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IS BUSY AS EVER

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# December 2024



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An old pecan tree's dazzling annual metamorphosis becomes a community tradition.

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Photos by R.J. Hinkle

## Everybody's Beeswax

Texans help each other help the mighty honeybee help the rest of us.

By Claire Stevens  
Photos by Eric W. Pohl

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Photo by Eric W. Pohl



# Y2...What?



THE WORLD SEEMINGLY teetered on turmoil 25 years ago this month at the hands of Y2K, a supposed computer glitch that threatened to stymie systems as the calendar turned from 1999 to 2000. It was quite a big deal—though for TCP's editors and writers, not so much:

**Samantha Bryant:** *I was at my grandmother's house in Poolville, listening to the news on TV while my siblings and I did a Y2K-proof activity—a puzzle.*

**Chris Burrows:** *I was making sure our family computer kept ticking (by playing video games all night).*

**Alex Dal Santo:** *We were with neighbors, watching Space Jam. None of the adults seemed very concerned.*

**Claire Stevens:** *That was before my time, but my parents didn't even see midnight. I'm told they "went to bed hoping the world and digital appliances would live to see the next day."*

**Tom Widlowski:** *I was one of the 260,000 revelers packing Congress Avenue in Austin.*

Read *Black-Eyed Peace* on Page 25 to learn more about the experiences of Texans during Y2K.



## TCP Contests and More

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### RECOMMENDED READING

Download our issue from December 2004 and enjoy our look at holiday lights. Find it at [texascooppower.com/magazine-archives](https://www.texascooppower.com/magazine-archives).



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My favorite holiday lights are ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our October prompt: **My favorite hand-me-down is ...**

Old recipes. You get to learn, by trial and error, how much a pinch and a dash actually is.

TABITHA FOUNTAIN  
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC  
SAN AUGUSTINE

My name. My dad named me after his sister. We both were Yvette Françoise "Sissy" Sherman.

YVETTE COOPER  
BANDERA EC  
BANDERA

A small screwdriver my dad gave me when I was about 6. I'm 75 and carry it on my key chain every day.

GARY ELLIOTT  
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

## 75 Candles

Three Texans with storied careers in their chosen fields turn 75 this month.

- Hall of Fame golfer **Tom Kite** was born December 9, 1949, in McKinney.
- ZZ Top guitarist **Billy Gibbons** was born December 16 in Houston.
- Academy Award-winning actress **Sissy Spacek** was born December 25 in Quitman.



## OCTOBER 2024 There's No Party Like La Pitada

"I extend my gratitude for including such a small town like ours in your amazing magazine—and also the tradition we hold sacred, celebrating our Dallas Cowboys!"

SANTA GARCIA  
MAGIC VALLEY EC  
BROWNSVILLE



ERICH SCHLEGEL

## Hauling Grass

Hadn't seen lawn mower racing in years—since I left the hills of Kentucky [*Grassroots Movement*, October 2024].

Mark Wright  
Via Facebook

## Come Together

Thanks for the old Beatles memory [*Invading Dallas*, September 2024]. I saw them the night before in Kansas City. I was a sixth grader in Topeka, Kansas.

Larry Chabira  
Pedernales EC  
San Leanna

## The Cactus Experience

I have looked for a book—*Gunsmoke in the Redlands*, about feuds in San Augustine. Felton Cochran said he had the book in his hand, and two days later I had it in my hand [*Texas Book Man*, July 2024].

Buddy Hancock  
Deep East Texas EC  
Center



JULIA ROBINSON

I ventured into Cactus Book Shop about 22 years ago. Felton Cochran was so pleasant and welcoming, and I picked out several books totaling well over \$100. Back then, he didn't take credit cards.

I asked him to hold my books until I could come back in a few days with a check, as I was a 100-mile round trip from San Angelo. He insisted I take them with me and mail him a check later. He didn't ask for ID, phone number or anything.

Susan Wellborn  
Concho Valley EC  
Robert Lee

## Saltshaker Logic

I especially enjoyed the last two sentences: "Oh well, even the imperfect ones have purpose. I grabbed the saltshaker." We humans are imperfect and sometimes say or do something that rubs another person the wrong way [*Culling Time*, July 2024].

Instead of getting upset at someone, grab the imaginary saltshaker. Take what the other person said or did with a grain of salt.

Ted Pasche  
CoServ  
Argyle

## TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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**TEXAS CO-OP POWER** Volume 81, Number 6 (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 76 electric cooperatives. Texas Co-op Power's website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** Subscription price is \$4.44 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

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American MainStreet Publications

An old pecan tree's dazzling  
annual metamorphosis becomes  
a community tradition

# Field of Beams

BY PETE ALFANO • PHOTOS BY R.J. HINKLE

A family gathering on Thanksgiving culminates in the pasture of a 10-acre ranch where a pair of old geldings, Zephyr and Max, graze during the day. In the middle of this equine playground is a pecan tree, standing like a sentry, having taken root about 30 years after Texas became a state.

But for the past 17 years, the tree has been more than just a vestige of the past; it is the town of Bartonville's symbolic tribute to the holidays.

Without fanfare Barbara Nunneley first lit the nearly 50-foot-tall tree in 2007, when about 60,000 bright LEDs illuminated the darkness and could be seen from 3 miles away. The bright lights attract visitors who admire and photograph it or quietly take in the glow, reflecting on another year coming to an end.

"It's mesmerizing, almost a spiritual thing," says Jaclyn Carrington, mayor of Bartonville, 30 miles northwest of Fort Worth. "It is so black out because there are no streetlights, so all you see is this gigantic, beautiful bright tree. The first time I saw it, I thought, 'Wow, this is magnificent.'"

This month is the 18th renewal of a tradition Nunneley, a retired lawyer, initiated to honor her father, Earl, a larger-than-life personality, she says, who was battling prostate cancer during the early 2000s. She plays host to siblings and their families on Thanksgiving and wanted her father to be there to witness a tree-lighting ceremony that has become as anticipated in Bartonville as the annual tree-lighting event at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

"It's mesmerizing, almost a spiritual thing," Bartonville Mayor Jaclyn Carrington says of the centuries-old lighted pecan tree on Barbara Nunneley's ranch.

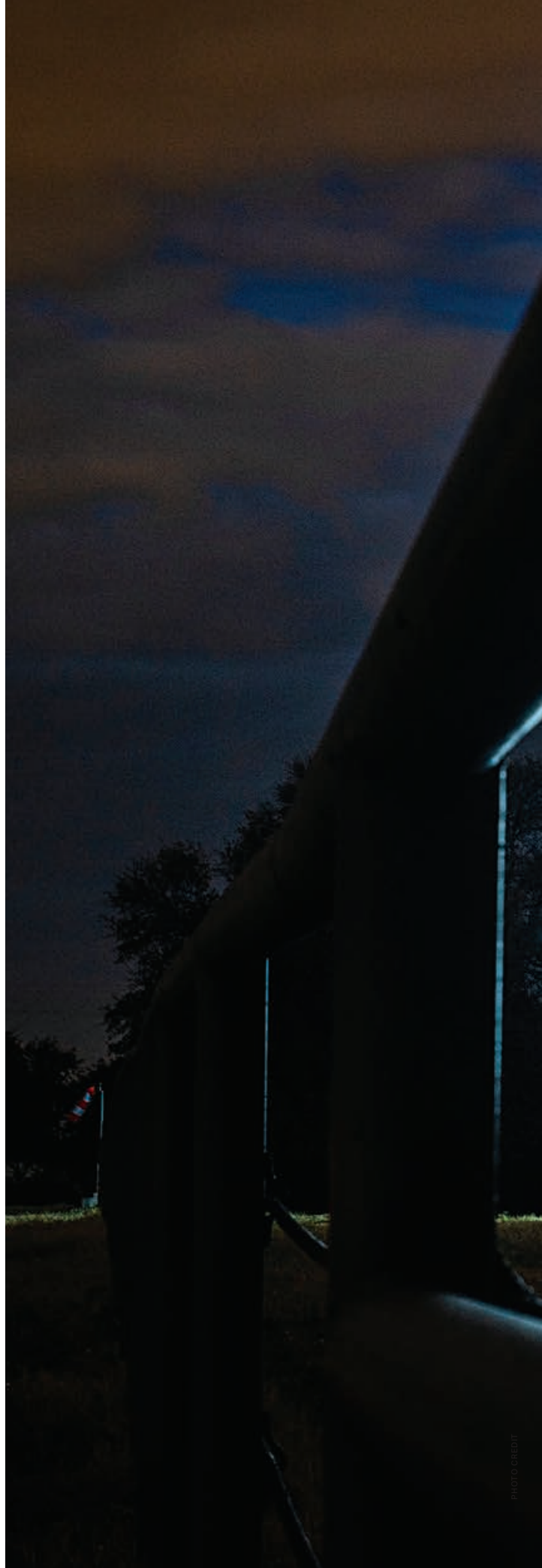


PHOTO CREDIT







“  
*No one could have predicted that an old and revered pecan tree would become the centerpiece of the holiday season in Bartonville. It has had a life of its own and now, ‘a light of its own.’*  
”



Her dad, however, was too ill to make the 70-mile trip from Nocona on Thanksgiving in 2007, but with her family gathered around the tree in the pasture after dinner, Nunneley flipped the switch that brought the pecan tree to life.

“There was dead silence for a couple of minutes,” she says. “Then tears.” Her father died the next day, but Nunneley has faith that he has seen the tree from a far loftier perch.

Bill Rathburn, owner of the Christmas Light Co., first suggested lighting the 150-year-old tree in 2005. His crew was there to string lights across the roofline of Nunneley’s sprawling ranch house when he sized up the gangly mass of limbs and branches after the tree had shed its leaves and

dropped its pecans. He pondered what a different kind of Christmas tree it could be.

But Nunneley and her partner, Jan Deatherage, decided against the challenging and costly job of lighting the tree. With her father’s illness progressing, however, and his love for anything over-the-top, Nunneley gave the go-ahead two years later.

Stringing lights on the tree is labor intensive. Rathburn’s crew uses cherry pickers to reach the top, and the project takes a couple of days each year to set up and then take down in early January. Nunneley says a new circuit board had to be installed to handle the power output and that a timer now turns the lights on at dusk and off at midnight.

The tree has had various light colors over the years, but white appears to have the most dramatic impact. CoServ, an electric cooperative based in Denton, provides the electricity for the property and the tree.

Pecan trees are resilient, and this one has obviously survived numerous winters of freezing temperatures and ice storms as well as tornado seasons and Texas’ broiling summer heat. During severe drought, Nunneley runs garden hoses out to the tree from the house to ensure it stays healthy.

Carrington says the famous tree has had a modest economic impact during the holidays as people from the region make the pilgrimage to Bartonville. They eat dinner in the town of about 1,800 and then park along the side of the road fronting the pasture to admire the tree from behind the low fence.

“They make an evening out of it,” Carrington says. “It’s a huge event every year.”

One evening the week before Christmas last year, local Kim Corser stepped out of her car and walked up to the fence to just marvel at the tree. “I was out running errands and realized I hadn’t come to see the tree yet,” she says. “I usually come with my kids, but we’ll come back.”

Some visitors have tried to scale the fence to get even closer to the tree despite a sign that warns against trespassing. “Some high school boys tried to climb it,” Nunneley says. “People sneak in because they think it is on a vacant lot. Parking can be an issue because we’ve had people pulling into our driveway.”

She says a neighbor who works for the Federal Aviation Administration has informed pilots about the tree, which can be seen from planes as they come and go from nearby Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

The pecan tree is not just a tourist attraction but a source of inspiration. Deatherage displayed a coffee-table book about the tree compiled by Flower Mound photographer Meredith Butterfield. “It has entries by different photographers with stories of what the tree means to them,” she says. It’s a limited-edition book: The only copy belongs to Nunneley and Deatherage.

One holiday season early on, Nunneley heard a knock on



the front door and found a sheet of legal paper under the doormat. It was left by a young man who wanted to propose to his girlfriend under the tree because she had admired it the year before. But there was no name, phone number or other contact information.

“Several days later, I was walking in the pasture collecting the horses and saw yet another sheet of yellow legal paper,” Nunneley says. “It was the second page of the original letter. Clearly the wind had come up and separated the letter. It had the young man’s name and the way to contact him.” She followed through and gave her blessing to his request.

It happened again years later when a polite young man, about to graduate college, rang the doorbell and nervously asked whether he could propose to his college sweetheart under the tree. “He thought it was a logical place because it was a place of so much light, hope for the future and promise,” Nunneley says.

The young Romeo kept it a secret from his girlfriend when they came to view the tree. He convinced her that he knew the owners and it would be OK to trespass and take photos under the blinding canopy.

When they went over the fence and walked up to the tree, his family and hers drove from around the corner and watched as the young man dropped to one knee and proposed. “There were celebratory handshakes and hugs and lots and lots of flash camera pictures,” Nunneley says.

No one could have predicted that an old and revered pecan tree would become the centerpiece of the holiday season in Bartonville. It has had a life of its own and now, “a light of its own,” Nunneley says. ■



OPPOSITE Nunneley began the tree-lighting tradition in 2007 to honor her father.  
THIS PAGE The 60,000 LEDs have made the tree a famous attraction over the holidays.







# Everybody's

BY CLAIRE STEVENS  
PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Michele Jaquier, a tour guide at Two Hives Honey in Manor, shows guests a beehive frame loaded with bees and honey. Jaquier captures a sample of honey. Atlas, owner Tara Chapman's son, helps with the smoker. Honey production in the U.S. was up last year even as bees face a range of threats.

For years now, all eyes have been on the bees. In the mid-2000s entire colonies of worker bees started disappearing suddenly and mysteriously, raising alarm bells around the world. Since then, there has been serious concern for the insects we depend on to pollinate our crops and native flora. Bees are up against a whole host of threats, including habitat destruction and fragmentation, invasive parasites, and extreme weather.

But things might finally be looking up for honeybees. In the U.S., honey production was up 11% in 2023 after three years of decline, according to the Department of Agriculture.

That's due, at least in part, to the many dedicated defenders of these critical pollinators. Across Texas a growing movement





# Beeswax

**Texans help each other  
help the mighty honeybee  
help the rest of us**

of beekeepers, educators and researchers are working to save the bees. One such defender—Juliana Rangel, a professor of apiculture who runs the Texas A&M University honeybee lab—says those efforts are starting to pay off.

The biggest threat facing the bees, Rangel says, is the varroa mite, a tiny parasite that feeds on bees and spreads viruses among colonies worldwide. Despite measuring just over a millimeter, the pests have devastated U.S. honeybee populations as they've spread since the late 1980s. Some insecticides are effective against varroa but can also have negative effects on bees.

Making matters worse, increasing urbanization has left wild and managed bees with less forage.

Bees also must contend with extreme weather amid a changing climate. The February 2021 winter storm in Texas impacted bee populations unequipped for the cold and delayed the spring blooms they rely on for food. In addition, increasingly hot summers and droughts have left many bees starving. Beekeepers can keep them alive, but they'll struggle in the heat, with poor nutrition leading to no honey yields.

Against these threats, it's impressive that bees can survive in the wild. While beekeepers keep honeybees almost exclusively, native wild bees often live secluded, in nests, making them much harder to study. But they face many of the same challenges as their managed counterparts.



"I love feral colonies because they are kind of like a beacon of not just diversity but also resilience against all of these issues," Rangel says. "If they're alive, it's because they've been able to survive on their own."

Luckily, not all bees have to do it on their own. Beekeepers across the state dedicate themselves to the pollinators.

Suzanne Truhlicka, a Lyntegar Electric Cooperative member who lives in Tahoka, just south of Lubbock, was hooked after a neighbor took her along for a hive removal in 2019. "I just became addicted to bees," Truhlicka says. "The bees are like therapy to me. They're a challenge, every day."

She now maintains 12 hives and sells honey and beeswax products online and at local shops through her business, Flying Fancy Bees. She's one of many Texans who have picked up the trade in recent years. In fact, the number of farms with bees in Texas more than quadrupled from 2012 to 2022, according to the USDA's Census of Agriculture. Texas had 8,939 farms with bees—more than twice as many as the next highest state, Ohio.

One leading contributor to Texas' honeybee craze is a 2012 state law that allows folks with 5–20 acres of land to get a property tax break under an agricultural exemption if they keep bees.

That tax break was what originally prompted Susan Allen to put hives on her North Texas property, deciding that tending bees was going to be a whole lot easier than maintaining



RIGHT Chapman has become focused on beekeeping education.  
BELOW A collection of hives in September at Two Hives Honey. The smoke keeps the bees calm while keepers perform hive inspections.





# Save the Bees

If you want to do your part to help bees, here are a few steps you can take:

- **Grow native plants.** While a perfectly manicured lawn might be your homeowners association's preference, having a "wild" portion of your lawn where native plants and wildflowers can grow is much preferred by bees.
- **Plant large patches of the same flower.** Bees have site fidelity, meaning they prefer to return to the same patch of flowers again and again. Having a large patch of one species, rather than just a few of each kind of flower, makes it easier for them to do so.

- **If you're ready to begin caring for your own hives,**

now is the ideal time to learn and order a nucleus colony, often just called a nuc, to get started.

Nucs are typically delivered in late spring but often must be ordered in advance.

- **Support local beekeepers.** Find a map of Texas honey retailers on the Texas Beekeepers Association's website, [texasbeekeepers.org](http://texasbeekeepers.org).



the hay the land had been used for. But what started as a smart financial move quickly grew into a passion as Allen, a Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative member, became more and more involved in beekeeping, connecting with other local beekeepers through the Grayson County Beekeepers Association.

The more Allen learned about bees, the more she was invested. "They're just so stinking smart," Allen says. "They're fascinating. That's what keeps me going. It's just learning more and more about them."

Beekeeping clubs exist all over Texas, gathering in churches, community centers, restaurants and homes to educate, discuss challenges and collaborate.

Best friends Rosie Lund and Meredith Pace started their honey and beekeeping supply business, Apis Supply, in 2023 and quickly realized they needed a bee club in their neck of West Texas, where high winds and dry weather make keeping bees particularly tricky. The duo helped organize curious beekeepers into the Permian Basin Beekeeping Association, which now meets monthly in Seminole.

"It's a family, really," says Pace, a Lyntegar EC member. "We all just kind of support each other. It's like, 'Oh, hey, I have an extra frame,' or 'I have an extra box,' until you can get stuff in the mail because everything takes a week to get here."

Much like the community inside a hive, the community of beekeepers depends on each other. And they depend especially on people like Tara Chapman, whose beekeeping venture goes well beyond honey production, aiming to get more people informed and excited about bees.

Chapman took a beekeeping class in 2013 while looking for a new career after 10 years at the CIA. She became fascinated with bees and decided to trade war zones for worker bees, starting with just two hives maintained by her and a friend. Her operation has grown to more than 300 hives at Two Hives Honey in Manor, just east of Austin.

Chapman doesn't get to spend as much time "in bees" as she used to but now focuses on beekeeping education. In addition to tours of the honey ranch, honey tastings and

beekeeping classes, Two Hives offers a six-month hands-on "beek" apprenticeship program. Last month Chapman published *For the Bees: A Handbook for Happy Beekeeping*.

"Beekeeping is the most nuanced form of ag there is," she says. "I will argue to my death that that is true, and it's not totally intuitive to everybody."

Chapman set out to teach people about the "bananas" world of bees, making sure they understand basic bee biology first. Inside each hive is an entire society, she explains, with a queen at the center. But the queen, while important, isn't really in charge. Honeybees make decisions democratically, communicating through pheromones and "waggle dances."

"It just so defies logic of how humans live and exist," she says. Understanding the foreign world of bees is one of the things that can make keeping them so challenging.

"I've made every mistake, and I think it's why my greatest asset is my ability to teach beekeeping," Chapman says. Those mistakes have included an incident in which an improperly secured box resulted in roughly 50 pounds of spilled honey in the back of Chapman's truck.

Luckily, she says, bees will quickly come to take care of any honey that's just sitting there for the taking, but "while they're taking care of it, it's going to be a terrifying sight for the layman that happens to be walking by your driveway."

Chapman's and others' efforts haven't been in vain. Rangel says the increased awareness and interest have been important and that honeybees are doing better now than when the public first learned about collapsing colonies—though it's too soon to say they're in the clear. Honeybee numbers can fluctuate year-to-year as environmental factors change, but Rangel says there's been a trend of about a 1% increase in the U.S. managed population each year.

"In the last 15 years, the number of studies on honeybees and honeybee health have grown exponentially, which increases our understanding of all the issues that they face," she says.

"Increased awareness by the public and the farming community, I think, is what's mostly helping." ■

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- 2 Butcher's Cut Top Sirloins (5 oz.)
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- 4 Caramel Apple Tartlets (4 oz.)

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MESSAGE  
FROM  
GENERAL  
MANAGER

ALAN  
LESLEY

## May Your Holidays Be Merry and Bright

**IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE** the holiday season is already here, and we'll soon be gathering with family and friends to celebrate. This festive time of year brings joy and warmth, but as the weather gets cooler and we spend more time indoors, the holidays can also bring increased energy use and a higher risk of electrical and fire hazards.

Your team at CECA cares about your well-being, so this month I'd like to share a few practical tips to help you stay safe and efficient during the holiday season.

### Safety First

My family really enjoys decorating our home for the holidays. But before we deck the halls, I always check electrical cords and light strands to make sure they aren't frayed or damaged. This gives us

the first of each month, so it's easy to remember. Testing smoke alarms only takes a few seconds and could save lives, so make it a habit.

### Season for Savings

Spending more time indoors with more guests in the home can really impact energy use. By taking a few small steps to save energy during the holiday season, you can minimize the effect on your power bill.

I like to remind my family members to mind the thermostat. Since heating and cooling makes up the majority of home energy consumption, the thermostat is one of the best places for savings.

On those chilly days, lower it a few degrees, especially when you have family or friends stopping by. Good company brings additional warmth to your home—and so do the oven and stove.

There's no denying one of the best parts of the holiday season is the food—not just the meals but the time we spend together in the kitchen. There are many ways to save in the heart of your home, but one of the best approaches is to cook with smaller countertop appliances, such as air fryers, slow cookers and toaster ovens.

These handy appliances consume a fraction of the energy used to heat the oven, creating the perfect recipe for mealtime and energy savings. If you do use the oven, plan to cook several dishes at the same time.

Your family can also save energy by decorating with LED holiday lights. LEDs are the most energy-efficient lighting option available, and they last much longer than traditional bulbs.

I hope you'll implement some of these energy-saving and safety tips into your holiday plans. For additional advice, visit our website, [ceca.coop](http://ceca.coop). We're here to help you with safety and savings year-round.

Your friends at CECA hope your holiday season is merry and bright. ■



STEFANIKOLIC | ISTOCK.COM

peace of mind, knowing our holiday lights are ready to safely brighten our home. I also double-check the lights we use outside to make sure they're rated for outdoor use.

Like many households, we also enjoy holiday-scented candles. While festive, candles can be fire hazards and should never be left unattended.

One of the best and easiest ways to safeguard your home is to test smoke alarms often. I test mine on





## Sign Up Your Child for the Imagination Library

**FOSTER A LOVE OF READING** in your child by signing up for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Sponsored by CECA's Operation Round-Up, the program is available at no cost to children younger than 5 who reside in CECA's service territory.

The Imagination Library puts books into the hands and hearts of children worldwide by partnering with local communities to provide specially selected high-quality books each month to participating children from birth to age 5.

Personalized with the recipients' names and mailed directly to their homes, these books create an exciting reading experience and encourage families to spend time enjoying books together.

Each book is carefully chosen by a panel of childhood literacy experts and includes tips on the inside cover for enhancing engagement and interaction between the child and their caregiver. The Imagination Library also sends two Spanish-English bilingual titles per age group each year, helping your child discover the joy of language learning.

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity! To sign up your child, visit CECA's Imagination Library sign-up page at [ceca.coop/imagination-library](http://ceca.coop/imagination-library) or scan the QR code above. ■

## 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](http://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](http://ceca.coop)



Check us out at  
[TexasCoopPower.com/comanche](http://TexasCoopPower.com/comanche)

# ANNUAL MEETING RECAP



## CECA Annual Meeting Sees Attendance Boost

**CECA HOSTED ITS** 86th Annual Meeting on Thursday, October 10, at the cooperative's headquarters in Comanche, welcoming 243 registered member families—a 20% increase from the 199 registered members who attended in 2023.

Held every October, the annual business meeting is a stakeholder event for our members and also functions as a member appreciation gathering. The meeting provides an excellent opportunity for members to come together, learn about the cooperative's activities and connect with one another while enjoying delicious food.

CECA is owned by its members, and the meeting allows them to receive important updates about their cooperative and actively participate in the election of board members, reinforcing their role as essential stakeholders in the organization.

Registration for the annual meeting opened at 5:45 p.m., but members began arriving as early as 5 p.m., drawn in by the mouthwatering aroma of barbecue wafting through the facility. Eager to savor a delicious meal prepared by CECA linemen the night before, attendees quickly lined up to indulge in bris-

ket, sausage, beans, potato salad and other sides.

Once the majority of members were settled at their tables with their meals, the business portion of the meeting commenced.

The election process was smooth and efficient. Directors Randy Denning, District 1, and Phil Taylor, District 7, were reelected to three-year terms after running unopposed, having been renominated at their respective district meetings in July.

Tyler Canady from Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss, a cooperative auditing firm based in Lubbock, delivered a financial report and stated that the cooperative received a clean audit with no issues found.

Alan Lesley, CECA general manager, then took the stage to provide his report to the membership, highlighting what members could expect from future electric bills. Lesley emphasized the significance of the annual meeting as a vital platform for holding the cooperative accountable to its members while providing essential updates on CECA's utility services and overall electric market trends.





1. A CECA member licks their finger after tasting the barbecue prepared by CECA linemen.
2. From left, CECA employees Kimberlee Gilbert, David Cisneroz, Veronica Gutierrez and Janet Ogden.
3. Gutierrez hands arriving members their cutting board gift.
4. Ogden registers a member for the annual meeting.
5. CECA employee Clayton Boone holds his daughter Ottlie at the annual meeting.
6. A member gets his drink from a CECA lineman.
7. Kendall Keith, right, transports CECA members to the building from their cars.
8. The view of the crowd facing the stage at the annual meeting.
9. CECA members fill their plates.



Lesley provided the membership with an overview of the cooperative's operational costs, comparing expenses related to transformers, poles and wires from 2018 to 2024. He announced that the wires (availability charge) component of the electric bill would be adjusted in January 2025 to address rising prices.

CECA launched a comprehensive cost-of-service study in November 2023 to assess past and present expenses for long-term financial sustainability. To combat escalating operational costs and inflation, Lesley announced a 5.6% rate adjustment across all classes, effective January 2025, which received approval from the CECA Board of Directors in August.

The adjustment will affect rate classes differently. The majority of these changes impact the fixed-cost portion of the rates, where the greatest expense increases were identified through the rate study.

In general, member families living on CECA lines with a typical usage of 1,000 kilowatt-hours per month will notice a \$5 increase in the monthly availability charge. However, this increase will largely be offset by a reduction in power costs to the cooperative, which is passed on to our members through the power cost recovery factor. As a result, typical residential members will see little to no change in their energy bill when

the new rate is implemented in January. Services with little to no usage will see an increase in the base fee.

Lesley then transitioned to recognizing the employee service award recipients. Each recipient received a service pin honoring their years of service to the cooperative. Monty Carlisle, board president, presented awards to Shelley Thedford for 25 years; Ryan Harris, Brandon Kidwell and Shane Kinnamon for 10 years; and Clayton Boone and Derek May for five years.

The 86th annual meeting celebrated CECA's achievements while addressing the challenges ahead. Lesley and the CECA Board of Directors are committed to transparency with members and dedicated to providing reliable service, even amid rising costs.

As CECA prepares for a rate change, the cooperative's focus remains on fostering strong connections with its members, ensuring they stay informed and supported. The sense of community at this year's meeting underscores the value of cooperative membership and the collective strength of its members as they look toward a promising future. ■





# Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year

from all of us at



Our offices will be closed Tuesday–Wednesday,  
December 24–25, and Wednesday, January 1, in observance of  
each holiday.





## Service Award Recipients

Pictured from left to right are the 2024 service award recipients:

**Top Row, from left:**

Shelley Thedford, 25 years

Shane Kinnamon, 10 years

Brandon Kidwell, 10 years

**Bottom Row, from left:**

Ryan Harris, 10 years

Clayton Boone, 5 years

Derek May, 5 years

Thank you for all you do for the cooperative membership.

## Minutes of the 86th Annual Meeting Held October 10, 2024

**MEMBERS BEGAN ARRIVING** at the CECA Headquarters building just after 5pm. They were greeted at registration with a member gift and a barbeque catered meal served by CECA employees. In total, 644 attendees, which included members and their families, enjoyed the catered dinner.

At 6:30 p.m. Monty Carlisle, Board President, called the 86th annual meeting of Comanche Electric Cooperative to order.

Mr. Carlisle then introduced Alan Lesley who gave the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Alan Lesley introduced current directors and special guests.

Ruby Solomon, Secretary of the Board reported 243 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 30, 2024. Total copies mailed were 9,968 at a cost of \$6,216.21.

Ruby Solomon then welcomed Tyler Canady, CPA, from Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss who reported on the financial conditions of Comanche Electric Cooperative.

Mrs. Solomon then introduced Mr. Don Richards, Civil and Administrative Law Attorney. Mr. Richards conducted the 2024 director election.

Mr. Richards explained the results of the district meetings that were held in July. District 1 met at the CECA Headquarters building on July 11th and nominated candidate Randy Denning

for consideration at the October Annual Meeting. District 7 met at the Gun Baptist Church on July 25th and nominated Phil Taylor for consideration at the October Annual Meeting.

There was a motion and second to elect Randy Denning for District #1 and Phil Taylor for District #7 by acclamation. The motion passed.

Mr. Alan Lesley, General Manager, spoke about the costs member bills are comprised of and the effect those components (energy charge, PCRF or power cost recovery factor and the availability charge) have on those monthly bills. Mr. Lesley described how the Cooperative conducted a recent cost-of-service study at CECA to determine what changes are needed in the rate base and how those rate changes should be distributed. He told members a necessary rate adjustment would apply this coming January.

Alan Lesley and Monty Carlisle distributed the service award pins.

In concluding the business meeting of the 86th annual cooperative meeting, Mr. Richards then asked if there was any old business and there being none, the meeting was adjourned.

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. ■

# Holiday Tree Safety Tips

Ensure a merry and bright holiday season by safely maintaining your tree with the following tips.

## Inspect lights:

Carefully inspect all electrical decorations before you use them. Cracked or damaged sockets and/or loose or exposed wires can cause serious shock or start a fire.

## Examine cords:

Examine extension cords and lights for signs of damage. Frayed electrical cords should be discarded.

## Keep away from heat:

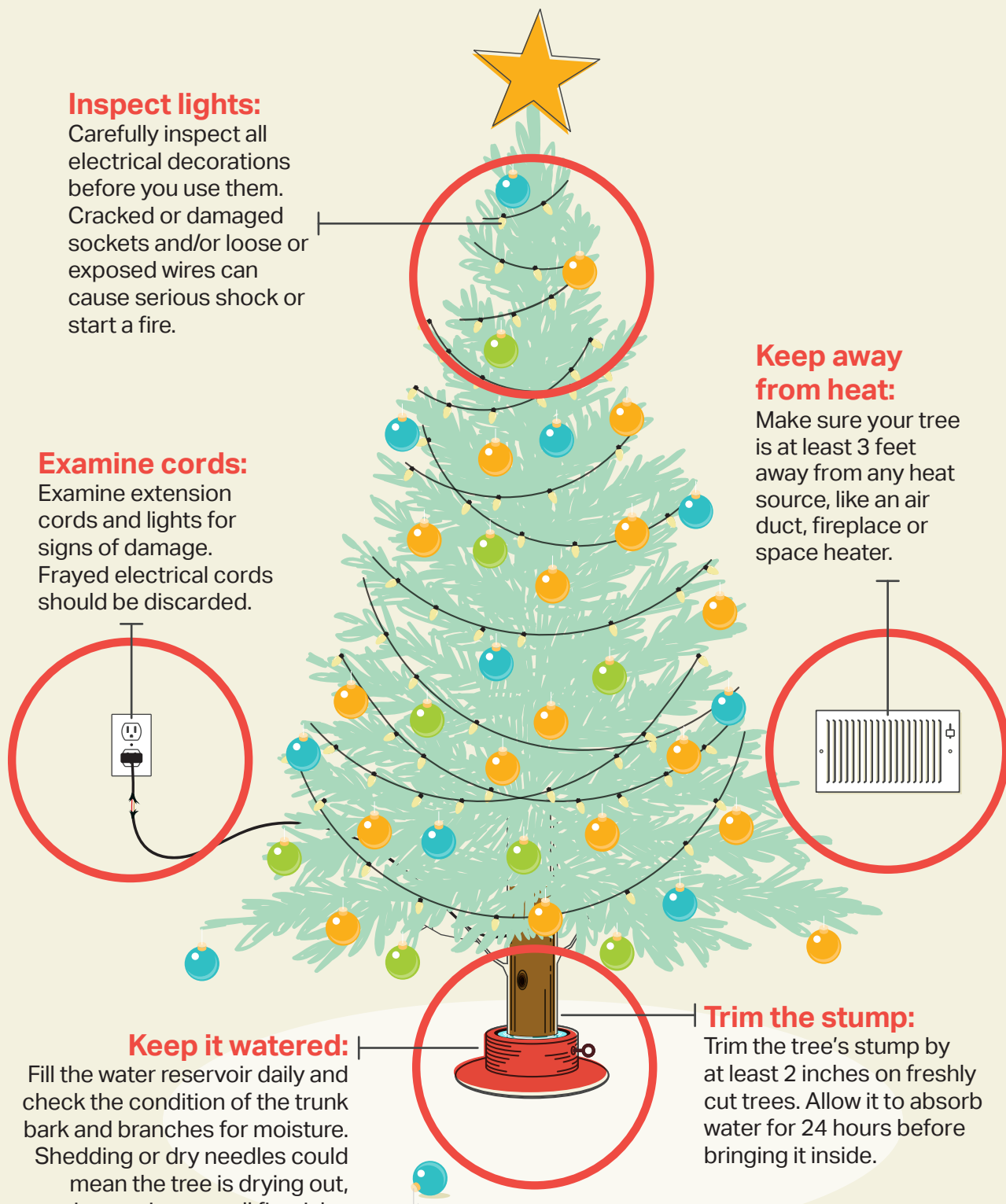
Make sure your tree is at least 3 feet away from any heat source, like an air duct, fireplace or space heater.

## Keep it watered:

Fill the water reservoir daily and check the condition of the trunk bark and branches for moisture. Shedding or dry needles could mean the tree is drying out, increasing overall fire risks.

## Trim the stump:

Trim the tree's stump by at least 2 inches on freshly cut trees. Allow it to absorb water for 24 hours before bringing it inside.







# Free Photo Op

With Santa

5pm-7pm

Tuesday,  
December 10th

Join us for Pictures,  
Hot Cocoa & Treats

At CECA Headquarters

349 Industrial Blvd, Comanche, Texas



## Government-in-Action Youth Tour

Explore the Nation's Capital

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Represent Your Community  
Represent Texas

Deadline: February 7



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Deadline: **April 7**

[www.ceca.coop/scholarships](http://www.ceca.coop/scholarships)





## CECA Offers Residential Solar Solutions for Members

**DID YOU KNOW** that CECA installs and sells solar power arrays? We have trained professionals who can evaluate your electricity use and property to provide the perfect fit for your home or business based on your usage patterns. We encourage members to include CECA in their solar array installation plans from start to finish.

CECA offers various options, from backup generators and battery systems to roof- and ground-mount arrays. Energy efficiency has progressed with new technologies, allowing members to take a more active role in optimizing their energy consumption. We're beyond the days of just turning off the lights or adjusting the thermostat when leaving the house.

If you're interested in optimizing your household's energy consumption, call Riley Hilliard at 1-800-915-2533 to set up a free energy audit and solar power analysis. Solar power may not be a good fit for everyone, but under the right circumstances, it can save CECA members money on their monthly bills.

There are many companies marketing the installation of solar panel arrays in every county CECA serves, and this has created confusion around solar buyback plans and raised concerns about fair pricing in a new and changing industry.

We're here to help our members navigate this confusion, and if they feel solar may be a good option for them, we can handle the sale and installation as well.

CECA does require that an application process be completed before interconnection with our system, to ensure proper safety, liability and metering standards are met. Regardless of the solar power vendor you choose, please contact us before you start your project to be sure that your plans are compliant and that your project goes smoothly.

You can always discuss your solar project plans with CECA staff for general information or specific needs. Solar power can be a great energy efficiency tool, and we applaud our members who are working to conserve power.

Call us at 1-800-915-2533 to learn more about how we can help. ■





# Kids Can Help With Holiday Meal Prep

**EVEN IF YOU LIKE** to prepare Christmas dinner by yourself so it's just right, consider letting your children—or grandchildren—in on the fun and the work this season.

Of course, you'll have to keep your youngsters away from the hot stove and sharp knives. **Still, there are lots of fun, safe ways to get everyone involved:**

Very young children can take the crusts off bread for the stuffing. They can also snap the ends off of green beans.

Children aged 3–5 can help pour in ingredients, and they can help stir or whisk. Have them stand at the kitchen sink to wash vegetables or let them use a hand-masher to make the mashed potatoes.

Older children can follow directions for a recipe and use cooking utensils with supervision. Let them cut, chop and peel veggies. These older kids also are strong enough to knead dough, so let them shape and divide the rolls or biscuits.

Cooking can be a great way to get kids interested in science, math and physics, as well as the history of the holiday. Talk about the food you're making, the measurements of the ingredients and the steps involved in getting food from the farm to the table.

The experience also can lead to conversations about energy conservation. Have kids turn down the heater while cooking or while company is over then explain how the extra heat of preparing a feast reduces the need to run the furnace.

The holiday might be a time to indulge, but sensible actions like using countertop kitchen appliances rather than the oven or keeping lids on pans can help ensure the feast is served without wasting electricity. ■



### DID YOU KNOW?

Animals are more sensitive to electric currents than humans. If you notice pets avoiding electrical objects, call a licensed electrician.

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MILAN JOVIC | ISTOCK.COM



### POWER TIP

If you're heading out of town this holiday, remember to lower your home and water heater thermostats a few degrees to reduce energy consumption.

SVETIKD | ISTOCK.COM

# SUBMIT YOUR RECIPES

*for our CECA Member Cookbook*

## Categories for Recipes :

Appetizers & Beverages  
Soups & Salads  
Bread, Spreads & Sauces  
Vegetable & Side Dishes  
Meats & Main Dishes  
Desserts



Submit a recipe for a chance to win a \$50 bill credit.

## Calling All Cooks: Share Your Favorite Recipes with CECA!

Got a family recipe that's been passed down through generations or a dish that never fails to impress at gatherings? We want to hear from you. CECA is gathering recipes from our members for our member cookbook.

Whether your recipe is a savory soup, a dessert or anything in between, we have a spot for you to share it. Here's how to do it:

### 1. Choose Your Category

Appetizers & Beverages  
Soups & Salads  
Bread, Spreads & Sauces  
Vegetable & Side Dishes  
Meats & Main Dishes  
Desserts

### 2. Prepare Your Recipe

- ▶ Include your name and member number.
- ▶ Tell us a bit about your recipe and list the ingredients: Is it a family favorite? A new creation?

### 3. Submit Your Recipe

- ▶ Mail it to: CECA  
C/O Triston McGehee  
P.O. Box 729  
Comanche, TX 76442
- ▶ Email it to: Triston McGehee at [tmcgehee@ceca.coop](mailto:tmcgehee@ceca.coop).
- ▶ Scan the QR code on the previous page or visit our online submission form at [ceca.coop/form/recipe-submission-form](https://ceca.coop/form/recipe-submission-form).

We can't wait to see (and taste) what you've been cooking up! ■





# Be Prepared for Winter Storms

**WHEN WINTER TEMPERATURES** drop and storms hit, staying safe and warm can be challenging. Winter storm severity varies depending on where you live, but nearly all Texans are affected by extreme winter storms at some point.

CECA cares about your safety, and we want you to be prepared. Ice and snow can lead to downed power lines, leaving co-op members without power. During extremely low temperatures, this can be especially dangerous. Our crews will always work as quickly and safely as possible to restore power, but there are a few things you can do to prepare yourself.

**Stay warm.** Plan to use a safe alternate heating source, such as a fire-place or wood-burning stove during a power outage. These are great options to keep you and your loved ones warm, but exercise caution when using them, and never leave the heating source unattended. If you're using gasoline-, propane- or natural gas-burning devices to stay warm, never use them indoors. Remember that fuel- and wood-burning sources of heat should always be properly ventilated. Always read the manufacturer's directions before using.

**Stay fed.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends having on hand several days' supply of food that doesn't need to be cooked. Crackers, cereal, canned goods and bread are good options. Five gallons of water per person should also be available in the event of an extended power outage.

**Stay safe.** When an outage occurs, it often means power lines are down. It's best not to travel during winter storms, but if you must, bring a survival kit along, and do not travel alone. If you encounter downed lines, always assume they're live. Stay as far away from the downed lines as possible, and report the situation to our dispatchers.

Winter weather can be unpredictable and dangerous, and planning ahead can be the difference between life and death. CECA is ready for whatever Mother Nature has in store, and we want you to be ready too. ■




KITCHENM | ISTOCK.COM

## Spicy Mixed Nuts

- 1 egg white
- 1 tablespoon water
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1¼ teaspoons cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 cup pecan halves
- 1 cup salted cashews
- 1 cup roasted almonds

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees.
2. Whisk together the egg white, water, sugar, salt and spices in a large bowl. Add nuts and use a rubber spatula to mix well.
3. Pour the mixture onto a rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake 40 minutes, stirring occasionally with a metal spatula. Reduce heat to 200 degrees and bake another 30 minutes.
4. Remove nuts from oven, use a fork to loosen them from baking sheet and cool completely. Store in a metal container with a tight-fitting lid; the nuts will last up to 2 months.

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

 Find this and more delicious recipes online at [TexasCoopPower.com](https://TexasCoopPower.com).

State of Texas

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1. 14.5¢ kWh – June 2024 Texa's Monthly Electricity Rate Average | Actual data powered by Symphony

2. ENERGY STAR rated units qualify for 30% through 2032, 26% through 2033 and 22% through 2034





# Black-Eyed Peace

Y2K upended New Year's traditions for Texans ready for anything

BY CHRIS BURROWS • ILLUSTRATION BY TARA JACOBY

AS KATIE WILLIAMS shopped in the run-up to Christmas 1999, the holiday wasn't on her list. The Kaufman resident had loaded up her cart with flashlights and batteries, toilet paper, water, and crates of food.

"I really think something's going to happen," Williams told *The Dallas Morning News*. "We have a pond in case we run out of water for the toilet. We can boil it if we have to drink it."

Michelle Quintiliani and her family were planning to hit the road after Christmas, leaving behind their home near the Comanche Peak nuclear plant southwest of Fort Worth.

"We're going to open our presents and then we're gone," Quintiliani told the *Waco Tribune-Herald*. "It's probably

stupid, but I don't want to chance it."

By December 30, shoppers in Victoria were hitting H-E-B hard.

"Today is busier than expected," a store manager told the *Victoria Advocate*. "This is the kind of day we expected tomorrow."

Twenty-five years ago this month, in the weeks before a new millennium, hardy Texans joined the rest of the world in making anxious last-minute preparations.

Computer experts had spent months warning that the Y2K bug might take down computer systems—and a society that was increasingly reliant on them—at the stroke of midnight. Breathless coverage took stock of the preparations as global industries—banks, utilities,

airlines—assured folks that the lights would stay on if everybody did their part to gird against glitches caused by computer systems not built with the foresight to handle the "00" in "2000."

For its part, the state of Texas spent a quarter-billion dollars on upgrades; the U.S. more than \$100 billion; and across the world, \$300 billion.

Texans weren't overly concerned though. The results of a statewide poll in October 1999 found 55% weren't worried about serious problems. One in 3 expected the lights to go out.

But they didn't.

On New Year's Eve, celebrations in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston tallied more than 320,000 total revelers.

Headline writers were ready. In the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*: "Y2K? Why Worry?"

*San Angelo Standard-Times*: "Y(awn)2K-Fear'd bug doesn't bite."

Wichita Falls' *Times Record News*: "It wasn't the night the lights went out in Texas after all."

The bug may have been a bust, but Leon Kappelmann, a University of North Texas professor who worked on several technical committees in preparation for Y2K, says the world learned a lot.

"In terms of IT management, many of us learned what a mess we had just about everywhere and realized it was past time to professionalize and improve our practices," he said. "IT had proliferated so quickly and completely over the 40 years prior to 1995, our ability to effectively and efficiently manage it had simply not kept up."

And besides, some Texans hadn't wasted any worries on Y2K.

C.M. Dehtam told the *Tribune-Herald* that he planned to be selling fruit out of his pickup on New Year's Eve.

"If it's going to happen, it's going to happen," he said. "It's not something I have any control over. I got other things to worry about, like what I'm going to eat tonight." ■



# Cookie Exchange

Be the star of the swap with these family gems

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

One of my favorite cake flavors transforms into cookies for a delicious addition to your cookie exchange. With a vibrant Christmas red hue; soft, chewy texture; and a crunchy topping, they're decadent enough to feel indulgent and light enough to enjoy more than one on Christmas morning.

## Red Velvet Cookies

**1½ cups flour**  
**2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder**  
**¾ teaspoon baking powder**  
**½ teaspoon salt**  
**½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**1 egg**  
**1 tablespoon buttermilk**  
**1 tablespoon red food color**  
**1 teaspoon vanilla extract**  
**½ cup white chocolate chips**  
**½ cup semisweet chocolate chunks**  
**White sanding sugar**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa powder, baking powder and salt.
3. In another bowl, cream butter and sugar with a hand mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy. Reduce mixer speed to low and add egg, buttermilk, food color and vanilla.
4. Add flour mixture in two batches, scraping down the sides and bottom of the bowl and mixing until well combined. Fold in the white chocolate chips and semisweet chocolate chunks. Cover and chill the dough in the refrigerator at least 1 hour.
5. Place 2-tablespoon scoops of dough 2 inches apart on baking sheets. Use the bottom of a glass to gently press cookies to about ½ inch thick. Sprinkle with sanding sugar.
6. Bake 10–12 minutes, until cookies are slightly puffy and set on the edges. Allow cookies to cool and sprinkle with additional sanding sugar if desired.

**MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Mexican Christmas Eve Salad.





## Grandma Melton's Sand Tarts

LAURA MCNABB  
PEDERNALES EC

These are considered the official cookies of Texas, at least according to McNabb's family. A crescent-shaped cookie that melts in your mouth, leaving a hint of sweetness and buttery goodness, they have a tender, crumbly texture that pairs perfectly with their light, nutty flavor. The delicate powdered sugar coating gives them a festive, snow-dusted appearance, making them a perfect addition to your holiday cookie platter.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 1 cup powdered sugar, plus more for dusting
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 cups flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Using an electric mixer on medium speed, beat butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add vanilla and mix well. Reduce mixer speed to low. Add flour and salt, mixing until almost combined.
3. Gently fold in pecans with hands, being careful not to overmix. Chill dough 30 minutes.
4. With floured hands, shape 1 tablespoon of dough at a time into a crescent. Place crescents 1 inch apart on baking sheets.
5. Bake 12–14 minutes or until the edges are lightly browned. Allow cookies to cool about 5 minutes on baking sheets then transfer to cooling racks. While the cookies are still warm, dust with powdered sugar.

MAKES 3 DOZEN COOKIES



\$500 WINNER

## Flonnie's Orange Slice Cookies

JENNIFER KEITH  
WOOD COUNTY EC



Keith found her grandmother Flonnie's recipe for these cookies in her mama's recipe box, and they have become a holiday staple in her house. These cookies are a delightful and nostalgic treat. The candies melt slightly during baking, creating pockets of gooey, fruity goodness throughout. A soft, chewy cookie with bursts of citrusy flavor in each bite is the merriest sweet for gifting this holiday season.

MAKES 5 DOZEN COOKIES

- 2 cups (4 sticks) butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 2¼ cups brown sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 3 tablespoons warm water
- 6 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 2 cups sweetened coconut flakes
- 2 cups chopped walnuts
- 1 package orange slices candy (10 ounces), diced

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, cream butter, sugar and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, scraping down sides of bowl after each addition.
3. In a small bowl, dissolve baking soda in warm water.
4. To the large bowl, add baking soda mixture, flour and cinnamon and mix until incorporated. Fold in coconut, walnuts and candy slices.
5. Use a medium cookie scoop to place dough onto a baking sheet, leaving 1 inch between each cookie.
6. Bake 11–14 minutes, until lightly golden brown.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**THE WHOLE ENCHILADA** DUE DECEMBER 10  
There are endless ways to fill an enchilada. Share your favorite filling to roll up in a tortilla and you could win \$500. Enter by December 10.

**UPCOMING: SUMMER PASTAS** DUE JANUARY 10





# HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

In the magazine and on [TexasCoopPower.com](https://www.texascooppower.com), we make it easy to shop for friends and family.



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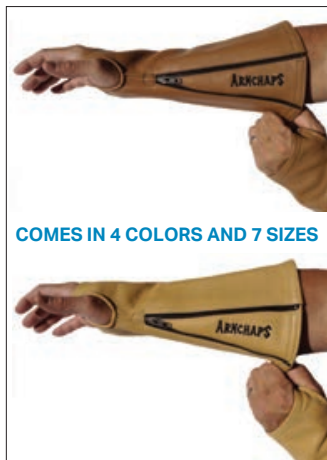
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

# Grandma's Italian Chocolate Spice Cookies

MARY BOLSINGER  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

These cookies have a firm, slightly crunchy exterior that gives way to a soft, cakelike interior. The harmonious blend of cocoa, cinnamon, cloves and vanilla creates a warm, spiced flavor that's perfect for the season. Chocolate is complemented by the subtle warmth of coffee, making each bite a cozy experience.

## COOKIES

- 2 cups flour
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup olive oil



- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 tablespoons brewed black coffee, at room temperature
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

## ICING

- 2¼ cups powdered sugar
- 3–4 tablespoons milk
- Sprinkles (optional)

- 1. COOKIES:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
- 2.** In a bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, baking powder, salt, cinnamon and cloves.
- 3.** In another bowl, whisk together eggs and sugar until sugar is dissolved. Stir in olive oil, vanilla and coffee.
- 4.** Add the flour mixture and stir until smooth. Stir in the walnuts.
- 5.** Scoop the dough with a medium cookie scoop. Roll into balls with floured hands. Place on baking sheets about 2 inches apart.
- 6.** Bake 10–12 minutes.
- 7. ICING:** Whisk together powdered sugar and milk until smooth.
- 8.** Dip the tops of cookies into the icing mixture and top with sprinkles.

MAKES 4 DOZEN COOKIES



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## A Belle Reborn

Experience Tres Palacios Bay like a French explorer—without the sinking

BY CHET GARNER

**THERE I STOOD** in the middle of Tres Palacios Bay, part of Matagorda Bay, aboard a sailing vessel named La Petite Belle. The crew and I had set out from Palacios into the same gulf waters that French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, had sailed 338 years before.

Hopefully, our seafaring adventure wouldn't meet the same fate as the French explorer's crew.

Our expedition started in the town's historic district at the City by the Sea Museum, where every era of Palacios' colorful past is brought to life through exhibits and artifacts. Most interesting (and tragic) is the story of La Salle's doomed voyage to Texas. La Belle, one of his four ships, wrecked on a sandbar and sank into the bay's muddy bottom in 1686. Luckily the Frenchman was already on land, exploring Texas.

In the 1990s, archaeologists found the ship and resurrected its hull along with 1.6 million French artifacts. The preserved remains are on display at the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin.

La Petite Belle, a half-sized, 30-foot-long re-creation of the original, now sails the high seas of Texas, giving tourists a taste of maritime history and adventure. The jolly crew of museum volunteers seemed seaworthy as they called out commands across the deck and navigated our ship using 17th-century techniques.

I simply walked around, rattling ropes and trying not to expose my greenhorn lack of sailing knowledge. While this isn't a pirate ship, I jumped with excitement when the crew announced it was time to fire the cannons. We loaded them up with pyrotechnics and yelled "fire in the hole" as we shot at imaginary ships.

The ship is small, but the adventure is surely Texas-sized. ■

ABOVE Chet, aboard La Petite Belle, ponders a 17th-century existence.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all his 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

**Castroville** **Castroville Conservation Society Candlelight Home Tour**, (830) 708-5680, [castrovilleconservationsociety.org](http://castrovilleconservationsociety.org)

**Fredericksburg** **Pearl Harbor Commemoration**, (830) 997-8600, [pacificwarmuseum.org](http://pacificwarmuseum.org)

**Kerrville** **Christmas Concert**, (830) 321-0303, [hillcountrychorale.org](http://hillcountrychorale.org)

**La Grange** **Beat Root Revival**, (979) 968-9944, [thebugleboy.org](http://thebugleboy.org)

**Marble Falls** **Christmas Home Tour**, (830) 798-2157, [fallsmuseum.org](http://fallsmuseum.org)

**Palestine** **Christmas on Main**, (903) 723-3014, [visitpalestine.com](http://visitpalestine.com)

**Sealy** **Fantasy of Lights Parade**, (979) 885-3222, [sealychamber.com](http://sealychamber.com)

**Woodville** **Christmas Twilight Tour**, (409) 283-2272, [heritage-village.org](http://heritage-village.org)

**Richardson** **[7, 14] Hot Cocoa Crawl**, [citylinedfw.com](http://citylinedfw.com)

8

**George West** **Church to Church Christmas Story Stroll**, (361) 449-5396, [facebook.com/firstbaptistgeorgewest](https://facebook.com/firstbaptistgeorgewest)

12

**New Braunfels** **New Braunfels Conservation Society Christmas Market**, (830) 629-2943, [newbraunfelsconservation.org](http://newbraunfelsconservation.org)

13

**Seguin** **[13-14] Country Christmas**, (830) 379-0933, [texagedu.org](http://texagedu.org)



**Shiner [13-14] Christmas Village**, (361) 594-3830, shinerfumc.org

**Kyle [13-15] A Night in Bethlehem**, (512) 268-7044, f-pc.org

**Montalba [13-15] Walk Through Bethlehem**, (903) 549-2319, montalbabaptistchurch.com

**Palestine [13-15] A Seussified Christmas Carol and Variety Show**, (903) 394-2173, thetexas theater.com

**Brenham The 3 Redneck Tenors Christmas**, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

**Coldspring Christmas on the Square**, (936) 653-2184, coldspringtexas.org

**Frankston Frankston Garden Club Christmas Tour of Homes**, (817) 913-1982, frankstongardenclubtx.com

**Jasper Country Lights**, (409) 384-5231, tpwd.texas.gov

**Stonewall Tree Lighting**, (830) 644-2252, tpwd.texas.gov

**Corsicana Santa's Sip & Stroll**, (903) 654-4851, facebook.com/corsicana mainstreet

**Richardson [19-22] Christmas With C.S. Lewis**, (972) 744-4650, eisemanncenter.com

**Fredericksburg Countdown to 2025: New Year's Eve**, (830) 990-2044, fbgtx.org

## TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your March event by January 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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# Young Photographers

Slow down a moment and take in the world through the lens of a child. These young photographers are honing their skills and having a great time doing it. One thing's clear: The future of Texas photography is in good hands.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



**1 CRYSTAL CANTU**  
VICTORIA EC

"I heard a frog and went on an adventure to find him," says Magi Jo, 15.

**2 CARLY LATHAM**  
HEART OF TEXAS EC

"The fascinated bluebonnets are so exciting to find. My sister and I always try to see who can find the most variations," says Byron Ace Latham, 10.

**3 MARK GARTON**  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

My son, 9, learns to take pictures of Texas bluebonnets at Fort Parker State Park.

**4 LAURA DAVIS**  
BANDERA EC

Blakely Barton, 2, has an impromptu photo session with her papa, Brad Davis.



## Upcoming Contests

**DUE DEC 10** Characters

**DUE JAN 10** Patterns

**DUE FEB 10** Family Vacation



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).



See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Young Photographers photos from readers.



## Emily's Wish

Christmas feels bleak when a family's hearts are in two places

BY FRED AFFLERBACH  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
THE BRAVE UNION

ON CHRISTMAS EVE 2022, it was my honor to tuck into bed my 6-year-old granddaughter, Emily. We said nighttime prayers, then she asked Santa for a bigger bike, stick-on earrings and an art set. I thought she was finished, but after a pause, she continued.

"I wish Mommy would be home from the hospital so that the whole family can be together for Christmas."

I closed Emily's door behind me. But I left pieces of my heart scattered on her bedroom floor.

Emily's mother, my daughter-in-law, Kim Afflerbach, delivered healthy twin boys five days before at St. David's Women's Center of Texas in Austin. Shortly after delivery, she experienced cardiac arrest. The cesarean section surgery apparently opened a Pandora's

box of stagnant blood clots that gushed throughout her body.

Her heart stopped beating after one nefarious clot lodged in her main artery. Fast-acting nurses and doctors performed CPR and rushed her to the intensive care unit, where she remained Christmas Eve.

Christmas morning, Emily held little sister Avery's hand as they walked downstairs together. Her shiny new bike awaited. Avery rushed to a Peppa Pig playhouse, dropped to her knees and squealed in delight.

The tree glowed in the early-morning light, and their nana removed golden-brown pigs in a blanket from the oven. I sipped hot coffee laced with Irish cream.

It looked like Christmas. It smelled like Christmas. It even tasted like Christmas. But it didn't feel like Christmas. There was something missing—Mommy.

Christmas Day at a hospital is a rather solemn occasion. Folks carry on the best they can. A skeleton crew in the cafeteria dishes out turkey and dressing and gravy. Doctors and nurses and families of patients smile while passing in corridors and sharing elevators.

Kim remained sedated. She had received multiple transfusions by then and would need more. Yet doctors remained optimistic. They eschewed invasive surgery. And we waited.

Finally, Kim moved out of the ICU on New Year's Eve and into a private room.

Come January 5, Emily's father, Eric, pushed Kim's wheelchair down hospital hallways toward the valet parking. Nurses, doctors and staff lined their exit route, clapping and waving, holding out flowers and balloons, and offering heartfelt goodbyes.

It's often said that a request delayed is a request denied. But that's not always so! Emily's entire family celebrated Christmas 2023 at home together. Emily and Avery, twin brothers Bryson and Jackson, Daddy—and especially Mommy.

Although a year late, Emily's Christmas wish came true. ■





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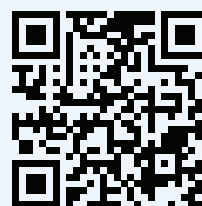
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