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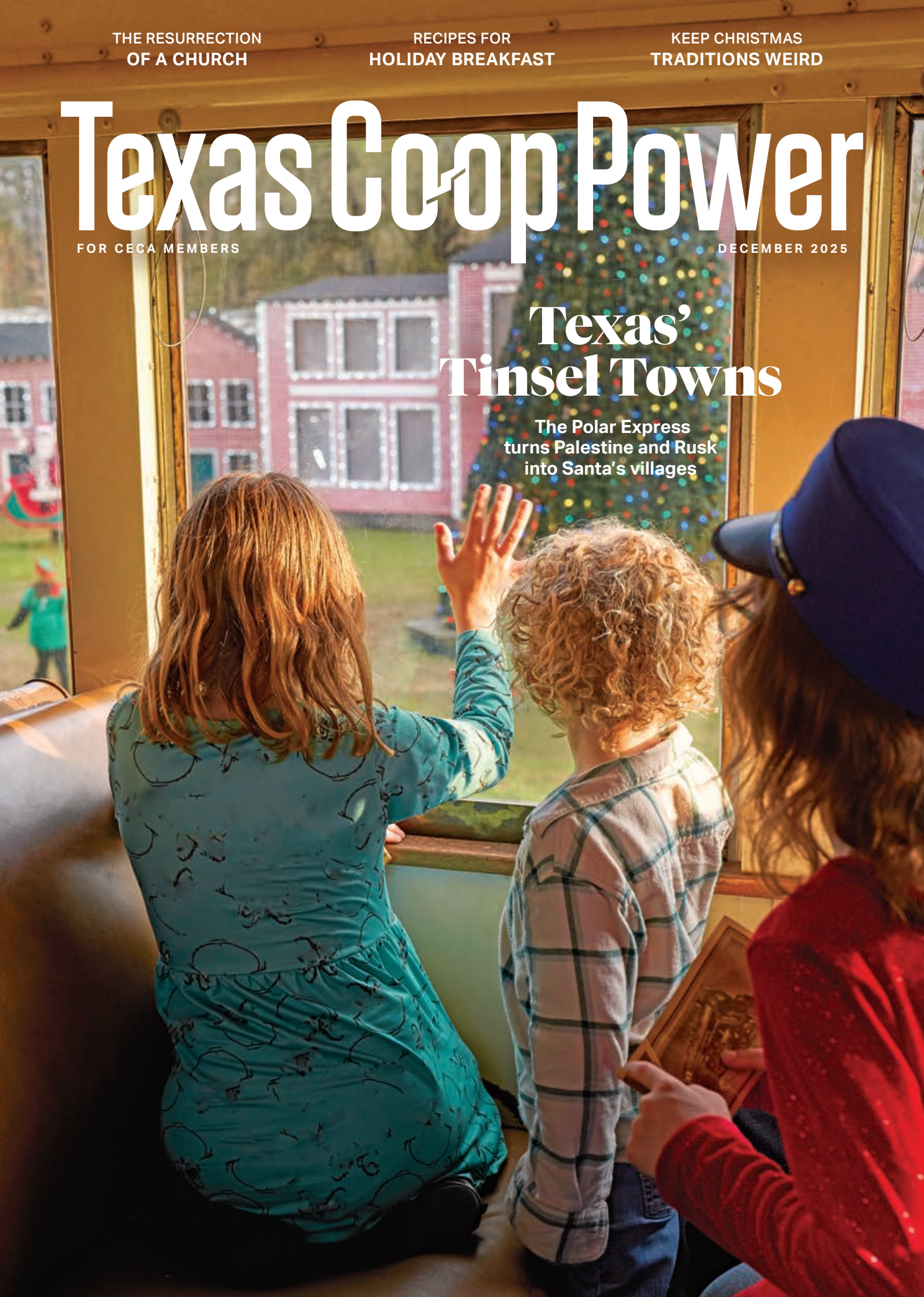
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DECEMBER 2025

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The Polar Express
turns Palestine and Rusk
into Santa's villages





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December 2025



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Polar Express trains take riders on a magical journey from East Texas to the North Pole.

By Jan Adamson
Photos by Dave Shafer

The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition.

By Eileen Mattei
Photos by Erich Schlegel

ON THE COVER
From left, Remy and Rendon Unger and Kynlee Kampen hope to catch Santa's attention—for all the right reasons.
Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE
Friends of the Ruidosa Church carry out their rebuilding mission along the Rio Grande.
Photo by Erich Schlegel

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Live, From Austin ...



Lorne Michaels, from left, watches a sketch rehearsal featuring Madeline Kahn, Will Ferrell and Cheri Oteri.

THE LEGACY OF LORNE MICHAELS, best known as the creator and producer of the long-running TV show *Saturday Night Live*, is the focus of an exhibit at the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center in Austin.

On display are scripts, production notes, props and costumes from the iconic show that has changed pop culture since it went on the air in October 1975.

Live from New York: The Lorne Michaels Collection runs through March 20, 2026. Admission is free.



For Heaven's Sake

The Hail Mary pass unofficially turns 50 this month, though the Notre Dame football team referred to desperation plays as Hail Marys as early as 1922.

But Roger Staubach's 45-yard heave that fell into the hands of receiver Drew Pearson for the Dallas Cowboys' game-winning touchdown over the Minnesota Vikings in the 1975 NFL playoffs made the name of a Catholic prayer into a signature play.

As Staubach, left, explained, "They asked me, 'What were you thinking about when you threw the ball?' I said, 'When I closed my eyes, I said a Hail Mary.'"

TCP Contests and More

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Mom's Favorites

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Gates

RECOMMENDED READING

We think of Santa as bearing gifts. But do you know about the time he was naughty? Read *Naughty Santa* from December 2014 at TexasCoopPower.com.



ENTER ONLINE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Dear Santa,
I would like ...

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

Here are some responses to our October prompt: **The best food I've ever had at a fair is ...**

Frito pie served in a chip bag, as God intended.

ROBIN THOMPSON PERRY
VIA FACEBOOK

Fletcher's corny dog, State Fair of Texas—1953, 14 years old and new to Texas.

CAROL MERCER
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
FAIRVIEW

A burger between a split Krispy Kreme doughnut for the bun at the State Fair of Texas. Weirdly good.

KATHY WHITBY
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC
FLINT

Smoked turkey leg, Shakespearean festival, July 2021, Kalispell, Montana.

TED HENDRIX
VIA FACEBOOK

Funnel cakes drizzled with chocolate sauce, topped with fresh strawberries and lots of whipped cream.

JANICE EHLERS
GVEC
SEGUIN

Gumbo at a seafood festival in south Louisiana.

WALT HUDSON
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

Catching Up With a Friend

“We just returned after five months outside of Texas, and I’m catching up on your magazine. Interesting stories: the missile silos, goats, flour, Frisbees and grapes.”

J. BAILEY
BANDERA EC
UTOPIA



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Two Bits and a Bag of Chips

From 1956 to 1960, I worked at the G.F. Wacker variety store in Levelland [It's in the Bag, September 2025]. The Fritos chili pie was sold daily—with a Coke and candy bar, all for about 25 cents.

Genie Ballew
Lamb County EC
Levelland

A State for Horses

I moved to Texas thinking it was a state for horses but was astonished to learn there are few places to ride but the roads and private property [Mounts in the Hills, September 2025]. In Washington I helped pack families and hunters into the Cascade wilderness, where we could ride for weeks.

While I admire the Texas Equestrian Trail Riders Association for all its work, I think our state forest service should support trail riders as other states have done, for example the rails-to-trails

projects in which the state pays to convert old railroad tracks into riding trails.

Loretta Bedford
Deep East Texas EC
San Augustine

I hope the article results in increased membership in TETRA since they do such awesome and necessary work. I'm not a horse rider, but I can appreciate the importance of maintaining equestrian trails to help keep people in contact with nature.

Elena Rivera
Pedernales EC
Austin

Nature Erases

I did not know the story of the ghost town Eagle Springs [Ebb and Flow, September 2025]. The simple beauty of Martha Deering's final paragraph—"evening breeze shivers" and "whispering of voices"—took my breath away. Nature erases, and it reclaims.

Mark Troth
Bluebonnet EC
Chappell Hill



DAVE SHAEFER

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

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BY JAN ADAMSON • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

The More, the Merrier

Polar Express trains take riders on a magical
journey from East Texas to the North Pole





Shhh. Listen.

It's a train whistle—low and long and lonely and romantic. It's a sound that for 150 years has permeated the Pineywoods town of Palestine.

But the whistle heard December 31, 1969, was thought to be the last. That day, Texas South-Eastern Railroad engine No. 22, a 70-ton diesel-electric locomotive, pulled into the station for the last time—the end of a century of regular freight and passenger service in Palestine.

But listen closely today along the 25-mile track between Palestine and Rusk, to the east, and you'll hear plenty of whistles and maybe even singing, laughter and bells. If you catch a glimpse into a passing train car, you'll see families in matching pajamas, dancing chefs and trays full of hot chocolate.

LEFT Santa doesn't always travel by sleigh—especially when he's in Texas.

ABOVE Remy and Rendon Unger take in the countryside on the way to the North Pole.

Ever since the Palestine-Rusk line reopened as a tourist railway called the Texas State Railroad on June 25, 1976, it has been building a corps of believers. Tens of thousands of them turn out each holiday season for the service's wildly popular Polar Express trips based on the film released in 2004 and the 1985 book by Chris Van Allsburg.

"With the popularity of the film, the Polar Express Train Ride has just grown and grown," says Amy Parady, president of the Texas State Railroad, which launched round-trip Christmas-themed excursions 20 years ago. "Many have made a tradition out of the event, so they come every year."

Like the Corley family from Magnolia.

"We meet new people and sit with different families," Kevin Corley says. "It's very interactive. We've never had a bad experience."

Long before it whisked families to the "North Pole," Palestine began its golden age after the Civil War when the International Railroad and the Houston and Great Northern Railroad opened a route between Hearne and Palestine. The transport of goods and passengers resulted in great wealth, allowing merchants and railroad executives to build massive mansions, especially in Palestine.

In 1881, when a prison was built in Rusk, the line was extended to the east. Shortly thereafter, the Palestine car shop was built to modify and repair freight cars. In 1971, not long after shipments of logging and mining equipment and passengers ceased, local banker Jack R. Stone, a member of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, and Rusk Mayor Emmett H. Whitehead led a campaign to reopen the railroad as a tourist attraction, and the Texas State Railroad was born.

A \$3 million appropriation went into refurbishing the rails, and Rusk and Palestine built support facilities such as campsites before the two depots were built. The line has been operated by private companies since 2007.

About half of the passenger cars are commuter coaches built in 1923 for other railroads; they're pulled by an assortment of vintage diesel- and steam-powered locomotives.

The railroad hosts a variety of excursions throughout the year. There's Rockin' the Rails, in which passengers attend a concert; the Rusk Turntable Run, which makes use of the 130-year-old, compressed air-powered railcar turntable in Maydelle; and Mother's Day and Father's Day trips. There are autumn- and Halloween-themed trains, dinner excursions, and trips that celebrate local beer and wine.



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Kynlee Kampen with her silver sleigh bell. The Polar Express departs from the Palestine depot.

RIGHT Engine 30, at 100 years old, comes to life in the early morning before a day's excursions.

But far and away the most popular themed ride is the Polar Express.

"We always have multiple [marriage] proposals and engagements during every season, which is always special," Parady says. "We have had grown individuals who have never seen Santa before, and just to watch the grandparents and parents see the joy in the eyes of the children creates magic every year."

The cars are festooned inside with greenery and twinkling lights, and outside, along the route to the North Pole—did you know it's in Rusk?—Christmas decorations whiz past the windows.

Passengers are encouraged to bring a copy of the book or buy one at the depot, and once aboard, they're served hot chocolate and cookies by dancing chefs who act out various scenes. On arrival at the North Pole, passengers are greeted by Santa and his elves, who bestow the first gift of Christmas: a silver sleigh bell that can only be heard by believers. The chefs lead passengers in Christmas carols on the return trip.

But the experience changes each year. Employees gather to discuss and workshop new ideas and improvements.

An adults-only railcar has club chairs. There's an open-air car with bench seats, an observation dome car, and another with tables and sofas. There's even a car that can be booked for private parties. The cars have the feel of a long-ago time because of the original fixtures retained throughout.

It all makes for a special experience.

"We have a family that started coming the first year we did the Polar Express train ride, and their son was 4 years old," Parady says. "They have never missed a year, and now their son is 22 years old."

Logistically, Polar Express season requires careful orchestration. Within a six-week time frame in November and December, there are typically 105–110 round trips with as many as five trains running a day for 60,000–70,000 passengers. Reservations open in July at texasstaterailroad.net.

"We hire typically 150 additional team members just for our Polar season," Parady says. "It is quite a feat pulling this event off with the ridership we have in such a short time frame."

Performers on the Polar Express have a reputation for the joy and professionalism they bring to the job, making it no wonder that passengers return year after year—and get into the spirit.

"About 95% of our visitors always arrive in matching pajamas," Parady says. "We have had people plan their family



On the Rails

The Texas State Railroad is a movie star, having been featured in more than 35 films, TV series, documentaries and commercials. Most recently, the train and the Palestine depot were part of the first episode of *1883*, the prequel to the *Yellowstone* series. The railroad also starred in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; *American Outlaws*; *The Great Debaters*; and *The Gambler Returns: The Luck of the Draw*.

reunions around our event. We have multigenerational attendees, meaning great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children all attending together. Families have become extremely creative with their attire, and many customize their pajamas or even make their own."

The Corley family has made the Polar Express a tradition. Kelly and Kevin Corley and their children, Piper and Carter, have been attending since 2015. "We read the book and watch the film," Kelly says. "It's such a joy to watch the kids' faces light up when they see the story play out in real life."

The Corleys prefer to take a late afternoon excursion so they can experience the sounds and smoke from the train during the daylight, and then, in the evening, they get to see the glowing Christmas lights and decorations on the return trip.

The family has dedicated a whole shelf in their home to train memorabilia. It's filled with cocoa mugs, golden train tickets and more than 20 silver bells.

"We pick out new pajamas every year," Carter says. "Me and Dad match, and Piper and Mom match."

That's an East Texas treasure worth believing in. Shhh. Just listen. ■



The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

BY EILEEN MATTEI • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition

IT'S A BREEZY, overcast 80-degree day in Marfa as a dozen or so volunteers rotate jobs in a brick-making assembly line.

Billy Joe Moore, 12, has the hardest job. He hoists small buckets of clay, sand, straw and water into a gas-powered mixer, like those used for concrete. His mother, Erin Moore, says the homeschooling, beekeeping family from Fort Davis is here to learn about adobe-making by doing it, getting into it.

It's also for a great cause: These bricks will be used in the restoration of a historic church in a remote outpost, turning a former Catholic house of worship into a community center.

"It's so neat to hear about the history of the church and the culture of the region," Erin says. "Who wouldn't want to get involved in this?"

In the ghost town of Ruidosa, 90 minutes southwest of Marfa in far West Texas, the adobe El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús (Sacred Heart of Jesus Church) is awaiting resurrection.

Completed in 1916, the church fell victim to blowing sand and rain that wore away the adobe before and after the droughts of the 1950s dried up the Rio Grande and the small agricultural community. By 1960, the church and town had been abandoned.

Native salts eroded the foundation. Huia-che branches battered the northeast tower. Attempts to restore the church, which claims the largest traditional adobe arches in Texas, faltered until the nonprofit Friends of the Ruidosa Church acquired the title to the Texas Historic Landmark from Presidio County after it was given the deed from the Diocese of El Paso in 2019.

With ownership, the Friends began work to preserve as much of the original adobe as

possible, to restore structural strength and to repair the damage done over 110 years. That meant making sun-dried adobe blocks—thousands of them, one at a time, starting in 2021.

For more than 10,000 years, adobe has been used as a building material, favored because its high thermal mass absorbs heat during the day and releases it at night.

"In recent generations, adobe-making skills have been lost, since the knowledge is rarely written down," says Joey Benton. His Marfa design and restoration company, Silla, has completed restorations of adobe buildings at Fort Davis National Historic Site and Big Bend National Park.

During the Friends' May Adobe Day, kneeling men and women scoop Billy Joe's fresh adobe mix from tilted wheelbarrows with their bare hands and tamp it into wood forms.

OPPOSITE El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús in the ghost town of Ruidosa on a September night.

BELOW From left, Terry Bishop, Martin Rivas and Claudio Nuñez load new adobe bricks onto pallets during a Friends of the Ruidosa Church workday.





"You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."



Others lift the forms off the freshly minted 10-by-18-by-3.5-inch blocks. They rinse off the forms in a large water trough and place them on black tarps, ready for the next batch.

The adobe blocks dry for a month in the sun, turned periodically like sunbathers so all

surfaces get exposed. Then the bricks are stacked and set aside. They'll eventually be used to rebuild the bell tower over the church's entrance.

"It's all about community, participating in a traditional activity," says Mike Green, a retired architect and chair of the Friends of the Ruidosa Church. "You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."

"People long for authenticity in their lives and something visible to show at the end of a day of hard work. Adobe-making gives us a deep feeling of achievement."

Hilary Raney, a Marfa resident, mud enthusiast and gardener, spent her third Adobe Day, a mostly monthly event, providing a helping hand and moral support.

"I see new faces every time," she says. "Last month a man in his 80s, whose parents got married in the church, came to Adobe Day. He was so happy to see what we were doing."

Adobe-makers come from El Paso, Houston, New Mexico and, like Steve McKeon, from Oregon. After McKeon opened a restaurant and bar in Marfa, he decided to help make bricks. "Working bubbles out of a block by hand gives you a sense of accomplishment," he says.

The Friends pays the bills for the church, power for which is provided by Rio Grande Electric Cooperative. Co-op power keeps the mortar mixer turning and the diamond saw spinning as it cuts adobe into segments.

Funds from the nonprofit's Community Day fundraiser every November in Ruidosa help pay to transport blocks to the remote site and to bring in masonry specialists to install them. Grants from the Texas Historical Commission and the Summerlee Foundation cover the costs of a historic structure report that guides its preservation.

Conversations with earthen-structure professionals, architects and archaeologists set the stage for the site work.



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A Friends of the Ruidosa Church work crew. Bishop carries a fresh brick.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT "The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques," says retired architect Mike Green, who is leading the restoration. A view from the top of a hill looking south toward Mexico over the old church.

In 2023, Benton and his skilled crew began critical structural repairs to the church. They stabilized the foundation and installed scaffolding and support frames. They straightened a wall and saved the northeast tower from collapse by repairing adobe blocks and inserting new volunteer-made bricks as needed. In some areas the exterior was so worn that light was visible through the mortar joints.

Green praises Benton and archaeologist David Keller for their contributions to the preservation and restoration efforts.

"The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques," Green says. "We're on the same journey: trying to restore and save adobes of the Southwest."

Free for the asking, the adobe recipe mixes clay, sand, silt, chopped straw and water in proportions determined by the soil used. Clay comprises 15%–30% of the mix, acting as the binder, similar to cement's role in concrete. The majority of the mix is sand and aggregate. Straw allows the adobe to dry more evenly by letting water get out of the block. The mortar



has the same mix as the block but with finer aggregate.

This classic frontier Catholic church, with its substantial bell towers, is a time capsule for the community, says Keller, who is a Friends co-founder and preservation specialist. The church is unique in that the exterior was never plastered—rare for adobe structures, even in arid climates.

Nevertheless, while the church is being restored with historical accuracy, "the integrity of the structure and preservation guidance trumps absolute historical fidelity," Keller says. So the exterior will be plastered to keep it from deteriorating like it did over the last 100 years. The interior, originally plastered and whitewashed, will be restored to that state.

Green hopes the bell will be restored to the entrance tower next year. In three years, he foresees the restored church telling the rich history of the area as a community center for residents of Brewster and Presidio counties as well as Ojinaga, across the Rio Grande.

Hands molding clay into architecture have built their own adobe-loving community. At the same time, they have helped restore the heart of a last-century community down a dirt road along the river.

As Green drove around the area over the years, the building often caught his eye. Eventually, his passion for architecture and history prompted him to try to save the old church. Now, the restoration work goes beyond saving the physical structure.

"The church at Ruidosa is the most peaceful place I know," Green says. "It is so remote, so quiet, so serene. It feels like good spirits are in the air." ■



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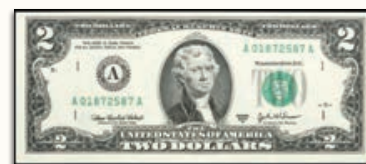
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How to Win at Love

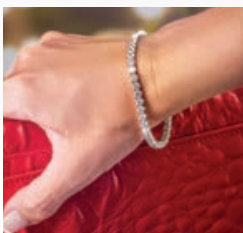
A classic tennis bracelet serves up over 10 carats of sparkle for a guaranteed win

It was the jewelry piece that made the world stop and take notice. In the middle of a long volley during the big American tennis tournament, the chic blonde athlete had to stop play because her delicate diamond bracelet had broken and she had to find it. The tennis star recovered her beloved bracelet, but the world would never be the same.

From that moment on, the tennis bracelet has been on the lips and on the wrists of women in the know. Once called eternity bracelets, these bands of diamonds were known from then on as tennis bracelets, and remain *the* hot ticket item with jewelers.

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D Flawless diamonds from another company that costs \$57,000!

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GENERAL
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ALAN
LESLEY

The Season of Giving

WITH THE HOLIDAY SEASON upon us and cheer in the air, we are reminded that this truly is the season of giving. It's a time for gratitude, generosity and looking out for one another, and at CECA, that's something we take to heart year-round.

You have probably heard us talk about our concern for community. It's not just a nice phrase. It's one of the Seven Cooperative Principles that makes electric cooperatives like ours different from other utilities. According to the seventh principle, "Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies supported by the membership."

We're not just here to keep the lights on. We're here to make life better for our members, neighbors and friends.

Over the years, we've faced challenges together, and every time, our co-op family has stepped up. We

It's a wonderful opportunity to create lasting holiday memories with your family, and we would love to see you there.

CECA members don't just show their charity during the holidays—they give back all year. Thanks to the generosity of members who round up their electric bills through Operation Round-Up, we're able to donate to local organizations that help people in need. Every little bit adds up, and it makes a big difference.

We're also proud to support local students through our scholarship program and the Government-in-Action Youth Tour. Each year, we award scholarships to deserving students across our service area to help them pursue higher education and reach their goals.

Through Youth Tour, we send some of our community's brightest young people to Washington, D.C., to see democracy in action and dream about

their futures. That is giving in a meaningful way, by investing in tomorrow's leaders.

And because we care deeply about safety, our team spends time visiting schools throughout the communities we serve, teaching folks of all ages how to stay safe around electricity. Knowledge is a gift too, and we love sharing it.

You'll also find CECA employees out in the community beyond work, coaching youth sports, volunteering at local events, serving on nonprofit boards and partnering with local organizations to keep our economy



have come together to support those in need, to keep our community strong and to build something better for the future. That spirit of generosity shines especially bright during the holidays.

One of my favorite ways we celebrate the season is by bringing families together. Join us for our third annual free photo op with Santa on Tuesday, December 9, at the CECA headquarters, 349 Industrial Blvd. in Comanche. Santa will be there along with hot chocolate and cookies. Bring your camera or phone to snap pictures.

strong. When you're part of a co-op, giving back is not a requirement. It's just what you do.

At CECA, we believe Concern for Community is more than a value. It's the heart of who we are. During this season of giving, we're especially grateful to be part of such a caring, generous community.

All of us at CECA wish you and your loved ones a joyful, safe and bright holiday season. ■



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Restock Your Winter Emergency Kit

WINTER STORMS CAN cut power quickly despite the best efforts of your crews at CECA. An emergency kit can reduce stress and keep your household safe until power is restored. It's a good idea to have one at the ready, and if you already keep one on hand, check it to replenish or update supplies.

Include these essentials in a weather-resistant bin:

- ▶ Flashlights or headlamps for each person, plus extra batteries
- ▶ Portable phone chargers, a car charger and at least one fully charged power bank
- ▶ Extra blankets, warm clothing, hats and gloves stored together for quick access
- ▶ Three days of nonperishable food and bottled water, a manual can opener, and some ready-to-eat meals
- ▶ A first aid kit, essential prescription medicines and copies of critical medical information
- ▶ A battery-powered radio, whistle and small fire extinguisher

Also, if the power goes out in your home, keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to protect your food. Turn off or unplug electronics to avoid damage from surges when power returns. If you run a generator, keep it outdoors and well away from windows, vents and the garage.

Next, think about heat and pipes. Open cabinet doors under sinks to allow warm air to circulate around exposed plumbing. If a pipe freezes, use a hair dryer or warm towels—never an open flame—to thaw it.

Finally, plan for your family's medical needs. Share your plan with a neighbor or family member who can check in during a storm.

Review and refresh your kit twice a year. Replace expired food and medicine, recharge power banks and check batteries. Label containers and store them where everyone can reach them in the dark. ■

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Hanukkah Begins
Sunday,
December 14

Christmas
Thursday,
December 25
Our offices will be closed Wednesday–Thursday, December 24–25, in observance of the holiday.

Kwanzaa Begins
Friday,
December 26

New Year's Day
Thursday,
January 1
Our offices will be closed.

DIMITRIS66 | ISTOCK.COM



1



2



3



4



5

1. A member casts their vote in the board election.

2. Members fill their plates with food.

3. Lineworkers Baylor Tidwell, left, and Tanner Farley ready to serve food to members.

4. Members place their hands over their hearts during the national anthem.

5. Attendees enjoy brisket and sides.

CECA Charts a Path Forward

Annual meeting covers AI, energy strategy and director election

CECA HELD ITS 87th annual meeting October 9 at the cooperative's headquarters in Comanche, welcoming a total of 455 attendees, with 212 member families registered.

Held every October, the annual business meeting is a stakeholder event for co-op members and also functions as a member appreciation gathering. The meeting provides an opportunity for members to come together, learn about the cooperative's activities and connect with one another while enjoying a delicious barbecue meal prepared by CECA lineworkers.

One critical piece of the annual meeting is the election of members to serve on the board of directors. This year, Bryan Morris was elected to represent District 3, succeeding Ruby Solomon, who retired after 21 years of dedicated service. Morris' term will run through 2028.

Incumbent directors Troy Stewart, District 5, and Loren Strobel, District 6, were both renominated unopposed at their district meetings and will continue serving through 2028.

Alan Lesley, general manager and CEO, provided updates to the membership on CECA's future, focusing on the growing impact of artificial intelligence. He compared AI's rise to the space race of the 1960s, noting that both U.S. political parties and global competitors like China and Russia see it as a national security issue.

Though the industry's rapid expansion is affecting much of the U.S., Texas is quickly becoming a hub for AI data centers, and CECA's service area is poised to be part of that growth.

CECA honored 10 employees at the annual meeting for achieving important years-of-service milestones, recognizing their commitment and contributions to the cooperative.



Service Pin Recipients

Kellie Deters: 35 years
Brandon Cook: 20 years
Dale Ogle: 20 years
David Cisneroz: 15 years
Tommy Hesbrook: 15 years
Riley Hilliard: 10 years
Chance Bragg: 5 years
Teresa Duran: 5 years
Tanya Holden: 5 years
Jaron Majors: 5 years

Lesley said that as crypto mining declines, many of those facilities are expected to be repurposed for AI, offering long-term benefits to CECA and its members. This shift could boost kilowatt-hour sales, allow CECA to buy power blocks ahead of anticipated cost increases and support larger electrical loads that bring more economic development opportunities to the communities it serves.

Lesley also addressed short-term challenges like reliability concerns and rising transmission costs as Texas expands infrastructure to support big data and energy demands. He closed by sharing CECA's commitment to being a trusted source for members seeking clear, factual information about AI and other energy-related matters.

If you have questions or want to learn more, CECA's member service department is always available to help. Call us at 1-800-915-2533 or email us at memberservices@ceca.coop. ■

Minutes of the 87th Annual Meeting Held October 9, 2025

MEMBERS BEGIN ARRIVING at the CECA Headquarters building just after 5 p.m. They were greeted at registration with a member gift and a barbeque catered meal served by CECA employees. In total, 455 attendees, which included members and their families, enjoyed the catered dinner.

At 6:30 p.m. Monty Carlisle, Board President, called the 87th annual meeting of Comanche Electric Cooperative to order.

Mr. Carlisle then introduced the Cooperative's General Manager and CEO, Alan Lesley, who gave the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Holli Garret, special guest and entertainment for the evening, sang The National Anthem.

Mr. Lesley introduced current directors and special guests. Special recognition was given to CECA Board Secretary, Ruby Solomon, acknowledging her dedicated service to the Cooperative. Ruby elected not to re-run for her board seat at the District 3 meeting held in July 2025, a position she had previously held since 2004.

Ruby Solomon, Secretary of the Board, reported 212 bona fide members were present constituting a quorum. Notices of the Annual Meeting were mailed from Texas Electric Cooperatives, in Austin, TX, in the October issue of the *Texas Co-op Power* magazine on September 29, 2025. Total copies mailed were 10,029 at a cost of \$6,006.86.

Mr. Lesley then welcomed Nicole Lenhart, CPA, from Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert and Moss who reported on the financial conditions of Comanche Electric Cooperative.

Following the financial report, Mr. Lesley spoke about artificial intelligence (AI) and large bitcoin operations (data centers) in relation to the electric cooperative world. He spoke about the opportunities for growth CECA could see very soon and current projects the cooperative is working to develop within the service territory where feasible.

Alan Lesley and Monty Carlisle distributed employee service award pins.

Mr. Lesley then introduced Mr. Don Richards, Civil and Administrative Law Attorney. Mr. Richards conducted the 2025 director election.

Mr. Richards explained the results of the district meetings that were held in July. District 6 met at the Mitchell Baptist Church building on July 14th and nominated candidate Loren Stroebel for consideration at the October Annual Meeting. District 5 met at the May Volunteer Fire Department on July 15th and nominated Troy Stewart for consideration at the October Annual Meeting. District 3 met at the CECA Headquarters building on July 17th. Ruby Solomon announced her intent not to re-run for the District 3 Board Seat and two nominees were chosen at that time to be determined by election at the 87th Annual Meeting of the Cooperative.

There was a motion and second to elect Loren Stroebel for District #6 and Troy Stewart for District #3 by acclamation. The motion passed.

An election was held for candidates Bryan Morris and Jason Davis. Attorney Don Richards announced voting was closed and Mr. Morris, having the most member votes, won the election and was chosen to serve as the new District 3 CECA Board member.

In concluding the business meeting of the 87th annual cooperative meeting, Mr. Richards then asked if there was any old business and there being none, the meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Under the direction of Riley Hilliard and Clayton Boone, gifts donated by vendors and CECA were distributed by the drawing of names. After door prize drawings concluded, attendees were escorted to their vehicles by CECA employees. ■



Happy members smile and look on as a CECA lineman fills their plate with brisket and side dishes.

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April 3rd**
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CECA



WWW.CECA.COOP/SCHOLARSHIPS

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who reside on CECA lines full-time.*



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Toll-Free 1-800-915-2533
Web ceca.coop

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

24/7

Outage Hotline Number

CECA crews are available 24/7 in the event of a power quality issue.

TOLL-FREE
1-800-915-2533

ABOUT CECA

CECA operates in Brown, Callahan, Comanche, Eastland, Mills, Shackelford and Stephens counties.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Esta institución es un proveedor de servicios con igualdad de oportunidades.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Headquarters

349 Industrial Blvd., Comanche, TX 76442
Monday–Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Early

1801 CR 338, Early, TX 76801
Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Closed from 1–2 p.m.

Eastland

1311 W. Main St., Eastland, TX 76448
Tuesday and Thursday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

VISIT US ONLINE

ceca.coop



Check us out at
TexasCoopPower.com/comanche

Community Calendar

Brownwood

Best Christmas Pageant Ever, December 5, 6, 12 and 13 at 7:30 p.m. and December 6, 7, 13 and 14 at 2:30 p.m.; **Lyric Theatre**; 318 Center Ave. Get ready for a heartwarming holiday comedy! When the unruly and infamous Herdman kids crash Sunday school and join the Christmas pageant, the entire town is horrified. Known as the “worst kids in the history of the world,” the Herdmans have never even heard the Christmas story, but they’re determined to take over every major role. As rehearsals go hilariously off-track, everyone expects total disaster—but the Herdmans might just help the town discover the true spirit of Christmas in the most unexpected way. Filled with laughs, surprises and touching moments, this family-friendly show is a joyful reminder of love, kindness and the magic of the season. For more information, call (325) 600-4303 or visit brownwoodlyrictheatre.com.

Wildflower Walk with Ranger George; December 6, 13, 20 and 27 (weather dependent); 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.; **200 State Highway Park Road 15**. Stop and smell the flowers on a wildflower walk to see what’s blooming in the park. This program is great for all ages. We’ll meet at the head of the Texas Oak Trail. Bring sturdy walking shoes and water. Free with park entrance. For more information, call (325) 784-5223.

Holiday at the Lake, December 12–13, 6–8 p.m., **Willow Point Camping Loop**, at **Lake Brownwood State Park**, **200 State Highway Park Road 15**. Celebrate the holiday season with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s drive-thru holiday lights display. Campers will have their campsites decorated. Make sure to stop by the group dining hall to enjoy a fire with a ranger and paint your own ornament to take home. This event is free. TPWD will be collecting items to help the Brown County Humane Society. Needed donation items include kitten and cat food (wet and dry), puppy food (wet), cat and dog toys, cat litter, puppy pads, laundry soap, dawn dish soap, 55–60 gallon heavy-duty trash bags, paper towels, and toilet paper. TPWD has free campsites for campers who wish to decorate their site and pass out candy for this event. To sign up for a site, call (325) 784-5223 or email lakebrownwoodsp@tpwd.texas.gov. Campsites are limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis.

CECA welcomes your local event submissions.

If you have any events you would like listed in the Community Calendar, please contact Triston McGehee. Event information must be submitted two months in advance for the magazine. The calendar is published monthly and includes events scheduled for the month of publication and the following month. CECA reserves the right to edit or exclude events based on space availability and other considerations. We do not certify the accuracy or reliability of any information posted in the Community Calendar. To confirm event details, please contact the event organizers directly. Email tmcgehee@ceca.coop; write to CECA at P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76531; or call 1-800-915-2533.

Yuletide Express, December 13, 5–8 p.m., **Lehnis Railroad Museum**, 700 E. Adams St. Join us for a night full of joy, laughter and festive fun. For more information, call (325) 643-6376 or visit visitbrownwood.com/schedule-of-events.

TexasBank Holiday Classic, December 29. This annual high school basketball tournament attracts dozens of teams from across the state competing in multiple divisions. For questions, contact the Brownwood Visitor Center at (325) 641-0517.

Cisco

Holly Jolly Lighted Christmas Parade, December 4, 6:30 p.m.

Santa at the Hilton, December 4, after the parade.

Events from the Cisco Chamber of Commerce, including dates and times, are subject to change. For more information, call (254) 442-2537.

Comanche

Annual Christmas Party & Open House, December 6, 1–4 p.m., **Comanche County Museum**. Enjoy snacks and delicious desserts with music and stories from special guest Tommy Patterson. The children’s choir will also sing holiday favorites. For more information, call (325) 356-5115 or email comanchecountytxmuseum@gmail.com.

Comanche Market, December 6, 9 a.m.–1 p.m., **1300 E. Central Ave**. This market takes place on the first Saturday of each month and features a variety of local vendors. For more information, call (325) 330-3666 or email texashandmadesuds@gmail.com.

Comanche Open House; December 6, 13 and 20; 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; **Comanche Mercantile**; 101 N. Houston St. Meet our talented artisans, sample delicious appetizers and receive giveaways while you shop for the perfect gifts and holiday finds. Don’t miss out on this cheerful celebration. For more information, contact Comanche Mercantile at (254) 979-1291 or texashandmadesuds@gmail.com.

CECA Free Photo Op with Santa, December 9, 5–7 p.m., **349 Industrial Blvd**. Ho ho ho! Join us for free Santa photos, hot chocolate and cookies at CECA headquarters. Bring your phone or camera. For more information, call 1-800-915-2533 or email memberservices@ceca.coop.

Explore Comanche Christmas, December 12, 13 and 15.

Get ready to celebrate Christmas in Comanche like never before, and immerse yourself in a Hallmark movie holiday experience. Join us for the dazzling Christmas lighted parade, glide across the ice skating rink and witness the magical tree lighting near charming Comanche square. Bring the kids for endless fun at Santa’s Workshop, then drop them off with a babysitter and head to Legacy Estates for the festive Jingle Mingle and Legacy of Trees. Sip on a glass of wine, indulge in tasty snacks and stroll through a decorated Christmas tree farm.

For questions, reach out to the Comanche Chamber of Commerce at comanchetxchamber@gmail.com or (325) 356-3233.

De Leon

De Leon Market, December 13, 9 a.m.–1 p.m., **City Auditorium**, 125 S. Texas St. This indoor market takes place on the second Saturday of each month and features over 30 vendors offering a variety of goods and local products. For more information, email deleontxmarket@gmail.com or call Jerry Leonard at (817) 371-7869 or Mark Beaty at (432) 209-3275.

Early

Lighting of the Christmas Tree, December 2, intersection of Early Boulevard and Garmon Drive. Enjoy live performances from the talented elementary and primary choirs as they fill the air with the sounds of the season. Create cherished memories with photos alongside Santa Claus, and warm up with complimentary cookies and hot chocolate, generously provided by United Supermarkets. This free, festive event is packed with holiday cheer and is the perfect way to kick off the season!

For more information, call (325) 643-5451 or visit earlytx.net/calendar.

Eastland

Rip's Lighted Christmas Parade & One Starry Night, December 6, Old Rip Square. Watch as the downtown Christmas tree comes to life, followed by Rip's Lighted Christmas Parade. Then stroll over to the Lumber Yard Event Center for One Starry Night, where you'll enjoy free hot chocolate, cookies, live music and pictures with Santa.

For more information on these events, please contact the Eastland Chamber of Commerce at (254) 629-2332 or chamber@eastland.net.



POWER TIP

Wood stoves manufactured before 1990 are inefficient. Newer models use one-third less wood for the same amount of heat and reduce fire risks.

DOUGLAS RISSING | ISTOCK.COM



DID YOU KNOW?

Texas' first recorded Christmas tree plantation was established in Jasper in 1935. Nowadays, more than 4 million Christmas trees are sold in the state.

KOSAMTU | ISTOCK.COM

Merry Christmas

From CECA

Wishing you peace, love and joy this holiday season.

Our offices will be closed December 24–25 and January 1 for the holidays.

ALONZODESIGN | ISTOCK.COM

Spirituality Meets Artistry



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

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals

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

Using this story as inspiration, Stauer brings you the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant**. With over 2 total carats of Kyocera lab-created opals set in .925 sterling silver encased in yellow gold, this pendant is a radiant celebration of beauty and craftsmanship. Each opal captivates with a kaleidoscopic dance of fiery oranges blending into oceanic blues, streaked with flashes of vibrant green that seem to come alive with every movement. The shimmering opals are skillfully arranged to create an enchanting, otherworldly glow, embodying the spirit of hope and harmony.

This breathtaking combination of color and craftsmanship is available as a limited availability of only 930 pieces, making it a rare and treasured addition

to your jewelry collection. Plus, when you order today, you'll receive the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant** at an impossible price of just \$59 normally ~~\$149~~!

Don't miss your chance to own this exclusive tribute to timeless elegance and meaningful symbolism.

Jewelry Specifications:

- Pendant: 2 1/2 ctw. Kyocera lab opals and DiamondAura® accents. Yellow gold-finished .925 sterling silver setting
- Chain: 18" gold-clad .925 sterling silver chain

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TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



Turn of Fortune

A family's legacy far exceeds its pilfered buried treasure

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT NEUBECKER

A LONG TIME AGO, a woman tried to sell me her home, hinting at the prospect of gold treasure long hidden and lost within.

She told me her husband had died suddenly, and his last words to her were: "There's gold coins behind the wall in the bedroom closet." She was willing to split anything found.

I didn't bite on that strange sales pitch, but it reminded me of another similar case, even more interesting, up the country a ways.

In the little Texas town of San Diego, about an hour west of Corpus Christi, there once lived a Dr. Jose García. In 1933, he was the primary doctor in town and preferred to store his wealth in the form of gold coins. He hid it in a tight crawl

space beneath a trapdoor in his kitchen.

No one knew of this treasure except García and his daughter, Gloria. He told her the coins were hers to use, for taking care of her disabled brother later in life.

When the good doctor eventually died, Gloria asked her husband, Hector López, to find the coins. After Hector's repeated determined explorations into the tight crawl space—even with a metal detector—he couldn't find the coins.

Since García had suffered from dementia late in life, Gloria and Hector began thinking the gold coins had been the invention of an imaginative mind or a mind that forgot he had moved the coins.

Years later, Gloria and Hector sold the house. Then, more than 20 years after

that, a plumbing leak sprang up underneath it.

A plumber went through that old trapdoor the doctor had created almost 100 years before. While laying in a new line through the muddy soil, the plumber saw a flicker of something shiny.

He brushed away the mud and discovered a very old gold coin. He dug deeper and found a gold mine: some 500 coins in various sizes and denominations.

He was elated, of course, but he didn't alert the homeowner. He calmly asked his assistant to get him an empty coffee can and absconded with the coins—worth about \$500,000 at the time.

But the plumber didn't handle it well. He went around paying for things with gold coins within the little community. The gossip erupted immediately, and Hector and Gloria soon got word.

They sued the plumber, saying the coins belonged to Gloria.

The new homeowner, too, sued for ownership, but after a long legal battle, a jury in Duval County decided that the coins belonged to Gloria.

Next, something even more unexpected and beautiful happened: Gloria and Hector gave the coins to the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg.

As it turned out, the coins were a small part of Gloria and Hector López's wealth. They both graduated from the University of Texas in the 1940s, and then Hector earned a law degree and amassed a \$275 million portfolio while working in the oil and gas industry.

Since they had no children, the Lópezes left their fortune to the children of Texas in the form of the Hector and Gloria López Foundation, which provides college tuition—especially for Hispanic and first-generation students, known proudly as López Scholars. ■

Holiday Breakfast

Be warned: Santa might stick around for these dishes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Making chilaquiles is a treasured tradition for my family. Chilaquiles are fried corn tortillas simmered in a creamy salsa verde and topped with eggs. Our girls love them; I love prepping everything in advance; and my husband loves a heaping plate of hearty goodness after the piles of wrapping paper.

Chilaquiles Verdes

1/4 cup vegetable oil, or more as needed
12 corn tortillas, cut into 4 wedges each
2 teaspoons salt, or more to taste
4 cups salsa verde, plus more for serving
1 cup heavy cream
4 eggs
Diced red onion
Cilantro
Queso fresco, crumbled

1. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat oil until shimmering. Add about a quarter of the tortilla wedges and cook, flipping once, until lightly brown and crisp.
2. Drain the freshly fried tortilla chips on a paper towel-lined baking sheet. Sprinkle lightly with salt. Repeat this process until all tortillas are fried, adding more oil as needed.
3. Drain oil and wipe skillet. Heat 4 cups salsa verde and heavy cream in the skillet over medium-high heat until warmed through. Add chips and gently stir to coat chips in sauce. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 2 minutes.
4. In another skillet, scramble or fry eggs to your preference.
5. Divide the chilaquiles between four plates and top with eggs. Sprinkle with red onion, cilantro and queso fresco. Serve with additional salsa verde.

SERVES 4

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



Artichoke-Cheese Frittata

WILLIAM P. LOYD
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

I feel strongly that Christmas mornings should be laid-back, meaning coffee, family time, gifts and a delicious breakfast that was prepped in advance.

- 1 tablespoon (1/8 stick) butter, melted
- 6 green onions, diced
- 1/2 cup diced green bell pepper
- 5 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 3-4 slices bread, cubed, divided use
- 3/4 cup shredded cheese (cheddar, Monterey Jack, pepper jack or a combination works well), divided use
- 1 jar marinated artichoke hearts (12 ounces), drained and chopped into bite-size pieces, divided use
- 1 jar diced pimientos (4 ounces), drained, divided use

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 1 1/2-quart baking dish.
2. In a skillet over medium-high heat, cook butter, green onions and bell pepper, stirring occasionally until tender, about 2-3 minutes.
3. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, mustard, salt and onion powder.
4. In the prepared baking dish, layer half the bread, half the onion-pepper mixture, half the cheese, half the artichokes and half the pimientos. Pour half the egg mixture over first layer.
5. Repeat layering with the remaining bread, onion-pepper mixture, cheese,



\$500 WINNER

Cranberry Orange White Chocolate Baked Oatmeal

MELISSA TURLEY
BANDERA EC



Looking for a cozy Christmas breakfast to feed a crowd? This is it. Imagine a holiday buffet table filled with baked oatmeal, bacon, sausage, scrambled eggs and fruit. And invite me because I would drive for hours for this baked oatmeal. The oatmeal can be prepped the day before, refrigerated overnight and baked the next morning.

- 6 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup white chocolate chips
- 2 cups orange juice
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 4 eggs

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a large bowl or stand mixer, combine oats, sugar, baking powder, salt, dried cranberries and white chocolate chips.
3. In another bowl, whisk together orange juice, oil, vanilla and eggs.
4. While mixing on low, slowly add wet ingredients to dry ingredients until thoroughly mixed.
5. Pour into prepared pan and bake 35-40 minutes or until golden brown.

SERVES 10-12

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

MOM'S FAVORITES DUE DEC 10
Everything is better when it's made with love by Mom. What recipe do you remember your mother by? Send us your favorite for a shot at \$500 and a spot in our May issue.
UPCOMING: THE ART OF THE SANDWICH DUE JAN 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPE PHOTOS: JASON DAVID PAGE. WINNER PHOTO: COURTESY MELISSA TURLEY

RECIPES CONTINUED

artichokes, pimientos and egg mixture.

6. If making in advance, cover and refrigerate. Allow to come to room temperature before baking.

7. Bake 30–40 minutes, until eggs are set and frittata is firm.

SERVES 6

French Toast Bake
With Caramel Banana
Cream Topping

MARIAN EVONIUK
PEDERNALES EC

Brioche coated in a creamy eggy mixture, baked until golden and topped with whipped cream, bananas and caramel is the only gift I want this holiday season.

FRENCH TOAST BAKE

6 eggs

1 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons maple syrup



1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon salt

1 loaf brioche, sliced and cubed

TOPPING

2 cups heavy cream

½ cup powdered sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

4 large bananas, sliced

Caramel sauce

1. **FRENCH TOAST BAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with butter or cooking spray and set aside.

2. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, 1 cup heavy cream, maple syrup, 1 teaspoon vanilla, lemon juice, cinnamon and salt. Add brioche and stir to coat. Pour into prepared baking dish.

3. Place baking dish on center rack of oven and bake 30–40 minutes, until mixture is set, puffy and light golden brown on top. Tent loosely with foil if top is browning too quickly. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.

4. **TOPPING** In a large bowl, combine 2 cups heavy cream, powdered sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Beat at medium-high until soft peaks form. Set aside.

5. To serve, cut the bake into squares and top with a large dollop of whipped cream, banana slices and a drizzle of caramel sauce.

SERVES 4–6

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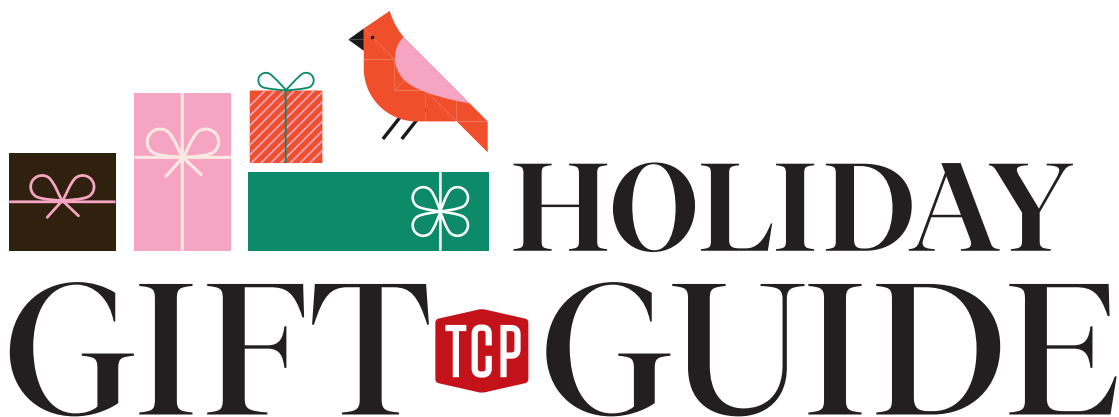
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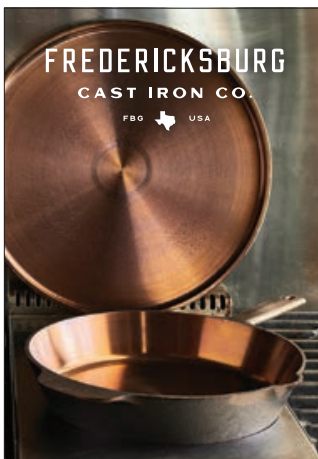
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Slabs of Strudel

The oldest bakery in Texas came from humble beginnings

BY CHET GARNER

I **DIDN'T KNOW** what to expect from the oldest bakery in Texas, but it certainly wasn't a giant slab of cherry strudel bigger than a roof shingle. And yet that's exactly what I found at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels—along with a line out the door, a heavenly yeasty smell that could lead a blindfolded squirrel to town and a friendly cashier who was happy to explain the unfamiliar pastries laid out before me.

Founded in 1868, the bakery was started by a man named Edouard Naegelin who emigrated from eastern France, arriving in town with a sack of flour and less than a dollar in his pocket.

For more than 155 years, it has kept the town outside San Antonio well-supplied with loaves of fresh bread, cakes and an assortment of European cookies I could barely pronounce. Pfeffernüse, anyone? But the undeniable star of the show was their homemade strudel, coming in apple, cherry and peach with buttery layers so soft you could use it as a pillow.

Inside, the décor is a delightful cross between a German Alpine lodge and grandma's kitchen circa 1952. In the name of "research," I ordered almost everything: kolache (both fruit and sausage), cinnamon rolls, danishes, lebkuchen, springerle, and each flavor of strudel.

I sat at one of the small tables outside and proceeded to make every one of my fingers sticky with icing and every thread of my shirt dusted with powdered sugar. It was a badge of honor earned in a pastry-filled battle of the bulge. In the end, the strudel won, but it was worth it.

Whether you're a hungry local, a curious traveler or an overambitious pastry juggler, Naegelin's is here to welcome you with open arms just like it has for generations. ■

ABOVE Chet's eyes are bigger than his stomach at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels.

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



Know Before You Go

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

DECEMBER

7

San Antonio Cowboy Christmas, (210) 299-4499, briscoemuseum.org

Waxahachie [7, 12-14] Bethlehem Revisited, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

Port Lavaca [7, 12-14, 19-21, 26-28] Nativity Exhibit, (361) 935-8032, bit.ly/nativityexhibit

9

Lufkin The Texas Tenors: Deep in the Heart of Christmas, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

11

El Paso Los Murales de Segundo Barrio, (915) 533-0048, tomlea.com

Marshall [11, 19] Fireside Feast: Cooking Up History at Maplecroft, (903) 935-3044, visitstarrfamilyhome.com

12

Kyle [12-14] A Night in Bethlehem, (512) 268-7044, f-pc.org

Smithville [12-14, 19-22] Dinah 4 Christmas, (512) 304-0666, dinah4.com

13

Bastrop Historic Homes Tour, (512) 303-0904, bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Burnet Christmas on the Square, (512) 756-4297, burnetchamber.org

Chappell Hill Teddy Bear Parade, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

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

Waxahachie [13-14] Historic Waxahachie Christmas Tour of Homes, historicwaxahachie.com

Corsicana CelloVoci, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

Richardson Rocky Mountain High Experience: A John Denver Christmas, (972) 744-4650, eisemanncenter.com

Levelland [19-21] Christmas Cash Classic, (806) 786-8683, facebook.com/christmascashclassic

Brenham Top of the World, A Carpenters Christmas, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Fairfield Jingle All the Way, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Grapevine The Nuttier Cracker, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

Eastland New Year's Eve Casino Night, (254) 631-0437, eastlandcountymuseum.com

Palestine Dash & Splash 5K, (903) 729-3139, palestineymca.org

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1 SCOTT BOWMAN
PEDERNALES EC

"Young mini-Nubian goats enjoy breakfast in the barn."

2 AMY BOGS
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

"One of our calves got a little too excited about the new hay and wedged himself between two bales."

3 KYLE BIGGERSTAFF
LIGHTHOUSE EC

"Hayden Biggerstaff and Jude the cow dog finish pushing cattle to a new pasture at sunset in Crosby County."

4 CAROLYN GULLY
PEDERNALES EC

"My great-granddaughter, Leighton Gully, and her friend, Annabelle, take a break on the farm."



Upcoming Contests

GATES DUE DEC 10

CAUGHT NAPPING DUE JAN 10

MAKING A SPLASH DUE FEB 10



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TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Country Life photos from readers.



Our Kind of Weird

The best Christmas mornings include a one-of-a-kind family dish

BY SHANE TORNO
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KACHIK

I SUPPOSE EVERY FAMILY has a favorite dish—a meal with special significance. In my family’s case, we had a special meal that my mom, the one who did the cooking in our house, didn’t care for. I wonder if this is common.

The meal was a breakfast dish known to us as biscuits and pudding. In my youth, I believed that this was unique to my family since everyone I ever asked about it had never heard of such a thing.

However, just recently I learned that the meal is actually known in the rural south as biscuits and chocolate gravy.

To be sure, the chocolate pudding we used was stove-cooked and served hot, so calling it chocolate gravy makes sense. My online research tells me that the dish has its origins in the Great Depression, when powdered cocoa

became readily available as a baking product. There are origin stories associated with Appalachia, the Tennessee Valley, western Oklahoma and Arkansas.

I have no idea how it could have come into contact with a German family settling in Dime Box in Central Texas and then relocating to deep South Texas.

Ignorant of any of this history, I enjoyed this breakfast whenever my father could convince my mom to get up early and prepare it.

A few tips if you decide to try this yourself on a cold morning. The biscuits need to be buttermilk with a consistent texture all the way through, not the canned biscuits that produce lots of flaky individual layers. Those flaky layers make eating the pudding-covered biscuits a messy and unappealing operation. Also, the meal is best when both the biscuits and the pudding are served hot.

Grab a couple (or three) biscuits and cut them in half so you have the biscuits lying open-faced. Add a pat of butter to each biscuit half and then douse with the pudding. As the butter melts under the hot pudding, it liquefies and seeps through the pudding to create some beautiful yellow puddles.

If you have a sweet tooth, this will beat the best biscuits and gravy meal you have ever had.

As I said, my mom didn’t care for the meal, possibly because it was passed down from my father’s family. Or maybe because she didn’t like getting up early to bake on Christmas morning. To her credit, she made them well (as did her mom, my dad’s mom and my Aunt Joy).

On those special mornings when they were available, we all made big plates of it while Mom stood back and ate her biscuit with jelly like a normal human. If you listened carefully above the racket of forks on plates, you might even hear her mutter something about a bunch of weirdos. ■

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