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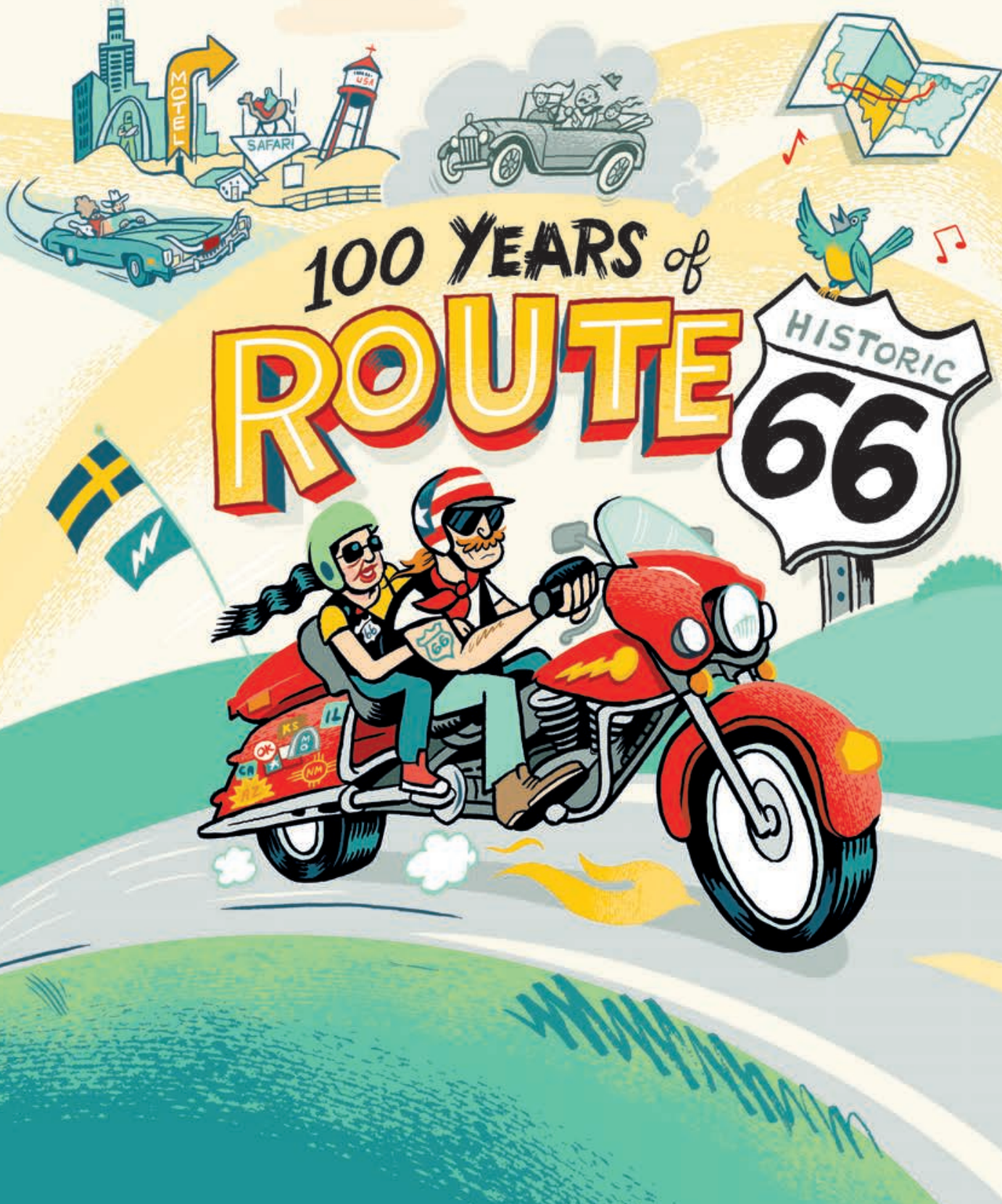
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November 2026



12

06 Still Kicking

A surge of travelers are getting their kicks during the Route 66 centennial.

*By Jim McCarty, Samantha Bryant and Claire Stevens
Illustrations by Dan Zettwoch*

ON THE COVER

The Mother Road, which winds from Chicago to Los Angeles, takes in 178 miles of Texas.
Illustration by Dan Zettwoch

ABOVE

Mark Meyers with gentle friends at Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue outside San Angelo.
Photo by Anna Mazurek

From Punch Lines to Peaceful Paddocks

Kind hearts and tranquil acres await donkeys in need of a second chance.

*By Jessica M. Ridge
Photos by Anna Mazurek*

04

Currents

The latest buzz

05

TCP Talk

Readers respond

16

Co-op News

Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

25

Footnotes in Texas History

Faces and Places
By W.F. Strong

26

TCP Kitchen

Cranberry Harvest
By Vianney Rodriguez

30

Hit the Road

How To Defeat a Creek
By Chet Garner

33

Focus on Texas

Photo Contest: Ride the Rails

34

Observations

Navigating Turbulence
By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

The Last Marine Reaches Safety



JUAN JOSE VALDEZ of San Antonio was the final Marine to get out of Saigon on April 30, 1975. He almost didn't make it.

Master Gunnery Sgt. Valdez, who had helped evacuate thousands, was thrown off balance and fell on the rear boarding ramp as the final helicopter lifted off during the fall of the South Vietnamese capital.

"I looked at the back of the helicopter door, and I noticed two hands hanging there," said Staff Sgt. Mike Sullivan, already onboard. Valdez was grabbed and pulled to safety.

Valdez later worked as a civilian employee on a Marine Corps base. He died February 15 at his home in Tucson, Arizona. He was 88.



TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST
Mac and Cheese

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
In the Garden

RECOMMENDED READING
Remember *Route 66*, the 1960s TV series that featured the Mother Road? One of our writers did in his May 2012 story *Getting My TV Kicks on 'Route 66.'*



ENTER
ONLINE



Bullish on Brahmans

Armel Keeran, right, became interested in Brahman cattle as a child on her father's ranch. After college she moved back to the ranch and became a passionate advocate for the humpbacked cattle.

Keeran, born 125 years ago this month in San Antonio, on November 15, 1901, became the first woman to raise the breed and had the largest Brahman herd in the U.S. at the time.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

It's not Thanksgiving dinner without ...

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 September prompt: **When I was a kid ...**

My brother and I would catch lightning bugs and bring them in the house and let them go in our rooms. It would drive our mom crazy.

JUDY KAY KRANTZ
CECA
LAKE LEON

We played outside all day long, rode our bikes and drank out of the water hose.

REBECCA BERRY
TAYLOR EC
ABILENE

I wanted to be an adult. Now, as an adult, I really wish I could be a kid again.

ARZOLA YOSHIMI
VIA FACEBOOK

We didn't ask if it was safe. We just did it and found out.

RUTH ORLOFF SCLAWY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC
ELKHART

Visit our website to see more responses.

SEPTEMBER 2026 TCP Kitchen

“It is rare that I don’t remove a page or get ideas from the recipes. The Sweet Potato Waffles are on my to-make list.”

BARBARA MACHA
COSERV
HIGHLAND VILLAGE



JASON DAVID PAGE

Old Favorites

As young’uns growing up in small-town Mabank in the 1950s, my mother made Peanut Butter, Crackers and Marshmallows [TCP Kitchen, August 2026] for her four young boys. My wife and I made them for our children. As grandparents of now-grown grandchildren, we made them but had to give them a special name—Pawpaw’s Favorite Treats.

Glenn Hyde
Trinity Valley EC
Mabank

Dining Defined

It’s About Time [August 2026] is tops. A very informative, dawn-to-dark account.

It is common today in Texas to refer to the evening meal as dinner. But just like in Andy Adams’ book *The Log of a Cowboy*, the Panhandle cowboys and farmers I know all call it supper. They call the noon meal dinner.

Rob Lee Roark
Lighthouse EC
Wichita Falls

Most Inspired

Thank you for *Giant Footsteps* [June 2026], the wonderful article on Miss Opal Lee. It was one of your best—super inspired.

Martha Sanchez
Magic Valley EC
McAllen

Monthly Motivation

I am deeply amazed and engaged by your publication. It keeps me motivated and provides invaluable information on subjects I hold dear.

Your articles consistently inform me about the beautiful geographical sites across our state and offer wonderful opportunities to learn about gardening, healthy cooking and better eating habits.

Furthermore, the magazine helps me discover ways to volunteer my time and services within my community, fostering a spirit of continuous learning.

Linda Gray
Farmers EC
Sachse



ROBERT SEALE

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letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 83, Number 5
(USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published
monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical
postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices.
TEC is the statewide association representing
77 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power*'s
website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-
0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

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A surge of travelers are getting their kicks for the 100th birthday of Route 66

STILL KICKING

BY JIM MCCARTY, SAMANTHA BRYANT AND CLAIRE STEVENS
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN ZETTWOCH



Brenda Hammit Bradley weaves between tables at the MidPoint Cafe, coffeepot in hand, laughing and talking with diners and, when there's a language barrier, gesturing and pointing.

When she reaches his table, Juan José Sillas Blanco from Spain, dressed in an AC/DC T-shirt, points at his 5-euro bill and then the wall, and Bradley knows what he means. She grabs tape and a stepladder so he can add it to the collection of currency and license plates from around the world lining the upper walls, creating a visual guest book.

For travelers making the journey down Route 66, the café in Adrian, west of Amarillo, is a respite from the road and an important mile-marker—1,139 miles, to be exact—halfway between Chicago and Los Angeles. Across the Panhandle, 178 of those miles are in Texas.

"I could have 10 different countries in here at the same time," Bradley says. "I'm grateful for all the business I get, but most of it comes from overseas—and that's a blast."

Blue Miller from England browses the café's gift shop.

She has traveled the entirety of Route 66 nine times but says she's "done thousands of shorter trips" and has written two books about the Mother Road.

"In Europe, Route 66 is kind of an encapsulation of the America that people grew up with—it's the diners, it's the cars, it's the small towns," she said. "And everybody's looking for what they saw in the movies."

Scenes like this play out every day along the remains of the most famous highway in the world. It originally traversed eight states along 2,448 miles, stretching from downtown Chicago to a pier at the Pacific Ocean in Santa Monica, California. Its official name is Route 66, and it's been busier in 2026 than any year since it was decommissioned in 1985.

This year Route 66 fans from around the world have been looking for new kicks as the celebrated road turns 100 years old. Larger cities along the road, including Amarillo; Joliet, Illinois; and Springfield, Missouri, hosted big celebrations earlier in the year.



Springfield earned the honor of hosting the national kick-off event through a competitive process but also due to its status as the birthplace of Route 66. It was there in 1926 that a telegram was sent by John Woodruff, a Missouri businessman, to Washington, D.C., asking that the new road be named Route 66 (he claimed it sounded catchier than the alternative, Route 62). The idea for the road—officially commissioned November 11, 1926—didn't originate in Missouri, but its iconic name did.

In anticipation of the centennial, communities all along the route spruced up their landmarks, planned events, relit neon and geared up for a major influx of visitors this year.

"I struggle to make a specific prediction, and part of that is because it's really hard to track specific routes," says Rhys Martin, president of the Oklahoma Route 66 Association, "but I would be surprised if traffic didn't double just because of

the attention and the people planning their trips."

Gary Daggett, who manages the MidPoint gift shop and is president of the Route 66 Association of Texas, has seen a big increase in traffic at the shop.

"I'd say at least three times the normal, and our numbers are showing that in our guest book, sales, everything," he says. "We've been very busy so far this year."

Daggett first traveled Route 66 when he was 20 and says he wants to see the route preserved for future generations to enjoy. He and his wife planned to make their 30th trip this year, and he says they have friends who they now consider family all along the route.

"It's the people that make Route 66," he says. "A lot of people come to find that out. It's one thing to see it, but once you stop at little restaurants like this and the mom-and-pop gift shops, you get to know the people."

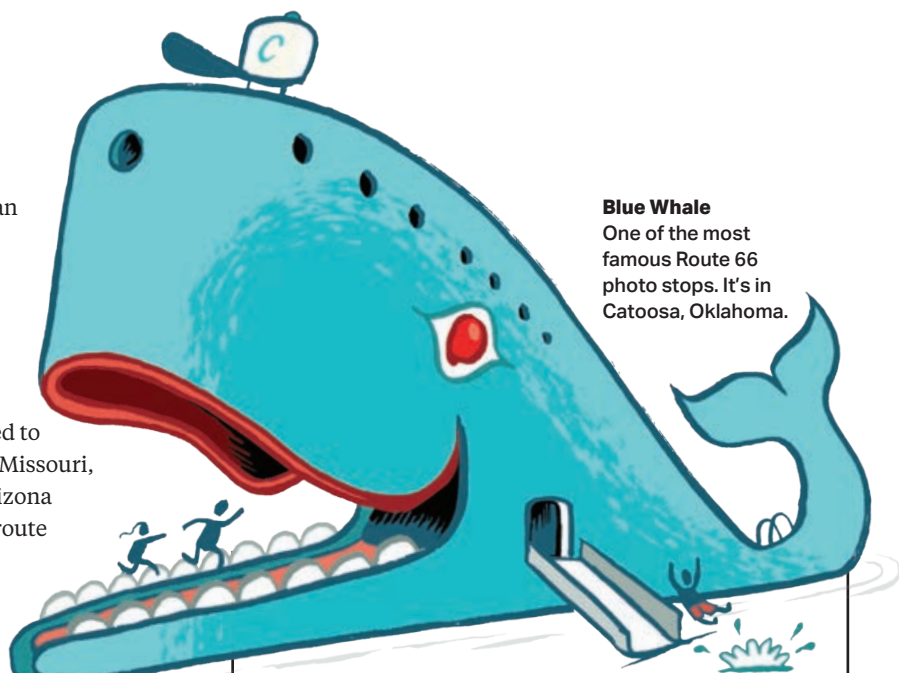
While Missouri can claim its birthplace, an Oklahoma man is known as the Father of Route 66. Cyrus Avery, a Tulsa realtor who owned a coal company, saw the need for a roadway from the Midwest to the West, connecting small towns and cities along the way. Appointed to the Joint Board on Interstate Highways in 1925, Avery managed to steer the route south from Illinois through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California instead of a more northern route through Las Vegas.

He also helped launch the U.S. Highway 66 Association in 1927 to encourage use of the new roadway. In the beginning, the route joined various existing state roads, with many of them still gravel. Besides paving the highway, the association's leaders also saw the need to encourage drivers to choose Route 66 over other transcontinental routes.

One of the first efforts to popularize the road was an epic footrace that followed Route 66 from its start in Santa Monica to Chicago, then on to New York City. The distance was 3,400 miles over just three months. It started with 275 runners, but 77 dropped out on the first day. Only 55 runners finished the race, with 20-year-old Andy Payne from Claremore, Oklahoma, the winner.

Through publicity like this, the nation learned of the new route, and traffic grew exponentially. Truckers favored its flat terrain, with elevations measured in hundreds of feet instead of thousands crossing the Rocky Mountains.

In the 1930s it became the road of migration as the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl displaced Midwesterners who sought a new life in California.



Blue Whale
One of the most famous Route 66 photo stops. It's in Catoosa, Oklahoma.

Don't Miss This!

Stop at these spots in each state.

ILLINOIS: Gemini Giant (Wilmington)

If you only stop once before leaving Illinois, make it here. The 30-foot-tall Muffler Man is one of Route 66's most iconic photo ops.

MISSOURI: Meramec Caverns (Stanton)

A road-trip classic since the 1930s. Billboards and barn roof signs for this cavern once lined the entire Mother Road, and the attraction still feels like pure Americana.

KANSAS: Cars on the Route (Galena)

Kansas has only 13 miles of Route 66, but this restored Kan-O-Tex gas station—home to the truck that inspired Tow Mater in *Cars*—is its standout.

OKLAHOMA: Blue Whale (Catoosa)

This 80-foot-long, smiling whale in a pond is one of the road's most beloved and quirky landmarks.

NEW MEXICO: Blue Swallow Motel (Tucumcari)

See beautifully preserved rooms and get a true 1940s motor court experience. Even if you don't stay, stop for the best neon on the entire route.

ARIZONA: Petrified Forest National Park

The only national park the Mother Road drives straight through—where classic roadside nostalgia meets staggering natural beauty.

CALIFORNIA: Roy's Motel & Café (Amboy)

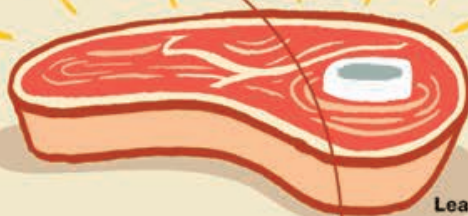
A surreal desert time capsule with a legendary Googie-style neon sign.



Cars on the Route
Galena, Kansas, is home to the inspiration for Tow Mater from Pixar's *Cars* movies.

TEXAS

The Panhandle



The Big Texan Steak Ranch

Home to Amarillo's free 72-ounce steak—if you can finish it in an hour.

Midpoint Cafe

Dine in Adrian, considered the exact midpoint between Chicago and Los Angeles.

Leaning Tower of Texas

OK, it's a 75-foot water tower in Groom, but you gotta see it.

Conoco Tower Station and U-Drop Inn

The Shamrock spot is the inspiration for Ramone's House of Body Art in Cars.

Adrian

Amarillo

McLean

Groom

Shamrock



Cadillac Ranch

A graffiti-friendly line of buried Cadillacs outside Amarillo.

Devil's Rope Museum

In McLean, learn how barbed wire tamed the West.



Phillips 66 Station

You can stop but you can't fill up at this remnant in McLean.



When World War II gripped the nation, it became a strategic route for moving men and materials to support the war effort. This led to a major effort to rebuild the roadway for Fort Leonard Wood, an Army base in Missouri.

The highway was no match for the heavy trucks supplying the base, so a four-lane “superhighway” was planned with a deep cut near Devils Elbow that became the deepest highway excavation in the nation to date, and the four-lane, divided highway was the first of its kind. Ironically, it was completed in September 1945, the same month the war ended.

Other improvements included a reroute around a series of dangerous hairpin curves in western Arizona dubbed the Sidewinder. This 8-mile section has 191 curves with no guardrails and 12% grades.

By the 1950s, Route 66 was the thru-way for a nation in love with the automobile. Cabins, motels, restaurants, roadhouses and all manner of highway kitsch sprang up to lure motorists off the pavement.

The road came to represent everything Americans hold near and dear: freedom, adventure, nostalgia and small-town values. Those themes were shared in the 1960s TV series *Route 66*, which helped fuel today’s nostalgia for the road.

Championed in songs such as Bobby Troup’s (*Get Your Kicks on*) *Route 66* and the Eagles’



Wigwam Motel

This historic landmark in San Bernardino, California, features 19 individual 30-foot-tall tipi-shaped concrete and wood cabins.

Take It Easy, immortalized by John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, and introduced to a new generation through Pixar’s *Cars* movies, the Mother Road continues to fascinate those

who prefer life in the slow lane.

Folks like Dale and Lesley Finigan from Key West, Florida, who got in their RV and picked up the road in St. Louis. They stopped in Adrian for lunch.

“We both retired a couple of years ago, and it was on our bucket list of things to do,” Dale says.

The road’s demise came when the interstate highway system replaced it. Suddenly, small towns where Route 66 was the Main Street were bypassed, and many businesses couldn’t survive as traffic moved away.

Mother Nature and the wrecking ball have taken their toll, but if you know where to look, you can still find the remains of the old route. Newer businesses, like the Devil’s Rope Museum, have sprung from the ashes of those long-gone oases.

Travelers from California, Pennsylvania, Germany and Australia have signed the visitors log at the museum, which resides in what used to be a brassiere factory in McClean, east of Amarillo. Anita Day worked in the building when it was a factory and now works the front desk of the museum dedicated to barbed wire.

The museum’s exhibits explain the history and role of barbed wire in conquering the West and include a collection of barbed wire sculptures and plenty of Route 66 memorabilia, including old newspaper clippings, road and business signs, and a re-creation of a classic café.

“When it opened, I thought ‘Who would want to go?’” Day says. “Barbed wire is all you see along the highway. But here it is 35 years later.” ■

Route 66 Start Sign

The starting point was at Adams Street and Michigan Avenue in Chicago until the city declared it to be closer to Lake Michigan this summer.



Gary’s Gay Parita

A replica of a 1930 Sinclair gas station near Paris Springs, Missouri.

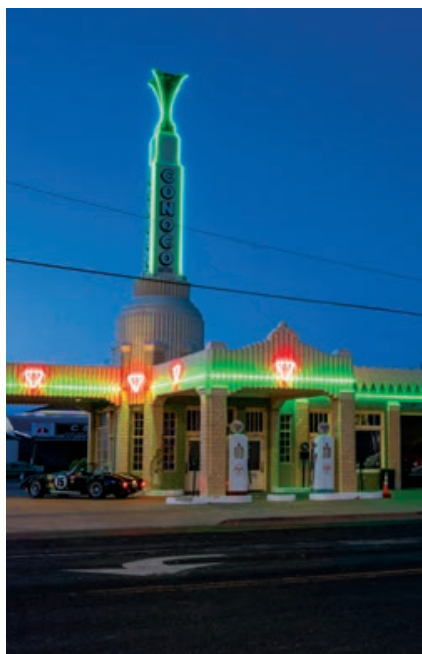
TCP Find this story on our website for a playlist of tunes that’ll get you kicking no matter your route.





LONESTAR LANDMARKS

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ANNA MAZUREK



SHAMROCK

One of the most iconic Mother Road landmarks is the art deco **Conoco Tower Station** and **U-Drop Inn Cafe**, near the Oklahoma border. The unique geometric design, topped with a four-sided obelisk tower adorned with a metal tulip, was the inspiration for Ramone's House of Body Art in Pixar's 2006 *Cars* movie.

According to lore, the building started as a dirt sketch drawn with a nail by owner John Nunn and was later built in 1936 for \$23,000. The structure was divided into three parts: a gas station, retail space and café, dubbed the U-Drop Inn by an 8-year-old boy who won a naming contest.

Over the decades, the building was a Greyhound station, then a barbecue joint and now houses the chamber of commerce visitors center.

In 2002, the city embarked on a comprehensive restoration to return the National Register of Historic Places-listed building to its original glory with red and green LED lighting that switches on from dusk to sunrise. The café, revived in 2021 by local restaurateur Osbaldo De Leon, serves homemade banana bread sundaes and brisket smoked on-site.

"The U-Drop Inn represents more than a historic building," says Crystal Hermesmeier, Shamrock chamber director. "It's the front porch of Shamrock."

GROOM

In the early 1980s, Ralph Britten bought a 75-foot-tall water tower from a refinery for the truck stop he was building on Interstate 40 in Groom. The tower spent two years lying horizontal while construction was completed.

"Everybody was talking about how the water tower blew over," says Vince Britten, Ralph's youngest son, who helped paint the tower with the words "Britten USA."

When the Tower Fuel Stop opened and the tower stood upright, it stopped attracting attention. Realizing the advertising potential, Ralph decided to tilt the tower, anchoring two legs to concrete pillars attached to a buried beam to act as a kickstand for stability. Then, he cut



off the other two legs to dangle in the air. The newly created **Leaning Tower of Texas** attracted curious customers.

While a 1988 fire destroyed the truck stop, the tower remains and is repainted regularly by the family.



Ralph wanted to be buried under the water tower, which wasn't legal, so he compromised on a grave monument with a water tower in a local cemetery.

AMARILLO

Five spray-painted Volkswagen Beetles buried nose-deep in the ground are a play on Amarillo's Cadillac Ranch, created in 1974. These colorful cars were planted near the town of Conway by Ricky Crutchfield in the late 1990s to attract people to his family's tourist stop.

After Crutchfield's death in 2022, the future of Slug Bug Ranch was uncertain. The property sold, and the cars were moved off-site in 2023.

In 2024, the Big Texan Steak Ranch bought and relocated the beloved bugs adjacent to Starlight Ranch, an outdoor entertainment venue in Amarillo. The new **Slug Bug Ranch**, featuring paved walkways, was unveiled June 14, 2024, during Amarillo's annual Texas Route 66 Festival. While the collection of nine bugs is the star, it also includes nine limousines, formerly used to transport guests to the Big Texan.

The outdoor art installation is maintained by volunteers and is open 365 days a year. Of course, spray painting is encouraged. ■

Kind hearts and tranquil San Angelo acres
await donkeys in need of a second chance

From Punch Lines to Peaceful Paddocks

BY JESSICA M. RIDGE • PHOTOS BY ANNA MAZUREK



Stories as dramatic as Mexia's are atypical of most arrivals, he says. More often staff, which includes ranch hands, trainers and vet techs, welcomes donkeys to the facility outside San Angelo in a state of general ill health. The 172-acre ranch—PVDR's flagship facility and home to an average of 1,000 donkeys—serves as a stopover haven for abused, abandoned and neglected domestic donkeys. Once rescues are friendly toward humans and meet socialization milestones, including lifting each foot for a farrier, they graduate to one of Peaceful Valley's adoption centers across the U.S. or find respite in sanctuaries in Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas.

Patron saint of the punch line, donkeys get a second chance at Peaceful Valley—a reprieve from toiling under the burden of human misapprehensions and ignorance. “You’ve been told all your life that donkeys are stubborn,” Elger says. “You call someone a jackass when they mess up—they’re always the butt of the joke.” It’s a casual bit of cruelty and caricature the rescue works to dispel and amend.

Outcomes ordained by a lack of research (“donkeys are the forgotten equine,” Elger says), conflation of donkey and horse care techniques, and ignorance of the animals’ deep need for socialization and bonding converge at PVDR’s intake facility, where arrivals receive vaccines, deworming, hoof trimming and a test for infectious equine anemia.

“They all come in needing something from us,” Elger says. “There’s no shortage of mistreated, abused or just neglected donkeys.”

Peaceful Valley’s off-site sanctuaries, which operate akin to grazing leases, each provide homes for 20–150 donkeys. That’s also where the nonprofit rehomes burros (wild donkeys) from federal lands, where populations are closely managed.

“In the national parks, they’re not protected,” Caniglia says. “So we’re their best bet. And so we take them out of that wide-open space—freedom—and we bring them here. And then we turn them out onto another wide-open space. That is meaningful to me.”

Irrespective of a donkey’s trajectory toward adoption or sanctuary, a baseline metric applies. “It’s important that their first interaction at this facility, and then from every

On a sunny West Texas afternoon, a 1-year-old donkey with gray-brown fur nuzzles my thigh and gently nips at my jeans.

“That’s how she says, ‘Come pet me please,’” says Kim Elger, chief operating officer at Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue—one of the world’s largest.

With a little help from Elger and general manager Jacob Caniglia, Mexia stands upright, which might seem unremarkable. But months earlier, a family in the Rio Grande Valley contacted the rescue to surrender the foal, which they’d found alone in the wild with hind legs made essentially useless by a toxin or vitamin deficiency.

Bereft, Mexia tried for months to rejoin her donkey family, which roamed just across the fenceline from where Mexia’s human fosters cared for her. To donkeys, “family is everything,” says Elger, a member of Concho Valley Electric Cooperative.

Once she got to Peaceful Valley, Mexia walked with the help of staff and a system of slings and straps until the rescue’s chief veterinary tech had a game-changing idea. She customized a wheelchair intended for a Great Dane, adding bigger wheels and extenders to increase its height. “It’s kind of a Frankenstein-type situation,” Elger says.

The makeshift mobility aid enabled Mexia to rehabilitate her leg muscles to the extent that she hardly needs the device anymore, Caniglia says.



OPPOSITE Donkeys in need of care get loving attention and 172 acres of ranchland at Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue.

TOP Mark Meyers, nuzzling with Calamity, started the rescue with his wife, Amy, as a backyard hobby more than 20 years ago.

ABOVE Misa rests in the nursery.

quietly while tour guides introduce individual donkeys and share some of their idiosyncrasies, medical challenges and backstories. My guide recognizes one resident by his Bray before we even pull up to greet him.

Several donkeys indulge my attempts to pet them, includ-

interaction on, is one of kindness," Elger says.

That ethos is evident to visitors who tour the rescue, alighting from golf carts at various enclosures and bays that dot the sprawling former dairy. Unfamiliar humans are regarded cautiously and

ing Shasta, who basks beneath a tree that shades her pen. I also meet Casey, who was found running loose in a Kaufman County neighborhood in North Texas with a rope around his neck and a painfully damaged, unsalvageable hoof.

Despite that ordeal, Casey swiftly allowed PVDR staff to help him. "Usually it takes them a while, donkeys that are new to us and intake, to trust us and see what we're all about," Elger says. As soon as Casey arrived, he jumped into a trailer and allowed a farrier he'd never seen to lift and examine his injured leg and hoof, Caniglia says.

"Equine amputations are not typically a thing that you're going to do," Elger says. "But Casey, like Mexia, was such a sweetheart. He had such a will to live." After a two-month postoperative stint at a veterinary clinic and a few more weeks to heal and adjust, Casey scratched his ear with his new prosthetic, affirming his adaptation.

Casey and Mexia's sweetness and grit aren't uncommon among donkeys. Just widely unsung. And awe-inspiring.

"These animals are not what we've made them out to be," Elger says. "I had no idea that donkeys were so loyal. I had no idea that they were so social. I had no idea that they were so resilient.

"To be able to go from some of these situations that they come out of, where you would never blame them for not ever trusting a single even human-shaped object ever again, and they can bring themselves to a place where they open themselves up, and they can develop trust again ... that they can make that choice."

Maybe that impulse is rooted in resilience. Or maybe it's a bit of grace donkeys extend to us, again and again. ■



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MESSAGE
FROM
GENERAL
MANAGER

ALAN
LESLEY

The Power of Neighbors Helping Neighbors

ELECTRICITY PROBABLY WON'T come up when families gather around the Thanksgiving table this year and talk about the things they're thankful for. And that's understandable. Reliable power is one of those things we expect to be there—quietly helping us cook a meal, keep the house comfortable, and enjoy time with family and friends.

But this time of year gives me reason to think about the people behind that power and the communities we are fortunate enough to serve.

Around here, helping a neighbor isn't a new idea. It's just what people do. When somebody needs a hand, you lend one. When there's a fire, a storm or some other hardship, people show up. You see it in our small towns and rural communities all the time, and that same spirit is at the heart of the cooperative way of doing business.



CECA crews assist United Cooperative Services with repairing power lines damaged by the Ross Fire near Graford in September. Crews worked through fire-scorched terrain, surrounded by dusty air and the lingering smell of ash.

We saw a good example of that in September, during the Ross Fire.

When United Cooperative Services, a co-op headquartered in Burleson, needed help rebuilding damaged power lines and restoring electricity, CECA lineworkers lent a hand, working alongside other crews to help get United's members back on as quickly and safely as possible.

Electric cooperatives have a long history of helping one another in times of need. We know that someday the situation could be reversed, and if CECA needed help after a major storm or disaster, our fellow cooperatives would be here for us.

That's Cooperation Among Cooperatives—one of

the seven principles cooperatives were built upon. But around here, I think most folks would simply call it being a good neighbor.

That idea extends beyond keeping the lights on.

Through Operation Round-Up, CECA members voluntarily round up their monthly electric bill to the next whole dollar. Individually, it may only amount to a few cents each month. But put together, those small contributions make a real difference right here at home.

Over the years, Operation Round-Up has helped support our volunteer fire departments, teacher grants, scholarships, Project Graduation, community projects, local food pantries and other worthwhile needs throughout our area.

It also supports Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which provides books to young children and encourages families to begin reading together at an early age. If you have a child or grandchild younger than 5 who lives in our area, I encourage you to learn more about the Imagination Library and sign them up at ceca.coop/imagination-library.

Sending lineworkers to rebuild power lines after a wildfire and putting a book in the hands of a young child may not seem to have much in common. But I believe they do.

Both happen because people are willing to do a little something for someone else. One member rounding up a bill by a few cents doesn't seem like much. One crew lending a hand to another cooperative may not make the evening news. But when enough people are willing to help where they can, small efforts add up to something meaningful.

That's one of the things I appreciate most about living and working here. We still live in communities where people know one another, look out for one another and step up when there's a need. CECA is fortunate to be a part of those communities, and I believe we have a responsibility to operate the same way.

As Thanksgiving approaches, I'm thankful for the men and women of CECA who work hard every day to serve our members. I'm thankful for the communities we call home and for the neighbors who make them what they are.

And I'm especially thankful for the trust you place in us to serve you.

From all of us at CECA, I hope you and your family have a safe and happy Thanksgiving. ■



Dolly Parton, founder of the Imagination Library, shares her book *I Am a Rainbow* with two young readers. Her literacy legacy continues through the program, which delivers free, high-quality books to children from birth to age 5.

A Season for Stories

Bring home holiday magic with free books

THANKSGIVING, CHRISTMAS AND New Year's bring families together to share traditions, make memories and look ahead. They also offer a perfect opportunity to slow down and enjoy a good book with a child.

Through a partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, CECA Operation Round-Up provides free books to children from birth to age 5 across our service area.

Participating families receive a high-quality, age-appropriate book delivered to their home each month. Every book is personalized with the child's name, making each delivery feel like a special gift, while helping families build a home library one story at a time.



The benefits extend beyond the books themselves. Childhood literacy experts carefully select each title, and tips printed inside the cover help caregivers engage children through conversation and shared reading. Twice a year, children also receive bilingual Spanish-English books that support early language development.

CECA Operation Round-Up makes the program available at no cost to families in our service area. It's one way we put the cooperative principle of Concern for Community into action by helping children develop important skills before they enter a classroom.

Whether families are gathered around the Thanksgiving table, settling in on a winter evening or beginning a new year together, books create opportunities to connect.

With every delivery, children receive more than a story. They gain opportunities to strengthen their vocabulary, curiosity and confidence while making memories with the people who read with them. To enroll, visit ceca.coop/imagination-library or scan the QR code on this page. ■

Comanche Electric Cooperative Association

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

CONTACT US

349 Industrial Blvd.
Comanche, TX 76442
Toll-Free 1-800-915-2533
Web ceca.coop

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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.

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EXPERIENCE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME!

Beware of Holiday Scams

YOU'RE MAKING YOUR holiday to-do list and checking it twice, so be sure protecting yourself and loved ones from online scammers is on that list.

Every year, thousands of people fall victim to holiday scams, robbing them of hard-earned money and personal information. Common scams include not delivering items you paid for, misrepresenting items on an auction site or having you pay with prepaid gift cards.

Follow these tips from the FBI to ensure you shop safely and smartly online this holiday season.

Follow best practices when it comes to cybersecurity. Don't click any suspicious links or attachments in emails, on websites or on social media. Phishing scams get you to click on links and give up personal information like your name, password and bank account number. In some cases, you may unknowingly download malware to your device.

Know who you're buying from. If you're purchasing from a company for the first time, do your research and check reviews. Check each website's URL to make sure it's legitimate and secure by looking for the "https" in the web address. If it doesn't have this, don't enter your information on that site.

Be wary of sellers who post an auction item or advertisement as if they reside in the U.S. but then respond to questions by stating they are out of the country on business or because of a family emergency.

Be careful how you pay. Never wire money directly to a seller. Also, don't pay for items with prepaid gift cards. In these scams, a seller will ask you to send them a gift card number and PIN. Instead of completing the promised transaction, the scammer will steal the funds, and you'll never receive your item.

Use a credit card when shopping online and check your statement regularly. If you see a suspicious transaction, contact your credit card company to dispute the charge.

Monitor the shipping process. Always get tracking numbers for items you buy online so you can make sure they have been shipped and follow the delivery process. ■



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Daylight Saving Time Ends
Sunday, November 1
Set clocks back 1 hour.

Veterans Day
Wednesday,
November 11

National Take a Hike Day
Tuesday, November 17

Thanksgiving
Thursday, November 26
Our offices will be closed
November 26–27 for the holiday.

Community Calendar

Brownwood

HPU Athletics Hall of Fame Golf Tournament, November 13, 7:30 a.m.–3 p.m., Hideout Golf Club & Resort, 185 Hideout Lane. Howard Payne University alumni, former student-athletes, coaches, supporters and friends can play in the Yellow Jacket Club tournament during Athletics Hall of Fame weekend. Registration is requested. For more information, call HPU Athletics at (325) 649-8103 or email tdrummond@hputx.edu.

Second Saturday Kids Art Lab, November 14, 1–3 p.m., Brownwood Art Center, 215 Fisk Ave. Children ages 6–12 can explore drawing, painting, printmaking and mixed media. The program is free, but advance registration and an accompanying adult are required. For more information, call the Brownwood Art Association at (325) 641-2916.

Logan Ryan Band, November 21, 8–11 p.m., Wild Duck Bar & Grill, 102 N. Fisk Ave. The Logan Ryan Band performs Texas red dirt country, Americana, alt-country and honky-tonk. Admission is \$20 in advance or \$30 at the door. For more information, call (325) 203-5286 or email info@wildduckbarandgrill.com.

Miniature Art Exhibit and Sale, November 27–December 30, Brownwood Art Center, 215 Fisk Ave. The Brownwood Art Association presents miniature works for viewing and sale. Gallery hours are 2–6 p.m. Tuesdays–Fridays and 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Saturdays. For more information, call (325) 641-2916.

Christmas Under the Stars Lighted Parade, December 3, 6:15 p.m., downtown Brownwood. Illuminated floats and vehicles and community groups travel through downtown for the annual holiday parade. Spectator admission is free; the route has not been announced. For more information, call the Brownwood Area Chamber of Commerce at (325) 646-9535 or email wendy.lawson@brownwoodchamber.org.

A Christmas Carol, December 4–13, Brownwood Lyric Theatre, 318 Center Ave. The Lyric Performing Arts Company

presents Charles Dickens' story of Ebenezer Scrooge and his Christmas Eve transformation. Shows are at 7:30 p.m. Fridays, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Saturdays, and 2:30 p.m. Sundays. For more information, call (325) 600-4303 or email office@brownwoodlyrictheatre.com.

Christmas Under the Stars Festival, December 5, Depot Civic and Cultural Center, 600 E. Depot St., and Lehnis Railroad Museum, 700 E. Adams St. The free festival brings family holiday activities to the two downtown venues. The detailed activity schedule has not been released. For more information, call Visit Brownwood at (325) 641-0517.

Voices of Christmas: Handel's Messiah, December 8, 7:30 p.m., First Baptist Church, 208 Austin Ave. The Howard Payne University Concert Choir, Brownwood Community Chorus and Festival Orchestra perform the Christmas portion of Handel's *Messiah*. For more information, call (325) 649-8500 or email Chris Rosborough at crosborough@hputx.edu.

Christmas Market at Shaw's Marketplace, December 12, 9 a.m.–1 p.m., Shaw's Marketplace. The market features local artisans, boutique apparel, handcrafted home decor and specialty Texas gifts. For more information, email shawsbrownwood@gmail.com.

Cisco

Holly Jolly Lighted Christmas Parade, December 3, 6:30 p.m. Lighted entries travel through Cisco for the chamber's holiday parade. Santa will greet visitors at the Hilton after the parade; the route and detailed program have not been announced. For more information, call the Cisco Chamber of Commerce at (254) 442-2537.

Comanche

CECA's 4th Annual Free Photo Op With Santa, December 8, 5–7 p.m., CECA headquarters, 349 Industrial Blvd. Families can visit Santa and enjoy hot cocoa and cookies at this free event. Visitors should bring a phone or camera for photos. For more information, call CECA member services at 1-800-915-2533 or email memberservices@ceca.coop.

Eastland

Sean of the South, November 12, 7–9 p.m., Majestic Theatre, 108 N. Lamar St. Writer and performer Sean Dietrich brings stories, live music and humor to this Eastland Memorial Hospital Volunteers fundraiser. A meet-and-greet, photos and book signing follow the show. For more information, call Vicki Armstrong at (817) 929-7078 or email vicki.armstrong@emhd.org.

Lake Brownwood

Reptiles With a Ranger, November 14, 2:30–3:45 p.m., Group Dining Hall, Lake Brownwood State Park, 200 State Highway Park Road 15. A park ranger introduces visitors to harmless native reptiles and explains their biology and role in the ecosystem. Touchable materials include snake sheds and turtle shells. The program is free with park admission. For more information, call George Dudich at (325) 784-5223 or email george.dudich@tpwd.texas.gov.

Holiday at the Lake, December 11–12, 6–8 p.m., Willow Point camping loop, Lake Brownwood State Park, 200 State Highway Park Road 15. Campers decorate sites for a drive-through holiday lights display. Admission is free, with supply donations requested for the Brown County Humane Society. Saturday includes Santa photos and hot chocolate at the Group Dining Hall. For more

Comanche Electric Cooperative Association welcomes your local event submissions.

If you have 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.

information, call Nikki Morris at (325) 784-5223 or email lakebrownwoodsp@tpwd.texas.gov.

Zephyr

10th Annual Democrat Community Center Chili Cook Off, November 21, Democrat Community Center, 907 W. FM 218 South. Visitors may stop by throughout the day or come for the community supper when it is served. Entry is free for the cooking competition, donations will be accepted for supper, and prizes and raffle tickets will be available. For more information, call Rachel Shelton at (512) 771-5713.

Electrical Safety for Kids

HOME SHOULD BE a place of comfort, familiarity and safety for you and your family. But safety requires education, especially with kids in the house.

Since November is Child Safety and Protection Month, here are some tips and lessons CECA encourages you to share with your little ones.

Water and electricity are a dangerous mix—never touch, sit or stand in, or attempt to walk through water that’s in contact with an appliance or powered toy.

Electronics and accessories must be handled with care. Always help younger children when they want to use an electronic device.

Plug unused outlets with outlet covers or install tamper-resistant outlets, which have a shutter system that only accepts electrical plugs.

Keep cords out of sight so children aren’t tempted to play with them.

Use ground-fault circuit interrupters to detect and prevent shocks anywhere water and electricity may meet, such as bathrooms, kitchens and basements. ■



Car accidents and weather are the main causes of downed power lines. But even on the ground, lines can carry an electric current strong enough to cause serious injury or death.

Here are some rules to follow around downed lines:

If you see a downed power line, move away from the line and anything touching it.

The proper way to move away from the line is to shuffle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times.

If someone is in direct or indirect contact with the downed line, do not touch the person. Call 911 instead.

Don’t try to move a downed power line or anything in contact with the line.

Don’t drive over downed power lines.

If you’re in your car and it is in contact with a downed line, stay in your car and call 911.

CECA encourages you to always practice safety.

PHOTO: MICHAEL BALLEW | SOUTHWEST TEXAS EC

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WWW.CECA.COOP/SCHOLARSHIPS

*Applicants must be dependents of active CECA members
who reside on CECA lines full-time.*



Fall is in full swing, and that means the leaves are changing, the weather is crisp and the holiday season is just around the corner! But the fall season also brings a higher risk of home fires and electrical safety hazards. Read the safety tips below and use the clues to complete the crossword puzzle.

5 Down: Smoke _____ should be tested every month to ensure they are working properly.

1 Across

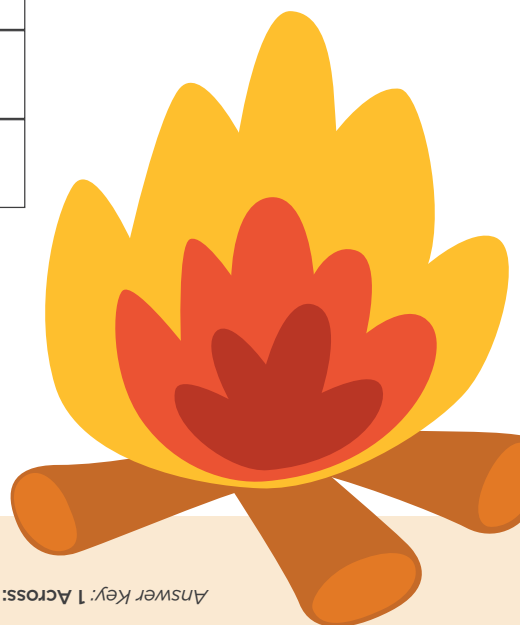
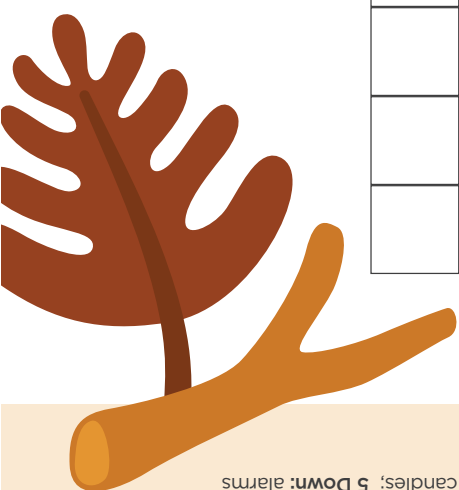
2 Across

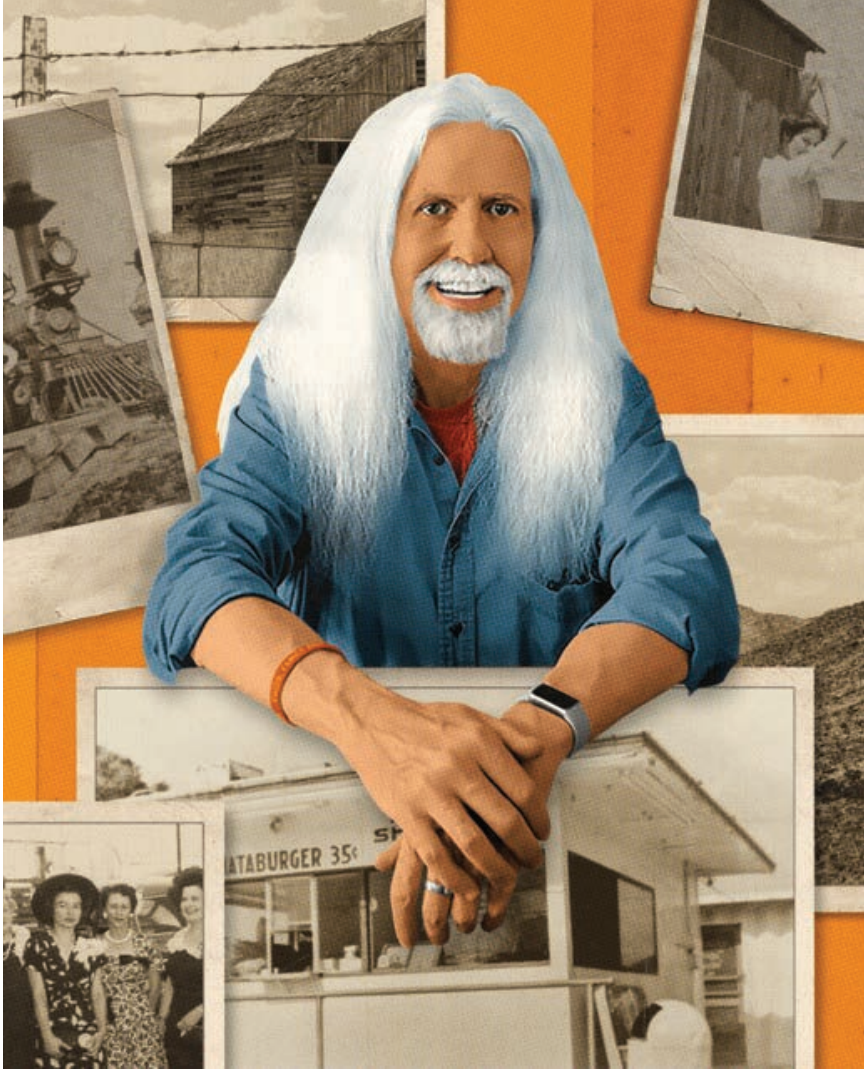
3 Down

4 Down

5 Down

Answer Key: 1 Across: adult; 2 Across: toaster; 3 Down: matches; 4 Down: candles; 5 Down: alarms





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



after they're posted. The comments section becomes a living classroom, a town square, a reunion hall.

After a photo taken at Dyess Air Force Base in the 1950s was posted, readers identified the exact model of the cash register, the type of flight suit the pilots wore, even the materials that would later replace them. Darsnek said Texas has an astonishing depth of collective knowledge and a generosity and passion for sharing it.

That generosity mirrors Darsnek's own. Gratitude underpins Traces of Texas like cultural bedrock. Every contributor is thanked. Every artifact is treated as precious. Darsnek once shared that if someone takes time from their "one granted life" to send in a photo or a story, the least he can do is acknowledge it and thank them most sincerely. That attitude may be the secret ingredient.

Then there are the people. Centenarians. War veterans. Farmers. River guides. Storytellers like Mel Dart, who flew 35 missions over Europe in World War II and said he was "too dumb to be scared." Or Dorothy McQuary Callaway, born on a farm near Thorndale. Darsnek walked the property with her when she was 99, and she showed him an old well, saying she had pumped "a kajillion gallons of water out of that thing."

Sometimes, Traces of Texas reconnects people. Once, after the devastating 2013 explosion in West, a family photo was found and returned to its owners after being posted on the page.

Traces of Texas is a reminder that Texas is a community and that our stories and photographs are worth preserving, sharing and honoring. Traces of Texas is our shared digital archive. That is a wonderful gift. And Texas is better for it. ■

Faces and Places

And a big helping of gratitude power the viral wonder Traces of Texas

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR CALLERY

EVERY HOLIDAY SEASON I thank someone for a great gift to Texas. This time I'd like to thank Jac Darsnek, the much-loved creator and editor of the Traces of Texas Facebook page that has accrued more than 1 million followers since 2010.

Texas has always been more than a place. It's a memory, a voice, a photograph tucked into a drawer, a story shared across a kitchen table.

Darsnek didn't start out with a plan but simply an instinct, sharpened by experience, that Texans liked talking about Texas. By late 2012, something clicked. Not because of flashy trends or algorithms but because Darsnek leaned into history and let it speak for itself.

His breakthrough moment was

publishing a black-and-white photo of the original Whataburger in Corpus Christi, which went viral.

Photographs became the heartbeat. The images, most of them taken long before color film was common, carry a gravity that modern photos often lack. These aren't stylized shots posed to impress; they're family photographs, photos of musicians before fame, pilots before they were legends, farmers before nostalgia softened the edges of real life. This was Texas unfiltered.

What's remarkable is not just the photos—acquired from the Portal to Texas History, the University of Texas at Arlington's Special Collections archive and other sources—but what happens

Cranberry Harvest

Sip and bake your way through the holidays with this traditional fruit

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

When I hosted my first Thanksgiving, I found myself with leftover cranberries I had trouble getting through. This holiday season, we're not letting any cranberry escape our holiday table. I'm transforming cranberries into a delicious agua fresca that can be enjoyed throughout the holiday season. It's tart, sweet and ideal for a crowd.

Cranberry Agua Fresca

**1 bag fresh or frozen cranberries
(12 ounces), plus more to garnish**
10 cups water
1½ cups sugar
Juice of 1 lime
Lime slices, to garnish

COOK'S TIP The agua fresca can be made up to two days in advance and stored in the fridge. Stir before serving.

1. To a stockpot, add cranberries, water and sugar. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer on low until all cranberries have popped and softened and all sugar is dissolved, about 10 minutes.
2. Remove from heat and allow to cool. In batches, add cranberries and liquid to a blender and blend until smooth.
3. Strain into a punch bowl or pitcher. Stir in lime juice, add ice, and garnish with additional cranberries and lime slices as desired.

SERVES 10

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for a Cranberry Mezcal Paloma.





Cranberry Pecan Cornbread Muffins

NANCY DENNIS
BARTLETT EC

These corn muffins, warm from the oven and buttered, are heavenly! The combination of cornmeal, cranberries and pecans works for your Thanksgiving, Christmas or brunch table. The key to this recipe is to not overmix. I enjoyed these tender muffins with a cup of coffee and served the rest with dinner.

- 1 cup cornmeal**
- 1 cup flour**
- 1 teaspoon baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon baking soda**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted and slightly cooled**
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- ⅓ cup light brown sugar**
- 2 large eggs, room temperature**
- 1 cup buttermilk, room temperature**
- ⅓ cup dried sweetened cranberries**
- ⅓ cup chopped pecans**

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line a 12-count muffin pan with liners or coat with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together butter, oil and brown sugar until completely smooth. Whisk in eggs and buttermilk until combined.
4. Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and whisk until combined. Fold in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Cranberry Nut Pie

BONNIE KOLIBA
FARMERS EC



Koliba buys an extra bag of fresh cranberries when they're in season. She freezes them just to make this pie throughout the year, and I'll be doing the same. I absolutely loved this pie for its ease and sweet and tart flavors. It's a recipe you'll get to know well.

- 2 cups fresh cranberries**
- ½ cup chopped walnuts**
- 1½ cups sugar, divided use**
- 1 cup flour, sifted**

- 2 eggs, lightly beaten**
- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, melted**
- 2 teaspoons almond extract**
- Sweetened whipped cream, for serving**

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat a 10-inch pie dish with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, combine cranberries, walnuts and ½ cup sugar. Spread into prepared pie dish.
3. In the same bowl, combine the remaining 1 cup sugar, flour, eggs, butter and almond extract. Stir well. The batter will be thick. Spoon batter over cranberry mixture in pie dish.
4. Bake 40–50 minutes. Allow to cool completely on a wire rack and serve with whipped cream.

SERVES 6

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

MAC AND CHEESE DUE NOV 10

What makes your ooey-gooey noodle dishes stand out from the crowd? Enter our contest. The best from Co-op Country will be featured in April, and the winner gets a load of cheddar: \$500.

UPCOMING: SALSA DUE DEC 10



RECIPES CONTINUED

cranberries and pecans just until combined; avoid overmixing.

5. Spoon batter into muffin pan, filling each cup all the way to the top. Bake 5 minutes, then reduce heat to 350 degrees. Continue baking another 10–15 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

6. Allow to cool in pan 5 minutes before serving. Store leftovers up to 1 week in an airtight container at room temperature or in the fridge. Leftovers can also be stored frozen up to 3 months.

MAKES 1 DOZEN MUFFINS

Cranberry Kuchen

SHELLEY FAHRENTHOLD
SAN BERNARD EC

This hearty, tart and comforting *kuchen*, German for cake, is meant to be enjoyed with a steaming cup of coffee. The batter is fairly thick, so be sure to grease your pan well. Fresh or frozen cranberries can



be used. Serve warm with a scoop of ice cream for a delightful fall treat.

CAKE

¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, room temperature
1 cup sugar
1 egg, lightly beaten
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons milk
2 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon salt
2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries

TOPPING

½ cup sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ cup flour
¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, room temperature

- 1. CAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat an 8-by-8-inch pan with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar. Stir in egg and milk. Slowly stir in flour, baking powder and salt. The batter will be stiff.
- 3.** Fold in cranberries. Spread batter into prepared pan.
- 4. TOPPING** In a bowl, mix sugar, cinnamon, flour and butter with a fork until crumbly.
- 5.** Sprinkle topping evenly over batter. Bake 30–40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 8

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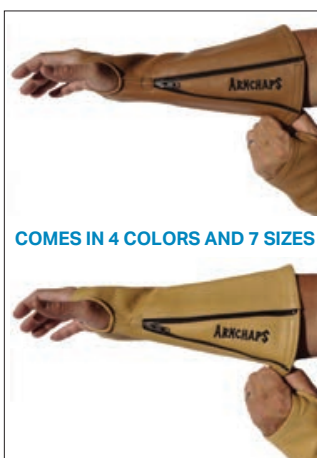
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

How To Defeat a Creek

Rusk's historic footbridge is the longest of its kind in the U.S.

BY CHET GARNER

THERE ARE MANY enormous bridges in Texas built to carry trains, trucks and oversized loads of every kind. Then there's the historic Rusk Footbridge, a narrow wooden walkway stretching 546 feet and built for something much humbler: helping folks get to town without getting their boots wet.

But what this East Texas marvel lacks in load bearing, it makes up for in length by being the longest wooden footbridge in the U.S. As soon as I heard about it, I had to cross it.

The bridge reaches far beneath a canopy of shade trees in Rusk, just off the Cherokee County Square and across a tributary to One Eye Creek, which must have its own interesting history. With every step, the span emanated a satisfying old-wood creak, the kind that makes you instinctively walk lighter, as if the bridge can feel your weight (and your thoughts).

The bridge was originally built in 1861 because residents on the east side of the creek were frequently cut off from life on the square every time it rained. Most Texans know the phrase "the good Lord willing and the creek don't rise" because every time the creek rose, they were at its mercy. But with this footbridge, they mastered the perils of nature.

Crossing the bridge today isn't exactly an adrenaline sport, although 546 feet is longer than I expected. And reaching the other side doesn't really take visitors anywhere of note, leaving everyone to simply turn around and hike back. But that's the charm.

It's not height or horsepower, it's longevity and the fact that this bridge has been carrying East Texans since the Civil War. By the time I reached the other side, I felt like I'd crossed more than a creek bottom. I'd crossed into the everyday history that holds small towns together, one plank at a time. ■

ABOVE Chet knew he had to walk across the 546-foot Rusk Footbridge soon as he heard about it.

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.

NOVEMBER

7

Hillsboro Municipal Airport—Open House/Fly-In, (254) 337-7051, hillsborotx.org

Pipe Creek Turkey Shoot, (830) 535-6611, castlelakeranchvfd.org

12

Goldthwaite The Stones Are Speaking Film Screening and Talk by Director Olive Talley, (325) 648-2750, legacyplaza.org

14

Grapevine Candlelight Tour of Homes, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Mason Mason County Wild Game Dinner, (325) 347-5758, masontx.org

Smithville Smithville Garden Club Tour of Homes, (512) 237-2313, facebook.com/smithvillegardenclub

19

Corsicana Tree Lighting, (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

Denton Homeless Veteran Stand Down, (817) 255-7150, bit.ly/veteranstanddown

Brackettville [21–Jan. 3] Legends at Las Moras, (210) 863-2355, legendsatlasmoras.com

21

Bluff Dale The Front Porch Christmas Market, (817) 946-0141, facebook.com/thefrontporchbluffdale

Henderson A Very Merry Market, (903) 521-3992, thechurchatlakecherokee.com

Kerrville Holiday Lighted Parade, (830) 257-7300, kerrvilletx.gov

Luling Candy Land—Christmas Arts & Crafts Show, (830) 875-0123, lulingcc.org

Grapevine [21–22] North Central Ballet Presents *Nutcracker—Short and Sweet*, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

22

Giddings Sip & Shop Christmas Market, (979) 542-3455, giddingsstx.com

27

Fort Worth [27–28] Home for the Holidays, (817) 665-6000, fwsymphony.org

28

Mason Light Up Our Town—A Hometown Christmas, (325) 347-5758, business.masontx.org

29

Mineola Toys for Tots Dance, (972) 979-2672, etsrda.com

DECEMBER

5

Bertram Country Christmas, (512) 882-2992, bertramchamber.com

Castroville Candlelight Home Tour, (830) 708-5680, castrovilleconservation.society.org

Fairfield Christmas on the Square and Parade, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

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SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



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

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

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our **Sedona Turquoise Collection**. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork.

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Management,
and Circulation**
(Required by 39 USC 3685)

1. Publication Title
Texas Co-op Power

2. Publication Number
0540-560

3. Filing Date
October 1, 2026

4. Issue Frequency
Monthly

5. Number of Issues Published Annually
Twelve

6. Annual Subscription Price
\$7.50

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Street, city, county, state and ZIP+4)
1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Travis, Texas 78701-2167

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher
1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Travis, Texas 78701-2167

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor
Publisher
Texas Electric Cooperatives, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl,
Austin, Texas 78701-2167

Editor
Chris Burrows, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, TX 78701

Managing Editor
Karen Nejtek, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, TX 78701

10. Owner
Full Name
Complete Mailing Address
Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., is a nonprofit association of rural ECs organized as a cooperative membership corporation under Article 1528b, Texas Civil Statutes. Its members are: Bailey County ECA, Muleshoe; Bandera EC, Bandera; Bartlett EC, Bartlett; Big Country EC, Roby; Bluebonnet EC, Giddings; Bowie-Cass EC, Douglassville; Brazos EC, Waco; Bryan Texas Utilities, Bryan; Central Texas EC, Fredericksburg; Cherokee County ECA, Rusk; Coleman County EC, Coleman; Comanche County ECA, Comanche; Concho Valley EC, San Angelo; CoServ EC, Corin; Deaf Smith EC, Hereford; Deep East Texas EC, San Augustine; East Texas EC, Nacogdoches; Fannin County EC, Bonham; Farmers EC, Greenville; Fayette EC, LaGrange; Fort Belknap EC, Olney; Golden Spread EC, Amarillo; Grayson-Collin EC, Van Alstyne; Greenbelt EC, Wellington; Guadalupe Valley EC, Gonzales; Hamilton County ECA, Hamilton; Harmon EA, Hollis, Oklahoma; Heart of Texas EC, McGregor; HILCO EC, Itasca; Houston County EC, Crockett; J-A-C EC, Bluegrove; Jackson EC, Edna; Jasper-Newton EC, Kirbyville; Karnes EC, Karnes City; Lamar County ECA, Blossom; Lamb County EC, Littlefield; Lea County EC, Lovington, New Mexico; Lighthouse EC, Floydada; Lower Colorado River Authority, Austin; Lyntegar EC, Tahoka; Magic Valley EC, Mercedes; Medina EC, Hondo; MidSouth EC, Navasota; Navarro County EC, Corsicana; Navasota Valley EC, Franklin; North Plains EC, Perryton; Northeast Texas EC, Longview; Nueces EC, Robstown; Panola-Harrison EC, Marshall; Pedernales EC, Johnson City; PenTex Energy, Muenster; Rayburn Country EC, Rockwall; Rio Grande EC, Brackettville; Rita Blanca EC, Dalhart; Rusk County EC, Henderson; Sam Houston EC, Livingston; San Bernard EC, Bellville; San Miguel EC, Jourdanton; San Patricio EC, Sinton; South Plains EC, Lubbock; South Texas EC, Victoria; Southwest Rural EA, Tipton, Oklahoma; Southwest Texas EC, Eldorado; Swisher EC, Tulla; Taylor EC, Merkel; Tex-La EC of Texas, Nacogdoches; Tri-County EC, Azle; Trinity Valley EC, Kaufman; United Cooperative Services, Cleburne; Upshur-Rural EC, Gilmer; Victoria EC, Victoria; Wharton County EC, El Campo; Wise EC, Decatur; Wood County EC, Quitman.

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders ☒ None

12. Tax Status ☒ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months

13. Publication Title
Texas Co-op Power

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below
October 1, 2026

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies	1,731,326	1,725,830
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation	1,720,634	1,715,277
c. Total Paid Distribution	1,720,634	1,715,277
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	5,013	5,034
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	9,944	9,991
f. Total Distribution	1,730,578	1,725,268
g. Copies not Distributed	749	562
h. Total	1,731,327	1,725,830
i. Percent Paid	99.43%	99.42%
16. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies	none	none
b. Total Paid Print and Electronic Copies	1,720,634	1,715,277
c. Total Print and Electronic Distribution	1,730,577	1,725,268
d. Percentage Paid	99.43%	99.42%

I certify that 50% of all my distribution copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership
☒ Publication required. Will be printed in the November 2026 issue of this publication.

Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager or Owner Date
Karen Nejtek, Production Manager October 1, 2026

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Ride the Rails

All aboard! Not to derail the conversation, but these Texans love to blow off steam by riding the rails. Let's get back on track. Have your tickets ready; this train's leaving the station.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 BOB NORRIS
PEDERNALES EC

A freight train crosses New Mexico.

2 STEFAN GREENE
HEART OF TEXAS EC

"Departure from San Antonio as the train is backed up for its return to McGregor."

3 ANN ANTHONY
MIDSOUTH EC

"When my grandson, Buchanan Anthony, was 3 years old, he enjoyed his first train ride on the Texas State Railroad in Rusk."

4 JOHN MCLAIN
TRINITY VALLEY EC

"Union Pacific's Big Boy No. 4014 makes its way west in East Texas."



2



1



3



4

Upcoming Contests

IN THE GARDEN DUE NOV 10

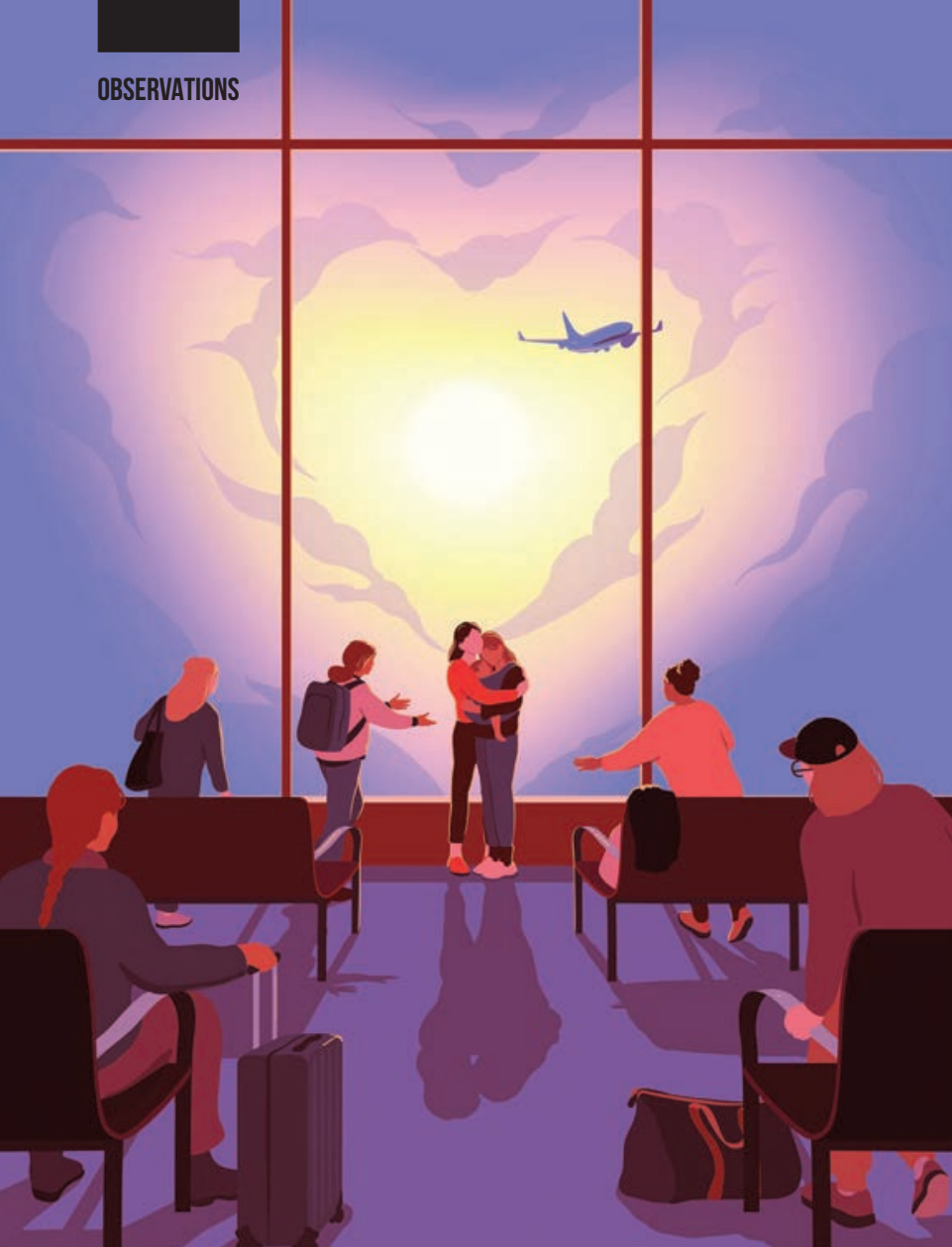
COUNTRY CHURCHES DUE DEC 10

REPETITION DUE JAN 10



ENTER ONLINE

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Ride the Rails photos from readers.



Navigating Turbulence

It only takes one person to ease life's baggage when all seems lost

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE MOLLON

THE AIRPORT CONCOURSE stretched ahead for what seemed like miles. Everywhere, throngs of strangers scurried like ants, oblivious to me and our fellow travelers. Most stared at their phones.

After a long walk, I arrived at Gate 81 and leaned against a column to catch my breath. And people watch.

Near the waiting area, four men stood in a circle, chatting and laughing. Over in a seat, an older man scribbled in a notebook. A few chairs away, a slim woman wearing glasses charged her phone. Across from her, a little girl played on a phone while her weary mother stared into space.

A young woman hurrying past caught my eye. Strapped to her chest was a baby, swaddled tightly. As I discreetly watched, the mother strode over to an airline agent.

They talked briefly, then the young mother burst into tears. So did the baby.

"This airport is horrible!" she wailed.

"What am I going to do?"

My heart sank as her cries turned into gut-wrenching sobs. She had missed her flight.

Tears streamed down her face, and fear shone in her eyes. "Oh, that poor, poor woman," I thought.

Seconds later, the slender woman I'd noticed before leaped up from her chair, left her belongings behind and beelined for the mother. Without hesitation, she wrapped her arms around her in a fierce hug and held the young woman as she continued to cry. Then the woman cupped the mother's face in her hands and looked into her eyes. "It's going to be OK," the woman said calmly. "It's going to be O-K."

Soon a second woman hurried up and embraced the mother too. Another woman appeared and put some bills in the mother's hand. "This isn't much, but it's all I have," she said. "I hope it helps."

More and more women stepped up, each gifting their own salves of cash. It was as if they were draping a communal blanket of love, warmth and protection.

Teary-eyed and deeply touched, I stood there, wanting to help, yet a little afraid and unsure of what to do. "You know what to do," a small voice told me.

Digging into my purse, I pulled out a white bank envelope with one last \$20 bill folded inside. I walked over to the mother and tucked my envelope into her hand, which by then clutched a fistful of bills. "Here," I said, "you can use this envelope for your money." I gave her a quick hug and then hurried to board my plane.

On the flight, I searched for the slender woman but couldn't find her. To this day, I'll always wish I could have thanked her for her brave act of compassion.

That morning in a busy airport, she empowered one young mother with hope. And she showed strangers like me how kindness can ripple out and impact the world in the best kind of way. ■

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The 2026-P Morgan Silver Dollar Reverse Proof

Struck in 2026 especially for America's 250th anniversary this Morgan features the classic Liberty and eagle designs collectors know and love, enhanced with a stunning Reverse Proof finish. What exactly is Reverse Proof? Think of it as the Morgan design turned inside out. Instead of the traditional mirror-like background with frosted details, the fields appear frosted while Liberty, the eagle and other design elements shine with brilliant, mirror-like surfaces. The result is dramatic contrast that makes this historic design practically jump off the coin.

Two Firsts for America's 250th

For the first time, the Morgan Dollar bears a special 1776 – 2026 dual date commemorating the Semiquincentennial. It also carries a one-year-only "Liberty

Bell 250" privy mark, adding another unmistakable connection to this once-in-a-generation American celebration. Each coin was struck at the U.S. Mint's historic Philadelphia facility, the nation's "Mother Mint," using carefully prepared planchets, polished dies, and multiple strikes to achieve its distinctive Reverse Proof appearance.

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