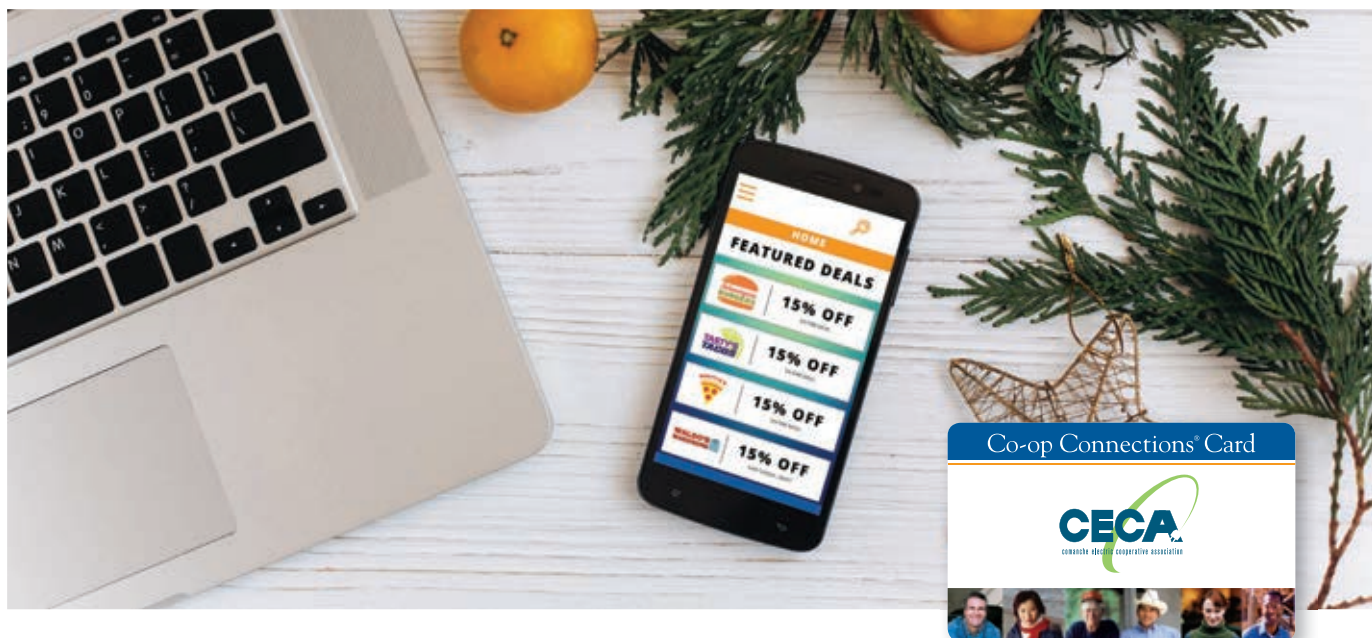
‘Move Over’ Law Expands to Co-op Vehicles

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER AT A LUNCHEON IN COMANCHE A COUPLE OF years ago resulted in CECA employee Shorty Hatley’s idea being codified into law.

State Rep. J.D. Sheffield and Hatley were seated next to each other when Hatley shared his thoughts on the safety of roadside utility vehicles—suggesting the “move over” law that applies to first responders should expand to include utility workers. Sheffield saw potential in Hatley’s idea.

After their conversation, Sheffield’s office crafted a bill during the interim between Texas’ legislative sessions. During session, the bill was filed and later merged with a similar bill filed by another representative. After passing the House, the bill was successfully incorporated into the language of larger transportation code legislation that was passed by the Senate.

The “move over/slow down” bill was signed into law by Gov. Greg Abbott and became effective September 1. In the presence of flashing amber and blue lights, drivers now must move over a lane or reduce speed to ensure the safety of workers alongside busy roadways. Thank you, Shorty Hatley, for the role you played in creating this law.



New and Improved Co-op Connections Program

CECA HAS BEEN A PART OF YOUR COMMUNITY FOR MORE THAN 80 years. While providing reliable electric service is the core of our business, we're always looking for new ways to bring value to our members.

One of the value-added benefits of being part of our cooperative is the Co-op Connections program, and we recently gave the program an overhaul!

You still have access to all the same great, money-saving features, but we've expanded the number of deals available to you, added a user-friendly mobile app and created an offer redemption process that's easy to use on the go.

What Is the Co-op Connections Program?

The Co-op Connections program is a free discount program for our members. When you sign up for Co-op Connections, you can save money on hotels, event tickets, prescriptions, doctor visits and more.

You also have access to national discounts from some big-name brands, such as Sprint, Dish Network, Uber, Six Flags and many others.

In total, there are more than 25,000 businesses across the country that offer discounts through the Co-op Connections program, and co-op members are saving lots of money. Through prescription savings alone, Co-op Connections users nationwide have saved more than \$100 million.

Try Our New Mobile App

In our original Co-op Connections program, you had to carry around a plastic card and show it to local businesses to get a discount. But there's no need to carry around a physical card anymore. All you have to do is download the Co-op Connections app from Apple's App store or Google Play.

Through the new app, your card displays right on your

phone. To redeem an offer, just show the merchant the discount listed in the app.

Of course, if an app isn't your style, you can always print a deal from the Co-op Connections website and take it with you to get a discount at a local merchant. You can even print out a Co-op Connections card from the website, or stop by one of our offices to pick one up if you prefer to have something tangible in your purse or wallet.

Check Out the Discounts

To participate in the Co-op Connections program, all you have to do is create a free account. You can create an account by downloading the mobile app or visiting connections.coop. Once your account is set up, you'll have access to all the money-saving deals available through the program.

Interested in offering a Co-op Connections discount at your business?

The Co-op Connections program is a smart way to get customers in your door. By participating in the program, you'll introduce your business to our members plus the other more than 32 million members of Touchstone Energy Cooperatives.

Participation in the program is free. We simply ask that you offer a discount on your products or services to members of CECA and other participating cooperatives. In exchange for your participation, we'll promote your discount to our members.

Once in the Co-op Connections system, you can directly manage the discounts offered by your business, change your discount as often as you wish, restrict how often it can be used and even have access to analytics that show how many people viewed your deal.

To learn more about the program, visit ceca.coop or connections.coop.



Notice of Capital Credit Allocations

CAPITAL CREDITS WERE RECENTLY ALLOCATED TO ACCOUNTS of members of CECA for the year 2018.

After the end of each calendar year, cooperatives must determine what, if any, margins from operations were made during the year and allocate these margins to members' accounts.

CECA's operating margin is any money left after all of its operating costs have been paid. Because members are owners of the cooperative, operating margins are allocated to their accounts as capital credits.

These capital credits will be returned to members in the future in the form of estate or general returns when doing so will not weaken the financial condition of the cooperative as determined by the board of directors.

In the meantime, the funds remain invested in the cooperative plant, credited to each member's account, even if the member moves away from CECA's lines.

It is important that departing members keep the co-op

informed of their current mailing addresses so that those members can receive capital credits returns when they are paid.

Capital credits for 2018 were calculated by multiplying each member's bill by the respective multiplier below. For example, if your total annual residential bill from the cooperative (consisting of energy billing and power cost adjustment) was \$500, simply multiply that amount by 0.06102596. The product is \$30.51.

In calculating your total bill, include any security light charge, but do not include any tax, service or miscellaneous charges.

If you have any questions concerning these calculations, please feel free to contact the co-op office.

This article is intended to serve as an official notice of allocation of capital credits for 2018.

Residential.	0.06102596
General Service	0.07889540
Large Power	0.03430378



Although much of the state is unaccustomed to snow and ice, temperatures can fall below freezing even in Texas, potentially causing power outages. To keep safe and comfortable during a winter power outage:

Report outages to your co-op.

Turn off electrical appliances that were operating at the time the power went off. Leave one light on so you'll know when service has been restored.

Keep warm by closing off rooms you don't need and use only safe sources of heat, like a wood stove. Do not burn charcoal indoors. If you operate lanterns or fuel-fired cook stoves or heaters, make sure that you have adequate ventilation.

Don't drive unless absolutely necessary until conditions improve. If you must drive, go slowly.

CECA encourages you to always practice safety.



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Nixon's Attack on Co-ops

President tried to block co-op loan program

BY ELLEN STADER

CO-OP LIFE HAS NEVER BEEN EASY. DURING the early decades of rural electrification, cooperatives in America had to defend themselves from special interests, with private electric companies and politicians often leading the charge.

Possibly the highest-profile attack on co-ops began just after Christmas in 1972. The Nixon administration directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to announce that, effective January 1, 1973, it would deny funds already authorized by Congress for the Rural Electrification Administration's upcoming fiscal year and then terminate the agency's direct loan program. For 36 years, this program had enabled the REA to offer loans to co-ops at 2% interest.

President Richard M. Nixon's plan was to replace the federally funded REA loans with commercially backed loans that would be offered at 5% interest. This move, designed to cut more than \$200 million in federal spending, would gut the rural co-op system by impounding the federal funds already allocated to hundreds of electric and telephone co-ops. In addition to taking away the loans that had been approved, this action would more than double the interest rates others would have to pay on new loans.

Robert D. Partridge, then-general manager of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, said the action would "wipe out many of the more than 1,000 rural electric systems and ... threaten the welfare of millions of consumers who depend on them." Many co-ops would no longer be able to offer service to people in outlying areas. That same winter, co-op systems across the



President Nixon approves a new REA direct loan program as, from left, William Erwin, assistant secretary of agriculture; David Hamil, REA administrator; and Earl Butz, secretary of agriculture, look on.

country were suffering severe damage from ice storms, but they were left without access to the emergency funding customarily offered by the REA.

Co-ops didn't take the new policy lying down. On January 23, three weeks after the USDA's announcement, 1,400 electric co-op representatives from the 46 states across the country with electric cooperatives (including 135 Texans) converged on Washington, D.C. Participants traveled to the Rural Electric Rally to persuade their representatives in Congress to restore the REA direct loan program.

Lawmakers rode to co-ops' rescue with legislation that would allow the REA to extend loans in the full amount authorized each year. They also estab-

lished the Rural Electrification and Telephone Revolving Fund that allowed for a standard interest rate of 5%, plus a special interest rate of 2% for those eligible. The Senate and House bills both passed quickly, and the fate of co-ops hung on Nixon's pen.

Finally, on the REA's 38th birthday—May 11, 1973, exactly 19 weeks after first issuing the order that would have crippled the agency out of his "concern for the nation's economy"—Nixon signed the new legislation implementing a modified direct loan program for the REA. Ironically, this new arrangement resulted in greater co-op financing than ever.

More than \$1.2 billion was made available to rural electric and telephone co-ops in 1973, the highest amount of loans granted in the program's history. The REA administrator's report from that year notes, "Fiscal 1973 was a remarkable year in the history of the Rural Electrification Administration."

Ellen Stader is a writer in Austin.

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Cookies & Candies

THIS RECIPE FOR CARAMEL POPCORN graced the pages of our magazine in December 1997, but its nostalgic, Cracker Jack appeal is timeless—especially this time of year. The original recipe calls for margarine, but use butter for the best flavor. To balance the sweetness and create an eye-catching, gift-worthy mix, I up the salty crunch with pecans (or use your favorite nut) and pepitas. For a kick of spice, add a pinch of cayenne to the sugar syrup, or use Picosos Hot Chile Peanuts (made in Helotes). You can pop your own kernels in a neutral vegetable oil or use store-bought popcorn.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Caramel Popcorn

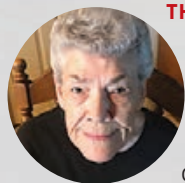
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
- 2 cups firmly packed light brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 6 quarts popcorn (about 1 cup unpopped kernels)
- 12 ounces roasted salted peanuts
- 1 cup roasted salted pecans or cashews
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup roasted salted pepitas

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees.
2. Melt the butter in a large, deep pan. Stir in the sugar, syrup and salt and bring to a boil. Boil 5 minutes without stirring. Remove from heat and stir in baking soda and vanilla (mixture will foam).
3. Pour the mixture over the popcorn and nuts in a large roasting pan and use a rubber spatula to combine until the ingredients are thoroughly coated.
4. Bake 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Transfer the hot mixture

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Retro Recipes

Cookies & Candy



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

SUE WEST | WISE COUNTY EC

These cookies will make your house smell like Christmas while baking and will please young and old when served. Spices, citrus zest and a crackled top with sugar coating—these treats meld all the holiday flavors into one delicious whole.

Cinnamon Crackles

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened (no substitutions)
 - ½ cup shortening
 - 1 cup sugar
 - ½ cup packed brown sugar
 - 1 egg
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - ½ teaspoon almond extract
 - 2½ cups flour
 - 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
 - 2 teaspoons baking soda
 - 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
 - 2 teaspoons ground nutmeg
 - ½ teaspoon salt
 - 2 teaspoons grated orange zest
 - 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- Additional sugar for rolling cookies

1. Cream butter, shortening and sugars thoroughly in a large bowl. Add egg and extracts; mix well.
2. In a separate bowl, combine flour, cinnamon, baking soda, cream of tartar, nutmeg, salt and zests. Add by heaping spoonfuls into butter and sugar mixture and stir until combined (or use the low setting on an electric mixer).
3. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put about ½ cup sugar into a bowl. Shape dough into 1-inch balls and roll in sugar. Place balls 2 inches apart on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake 12–15 minutes or until cracked and very lightly browned. ▶ Makes 6 dozen cookies.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

to waxed paper to completely cool. Store in an airtight container.
▶ Makes about 6 quarts.

Browned Butter Cherry Almond Chocolate Chip Cookies

MARIAN EVONIUK | PEDERNALES EC

This “everything” cookie will keep you coming back for more. The cookie has a crunchy texture from the almonds and oats, but then you get a bite with chocolate or a tart cherry and know you’re going to eat another one (or two).

- ½ cup sliced almonds
- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- ½ cup coconut oil
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¾ cup packed light brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups rolled oats
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- ½ cup tart dried cherries
- ½ cup shredded sweetened coconut

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place almonds into an 8-by-8-inch baking dish and toast until light golden brown, about 8 minutes. Remove and set aside.
2. While almonds are toasting, stir together flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a medium glass mixing bowl and set aside.
3. Place butter into a 10- or 12-inch light-colored heavy skillet and cover with a see-through lid. Heat on medium until butter is a soft brown color and emits a nutty aroma, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in the coconut oil and pour into a large glass mixing bowl. Include the browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Let stand 10 minutes.
4. Add the sugars to the butter and oil mixture using an electric mixer on medium speed until just blended. Add the eggs and beat until well blended, about 1 minute. Stir in the vanilla. Gradually stir in the combined dry ingredients followed by the rolled oats, chocolate chips, cherries, coconut and toasted almonds.



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\$100 Recipe Contest

May's recipe contest topic is **Spring Celebrations**. Send your favorite dish for showers and graduations. The deadline is **December 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.

5. Using a metal scoop (cookie-size for small cookies, ice cream-size for giant cookies), drop cookie dough 2½ inches apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake 10–12 minutes, until edges are a light golden brown. Remove and allow cookies to cool on baking sheet 5 minutes before enjoying. ▶ Makes 18–24 cookies.

COOK'S TIP Dried cranberries or raisins can be substituted for the cherries.

Chocolate Lemon Balls

CHRISTINE HENDERSON | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

"A few years back, I visited Italy and fell in love with their chocolate and lemon candies," Henderson says. "This is my reimagined version of the flavors I found there."

- 1 cup white chocolate chips
- ½ cup finely chopped slivered almonds
- ½ cup finely crumbled lemon cookies
- ½ teaspoon lemon extract
- 1 cup semisweet or dark chocolate chips
- Sugar sprinkles (any color)

1. Put the white chocolate chips into a heatproof bowl and microwave on 50% power 30 seconds, then take it out and stir. Continue microwaving in 30-second intervals at 50% power, stirring as needed. Once the pieces are mostly melted, remove from the microwave and let the remaining bits melt as you stir. This should take about 1–2 minutes. (Don't try to cook at higher power, which creates a less spreadable consistency.)

2. Once the white chocolate is melted, add the chopped almonds, cookies and lemon extract to the white chocolate and stir until smooth. Let sit 1–3 minutes, until a doughlike texture develops.

3. Wearing plastic disposable gloves or wetting your hands so the dough doesn't stick to them, form dough into 1-inch balls, rolling them in your hands until they are nicely rounded. Place balls on waxed paper in a sealed plastic container (single layer) and freeze 1 hour or longer.

4. Melt semisweet or dark chips using

the same method as the white chocolate chips. Place a wire cookie rack over a cookie sheet. Remove lemon balls from the freezer. Drop a lemon ball into the liquid chocolate mixture and quickly turn to coat. Use a fork to remove the dipped balls and place on wire rack. Repeat with each ball until done. Then cover with sugar sprinkles.

5. Refrigerate chocolate lemon balls on the rack for about 15 minutes. Cover and refrigerate until ready to eat, at least 15 minutes more. Remaining balls should be kept in a cool place in an airtight container. ▶ Makes 20 balls.

COOK'S TIP Cookies and almonds can be pulsed together in a food processor. Don't use lemon sandwich cookies.

WEB EXTRAS

▶ Read these recipes on our website to see the original Caramel Popcorn recipe from December 1997 and find a recipe for I Almost Ate Fruitcake Cookies.



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Deserts

TEXAS SETTLERS HAVE FOR MILLENNIA braved the harsh terrain of the Chihuahuan Desert. It's the kind of place where you shake out your boots before wearing them and look twice before stepping (or sitting). Enjoy the terrain where yucca, creosote, mesquite, agave and ocotillo dot the landscape and mountains loom in the distance. **GRACE FULTZ**

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

▲ **KAY BELL**, Nueces EC: "The century plant, havard agave, grows in the higher elevations of the Chihuahuan Desert in the Big Bend."



▲ **J. REAGAN FERGUSON**, Central Texas EC: "Enjoying a peaceful sunset in Guadalupe Mountains National Park."

▼ **MARK HOLLY**, Bandera EC: "It was a beautiful spring day in one of my favorite national parks, Big Bend."



▲ **MIKE PRESTIGIACOMO**, Bartlett EC: "Once upon a time—a tree."

▼ **MATTHEW CROTWELL**, Guadalupe Valley EC: "Nighthawk awaiting dusk for feeding time."



UPCOMING CONTESTS

APRIL SUNSETS	DUE DECEMBER 10
MAY FAIRS AND CARNIVALS	DUE JANUARY 10
JUNE STATE PARKS	DUE FEBRUARY 10

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests.

Pick of the Month Celtic Angels Christmas

Marshall December 19

(903) 934-7992, memorialcityhall.com

A quintet of singers from Ireland highlights a show that includes instrumentalists and Irish dancing. The set list includes traditional Christmas carols and Irish favorites. The event is part of the premiere season for the Memorial City Hall Performance Center, built in 1907 and former home to municipal offices and courts.



CELTIC ANGELS CHRISTMAS: COURTESY CMI ENTERTAINMENT INC. MISTLETOE: VERASTUCHELOVA | DREAMSTIME.COM. BEACH: ANNE WEBBER | DREAMSTIME.COM

December 7

Conroe Bark for Life Dog Walk,
1-800-227-2345, relayforlife.org/
barkconroeandwalkercotx

Frisco Hope for the Holidays Masquerade,
(972) 977-6064, melodyofhope.org/gala

Hubbard Magnolia & Mistletoe: A Victorian
Christmas, (254) 625-0258, hubbardcity.com

Johnson City Lamplight Tours of LBJ's
Boyhood Home and a Frontier Christmas,
(830) 868-7128

Rusk Cherokee Craft & Trade Fair,
(903) 268-1598

Santo Community Christmas Craft Show,
(940) 659-3990

Taylor Mistletoe Market, (512) 666-9003,
artoffcenter.com

Dripping Springs [7-8] Redbud Artisan
Market, (512) 660-3328

Keller [7-8] Keller High School Indianettes
Craft Show, (925) 708-7383,
indianettes.com/craft-show

December 7
Taylor
Mistletoe Market



8

Fort Worth Woman's Club Holiday
Open House, (817) 335-3525,
thewomansclubfw.com

Moody Mother Neff Christmas,
(254) 853-2389



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Palo Pinto Frontier Christmas,
(940) 769-2600, palopintohistory.com

Ransom Canyon Christmas Tour of Homes,
(806) 829-2637, ransomcanyonchapel.com

13

Cuero [13-14] Christmas in Downtown,
(361) 485-8008, cueromainstreet.com

Levelland [13-14] South Plains Showdown,
(806) 894-4161, malleteventcenter.com/events

Chandler [13-15] Night in Bethlehem,
(903) 849-6042, nib.wlbcc.com

14

Athens Wreaths Across America,
(903) 670-1031,
wreathsacrossamerica.org/tx0725

Burnet Christmas at Old Fort Croghan,
(512) 756-8281, highlandlakesofburnetcounty.com

Chappell Hill Garden Club Christmas Home Tour, (713) 562-6191

Gainesville All That Glitters Holiday Home Tour, (940) 668-8900, mortonmuseum.org

Jacksonville Cherokee Craft & Trade Fair,
(903) 268-1598

Sanger Sanger High Craft Show,
(940) 206-0007

Waxahachie YMCA 5K Santa Run,
(469) 309-4045

15

Stonewall 50th Annual LBJ Christmas Tree Lighting, (830) 644-2252

December 28-January 2
South Padre Island
New Year's at the Beach



19

Seguin Third Thursday in Downtown Seguin,
(830) 379-0730, seguindba.org

Anson [19-21] Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball, (325) 696-9040, texasccb.com

New Braunfels [19-22] The Nutcracker,
(830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

21

Boerne Winter Solstice Celebration Circle,
(830) 537-4212, visitboerne.org

Morgan Mill Live Nativity, (214) 793-9698,
morganmillumc.com

28

South Padre Island [28-Jan. 2] New Year's at the Beach, (254) 681-2354,
singlesinagriculture.org

31

Fredericksburg Countdown to 2020,
(830) 997-7521, fbgtx.org

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Camp Street Blues

Historic venue fuels memories of Crockett's musical legacy

WITH CREDITS TO BURN DURING MY senior year at the University of Texas, I enrolled in a class on the history of rock 'n' roll, expecting to listen to Led Zeppelin and ride an easy A into the burnt orange sunset. When the professor played a song from a scratchy blues record from 1926 by an artist I had never heard of, I realized I was in for more than I bargained for. The class turned out to be tough, but it set fire to my blues-loving soul.

That track was *Match Box Blues* by Blind Lemon Jefferson. It was a raw, visceral song with a clanging guitar and haunting vocals. I had never heard anything like it, and when I learned Jefferson was from Texas, I was hooked. My love for the blues drove me to East Texas and historic Camp Street in Crockett.

When I found Camp Street, a few blocks from the Houston County Courthouse square, I wasn't sure if I was in the right spot until I noticed a mural of Jefferson painted on a brick wall. Next to Jefferson were more musicians, including T-Bone Walker, Big Mama Thornton and Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, who all played in Crockett when it was a stop for blues artists traveling the Chitlin' Circuit between Houston and Dallas.

In the 1930s, Camp Street hummed as one of the most vibrant business districts in East Texas. Both sides of the street were lined with businesses: a beauty parlor, an all-night laundry, a shoe repair shop and a juke joint named the Jolly Joy. And there in the middle of the action, you'd find the Starlight—now called Camp



Chet Garner and Pipp Gillette on the front porch of Camp Street Café in Crockett.

building with its red sheet metal exterior and large front porch was built in 1931 by a local rancher named V.H. "Hoyt" Porter. On the porch were three doors: Through the middle door was a barber-shop and through the left door, a pool hall. Through the right door was a café and taxi stand that featured a dice table and bar. On any given night in the 1940s, you might find bluesman Lightnin' Hopkins playing for tips. In the '50s or '60s, you might find B.B. King or Fats Domino enjoying a beer after a show at the nearby Paradise Inn.

The café was closed for many years, but in 2008 it got a second chance. Porter's grandsons, Guy and Pipp Gillette, bought the property and turned it into a listening room to honor Crockett's musical legacy. Since then, this small stage has hosted artists including Michael Martin Murphy, Kinky Friedman and Ruthie Foster.

Street Café, the town's only remaining blues-era stalwart.

The quaint

On the night of my visit, Pipp, a singer and songwriter himself, was scheduled to perform.

I found a room packed with people at small square tables enjoying wine (it's BYOB) and munching on snacks from a counter in the back. When Pipp took the stage, a hush fell over the crowd. For the next hour or so, Pipp played one song after another, woven together with his stories and meandering thoughts. The experience epitomized why I love a good listening room, as the only sounds coming from the crowd were applause and laughs at Pipp's jokes.

As I enjoyed the show, I imagined the room in decades past, as the greatest blues legends played guitar and told stories of the road. I left feeling anything but blue.

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 Camp Street Café. Also, for more about the blues, read *Texas: A Blues State* in our March 2019 issue.

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