

THE DAZZLING PECAN TREE  
NEAR FORT WORTH

THE MIGHTY HONEYBEE  
IS BUSY AS EVER

REMEMBER THE  
GREAT Y2K SCARE?

# Texas Coop Power

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DECEMBER 2024

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**BLUEBONNET  
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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

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By Claire Stevens  
Photos by Eric W. Pohl

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The best of our Cookie Exchange recipe contest. Get baking on Page 26.  
Photo by Jason David Page

ABOVE

Busy bees at Two Hives Honey in Manor.  
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.



## 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.



### TCP Contests and More

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





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—*Guns smoke 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

**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

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

Editor, Texas Co-op Power  
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor  
Austin, TX 78701

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

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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.

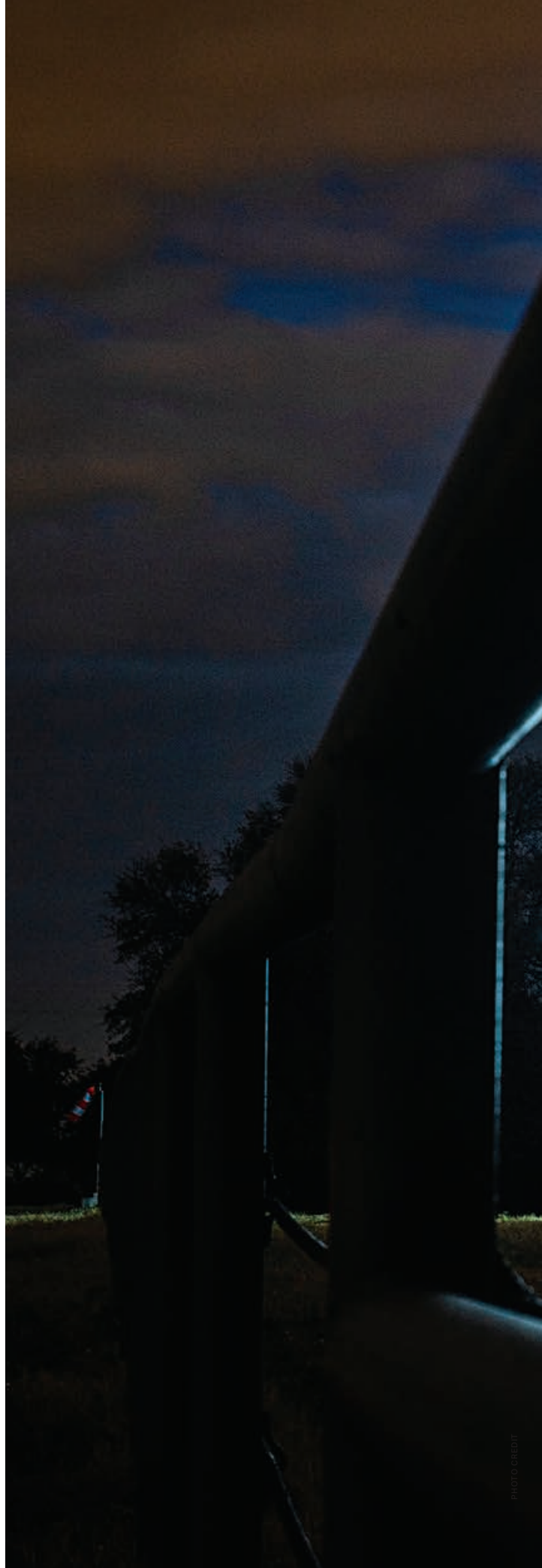
But for the past 17 years, the tree has been more than just a vestige of the past; it is the town of Bartonville's symbolic tribute to the holidays.

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.









“  
*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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Electricity sparked a revolution for rural home cooks, and treasured family holiday recipes, passed down for generations, have withstood the test of time.

# SAVORING TASTES of

Stories by Addie Broyles

**I**N THE YEARS after Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative brought electricity to its members in 1939, light bulbs banished the darkness and power pumped water into homes. Lives were transformed.

For families, however, the big changes hit home when electricity reached the kitchen. The difficult, tedious and hot work of cooking was soon to become a memory.

New kitchen appliances and available ingredients arrived and evolved over the coming decades. Schedules got busier and lives got complicated, but one tradition — eating home-cooked meals with family and friends — remained a priority. People gathered at church and social potlucks, dinner parties brought friends together, and old recipes — with the stories that came along with them — were passed to the next generation.

An old family dish lives on each time a member of the next generation makes it. Many of these tried-and-true favorites — captured on worn recipe cards, in fragile newspaper clippings or in faded copies in three-ring binders — make an annual appearance during the holidays.

Community cookbooks are among the most treasured sources of old recipes. They began to appear during the Civil War, when groups of women gathered recipes to sell for the care of war veterans. The cookbooks became popular with church groups, schools and community organizations, allowing them to raise money and share beloved dishes with friends and neighbors.

There is no more definitive source of community cookbooks in the state than The Texas Collection, Baylor University's oldest special collections library which houses more than 9,000 cookbooks from around the state, including several thousand

community cookbooks. Much of the collection was donated by the late Houston Chronicle food writer Ann Criswell and Houston cookbook collector Elizabeth Borst White.

The vast collection, which also includes restaurant menus and traditional cookbooks, includes at least 15 community-made books from the Bluebonnet region. The earliest is a 1926 collection of "receipts" — an earlier term for recipes — from First Baptist Church



in Caldwell. The most recent cookbook, "Tasty Treats and Jazzy Eats," a 2011 publication from Lockhart, was compiled in honor of Alison Berry, a 31-year-old woman who died in 2009.

The books in the Texas Collection are a treasure trove of recipes from Bluebonnet's communities. Many of the cooks are long gone, but their favorite recipes live on.

Two of the collection's cookbooks are from St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Brenham, which opened in 1848, a year after the town was founded. One cookbook, from 1946, contains recipes with old-school dishes and ingredients, like sweet potatoes and possum, staples of the early Texan's diet. Another dish was syllabub, a cream-

Continued on Page 18



Before electricity reached rural Central Texas, home cooks used wood-burning stoves and non-electric ice boxes. After the Depression, electric stoves, refrigerators and cooktops were the first to reach the region's families.  
*istockphoto by George Marks*



Bluebonnet

# our PAST



Amy Jurica displays a collection of community cookbooks at the Burleson County Czech Heritage Museum in Caldwell. Jurica, co-chair of the Burleson County Historical Commission, still makes her mom's sauerkraut soup, chicken soup and cucumber salad.  
*Sarah Beal photo*

## Calling all cooks

Recipes from the past, **Pages 18-20**  
Share your favorite community cookbook recipes and your family's cherished cooking traditions, **Page 20**

## What Central Texans ate before and after electricity

By Addie Broyles

**THE EARLIEST RESIDENTS** of what would become the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area — indigenous peoples and then Spanish colonists — ate what lived and grew on the land: native fruits and nuts, wild game and fish.

Corn, beans and squash came later, and Spanish settlers brought cattle, hogs and other livestock. In the 19th century, immigrant European settlers enjoyed plentiful meat, but had to replace Irish potatoes with sweet potatoes. Flour was expensive and often replaced with corn meal. Traditional dishes were adapted to this new homeland until ingredients from native lands became available. Wheat, then rice, became common. Southern, Mexican and Black cuisines became part of the mix.

Many rural Texas cooks of the 1800s and early 1900s canned, preserved or pickled seasonal vegetables and fruit. Meat was preserved in the same ways, but also by salting, smoking or drying. Food was cooked over wood- or coal-fired open hearths, and later in cast-iron — then steel — cookers. In towns, general stores offered staples such as sugar, salt and coffee.

By the early 20th century, many Central Texans had non-mechanical wood and metal “ice boxes” that held a large block of ice in an upper compartment to cool perishable food below.

In 1926, “Cook Book: Choice Receipts Written by the Ladies of Caldwell,” put together by the members of that community’s First Baptist Church, included recipes for stewed chicken, cream veal, chicken à la king, griddle cakes, potato peanut loaf and cream of tomato soup.

After the Depression, many rural homes had been wired for electricity but some folks waited years to turn on the lights. Then electric refrigerator and cooker sales began to soar. About 44% of American homes had refrigerators by the end of the 1930s; that number doubled in the next decade.

Electric cookers, with a stove on one side and an oven next to it, gave way in the 1950s to electric stovetop burners atop the oven. Those allowed home cooks to maintain constant temperatures, which improved the quality and efficiency of their cooking.

Continued on Page 20

# Blasts from the past

Heirloom recipes live on in cookbooks, kitchens across the Bluebonnet region

## Hot Hoppin' John Salad

Hoppin' John came to Texas by way of the Southern United States, where the black-eyed pea dish has been a staple for more than 200 years. It became a traditional good-luck New Year's Eve dish during the Civil War. Black-eyed peas, which originated in West Africa, grew well in the South, but this version calls for canned peas. This recipe, originally published in the Austin American-Statesman, was shared by the Saint Ann's Society of Sacred Heart Church in Rockne in their 2006 cookbook, "Generations." The women's group at the church published its first cookbook in 1948. Longtime group member Letitia "Tish" Wilhelm got this recipe many years ago.

- 1 cup coarsely chopped or cubed ham, any kind
- 1 cup chopped onion, divided
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 3 cups hot cooked white rice, cooked in chicken broth
- 1 (16-ounce) can black-eyed peas, rinsed and drained
- 1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon cracked black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 slices bacon
- 4 cups finely shredded green cabbage

Cook ham, 1/2 cup onion and garlic in oil until lightly browned. Stir in rice, peas, pepper sauce, pepper and salt. Cook until thoroughly heated. Place bacon in large skillet; cook until crisp. Set aside, drain all but 1 tablespoon drippings. Add cabbage and remaining onion. Stir-fry until tender. Spoon onto large platter. Ladle rice mixture into center of cabbage. Serve hot or at room temperature. Crumble bacon on top of salad. Makes 6 servings.



A serving of Hot Hoppin' John Salad, prepared using a traditional recipe from a cookbook produced by the Saint Ann's Society of Sacred Heart Church in Rockne. *Addie Broyles photo*



## Continued from Page 16

based, whipped-sherry cocktail. By the 1940s, most home cooks didn't rely on hunting and gathering, but they still foraged for figs and dewberries. Some of the dishes from this cookbook sound as if they could be on menus today: eggs baked in tomatoes, meatloaf, chicken enchiladas, skillet cornbread, coconut macaroons, maple syrup mousse and mint sherbet.

The Rev. Stephen F. Whaley, rector of St. Peter's in Brenham, said food is still a big part of the church's life. "After a funeral, there's a pretty big spread with finger foods: cucumber sandwiches, pimiento cheese, chicken salad," he said. "At our potlucks, people break out the King Ranch casserole, cheesy spaghetti and fried chicken." Then there are the church's musical events, where you're more likely to see pork sliders, a newer dish in the Washington County food canon, served alongside a cheese ball, the humble party dish that hit the hostess scene in the 1940s.

The influence of Czech and German cultures caught Whaley's eye when he moved from Houston to Brenham seven years ago. "If you call a klobasnek a kolache, you'll get corrected," he said. Klobásníky, a sausage roll developed by Texas Czechs in the 19th century, are often mistaken by relative newcomers for their sweet kolache counterparts.

For dessert, instead of the cottage cheese pie featured in the 1946 cookbook, you're more likely to see store-bought baked goods — likely because of busy family schedules — on the potluck table these days. There are still homemade lemon bars, peach cobbler and the occasional ambrosia salad (served at the front of the line as an appetizer, not a dessert), Whaley said. "And then there's Cathy Stucker's bar that's like a cookie but is not a cookie," he said about one dessert published in the church's 1991 cookbook, which is also in the Baylor collection. "Everybody's always asking for those." **See recipe, Page 20.**

The Burleson County Czech Heritage Museum in Caldwell has published at least nine community cookbooks in the past 80 years, said Amy Jurica, co-chair of the Burleson County Historical Commission. Many of those recipes reference Monrovia, Polish, German and Italian culinary traditions, as well as Czech food from families like Jurica's. Her mother, Helen Jurica, was on committees





Cathy Stuckert shares her popular graham cracker cookies with the Rev. Stephen F. Whaley, rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Brenham. (See recipe, **Page 20**) The church was founded in 1848, and food has played a central role in its community. 'After a funeral, there's a pretty big spread with finger foods: cucumber sandwiches, pimiento cheese, chicken salad,' Whaley said. 'At our potlucks, people break out the King Ranch casserole, cheesy spaghetti and fried chicken.' *Sarah Beal photo*

that helped publish some of those cookbooks.

"My ancestors made do with what they could grow," Jurica said. "They ate cabbage they grew in the garden and the pork from the hog they butchered, and kolaches with cottage cheese and poppy seeds, not cherries. That was an American change that came later."

Jurica's own cooking has evolved. She no longer makes a rice casserole that called for a can of cream of chicken soup and Ritz crackers, but still prepares a chicken noodle soup and a cucumber salad that her grandmother made, closely following the original recipes.

She dreams about the knedliki, or bread dumplings, made with butter, sugar, cinnamon and prunes. "We would fight over them at Christmas," Jurica recalled. "I would stand there at the pot with my grandmother, waiting for them to finish cooking." She has tried to make them herself, but they don't taste like the ones made by grandmother Mimi, who died at 92 in 2018.

"You can tell what they were growing, what they could buy at the store," Jurica said as she flipped through other cookbooks in the collection, pausing at a familiar inscription: "This one says, 'From Mom, Christmas 2003,'" she said, her voice wavering.

Her mother died at 74 in 2020. Jurica still makes her sauerkraut soup.

Beverly McMurrey joined her mother as a member of the Lexington Garden Club in the early 1990s, after a three-decade career that started in information technology at Texas Instruments in Richardson. McMurrey, now 80, said her mother, Fae McMurrey, contributed to several community cookbooks, including a 2007 edition that Beverly McMurrey still has in her kitchen.

As she flipped through the book, McMurrey laughed at a recipe she submitted. "My recipe is a mock English trifle cake with all store-bought stuff," she said. "You can tell I don't cook." Her mother's recipes — creamy pumpkin pie, baked grits, Oreo ice cream pie — are the kinds of dishes her mother loved to make for her family and for the garden club's meetings, which started in 1967.

She reads names of the cookbook's contributors out loud. Several remind McMurrey of garden club friends over the years, many of whom have died.

"I'm not big on the food, but it's the people for me," she said.

## Macaroni and Cheese Deluxe

Mac and cheese has been around much longer than the iconic blue Kraft box, which hit store shelves in 1937. James Hemings, the enslaved chef of President Thomas Jefferson, brought the dish to the United States in the late 1700s after a trip to Europe. Once Velveeta, the meltable cheese that needed no refrigeration, was available, it didn't take long for this casserole to become popular in even more homes. Norma Blundell of Lockhart contributed this recipe to "Family Favorites," a 1959 cookbook published by the Christian Women's Fellowship at First Christian Church in Lockhart.

**1 (6- or 7-ounce) box of macaroni, cooked and drained**  
**1 tablespoon butter**  
**1 tablespoon flour**  
**1/8 teaspoon dry mustard**  
**1/8 teaspoon salt**  
**1/8 teaspoon pepper**  
**1 cup milk**  
**1 cup sour cream**  
**1/2 cup diced cooked ham**  
**1/2 pound grated mild cheddar cheese**

Melt butter, stir in flour and cook until bubbly. Gradually add milk and heat until thickened. Add cheese and heat until cheese is melted. Stir in sour cream, salt, pepper and mustard. Place half of macaroni in a casserole dish, then top with half of ham and sauce. Repeat with remainder of macaroni, ham and sauce. Bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

## Breakfast Casserole

Baked breakfasts — soufflés and spoon breads, grits and bread pudding — have a long history, both abroad and later in the United States. By the middle of the 20th century, most families had a favorite breakfast casserole of some kind. In Lee County, the late Fae McMurrey of Lexington used to make this breakfast casserole for members of the local garden club, founded in 1967. After her mother's death, Beverly McMurrey submitted several recipes in her honor for a 2007 garden club community cookbook called "Simple Pleasures." The cookbook includes this ham-and-sausage casserole recipe, which calls for a 9-by-11-inch glass baking dish, a near-ubiquitous baking container dating back to the 1915 introduction of low-thermal-expansion borosilicate glass, aka Pyrex.

**4 tablespoons butter**  
**8 slices bread, cubed**  
**10 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, grated**  
**1 (10.5-ounce) can cream of mushroom soup**  
**1/2 to 1 cup shaved ham**  
**1 pound breakfast sausage, cooked, drained and crumbled**  
**5 eggs**  
**2 cups milk**

Melt butter in 9-by-13-inch Pyrex dish. Place bread cubes in butter. On top of bread, layer the cheese, soup, ham and sausage. Beat eggs until fluffy, add milk. Pour egg-milk mixture over other ingredients, let sit refrigerated overnight. Set Pyrex dish in a larger dish filled with water. Bake 45 minutes at 350 degrees.

# We're looking for favorite family recipes and community cookbook treasures

**DO YOU HAVE** a beloved holiday recipe or cooking tradition that's been passed down for generations? Or have you been making a favorite holiday dish from a time-worn community cookbook?

Take the Martinez-Rodriguez family of Bastrop. Eva Martinez was 10 when her mother taught her to make the spicy red mole, which translates to "sauce," that is central to their holiday and family celebrations.

Today, more than 50 years later, the Martinez-Rodriguez family carries on the cherished tradition of making the dish passed down by Angela Zamora, originally from Guerrero, Mexico, who was 82 when she passed away in 2020. 'Mole was always a dish we made when the entire family came together. It takes so much work that everyone has to help. I remember helping stir the sauce for a very long time.'

— ISIDRA RODRIGUEZ KINNEY

Rodriguez Kinney. "It takes so much work that everyone has to help. I remember helping stir the sauce for a very long time."

Isidra learned the recipe through repetition and memory, just as Eva Martinez learned from her mother. Now, Isidra, 32, and her four siblings are passing it down to their 18 children.

From toasting ingredients — including garlic, comino, cloves, peppers, bay leaves, raisins, chicken broth and guajillo chili — to stirring the sauce, everyone pitches in. You can get the Martinez-Rodriguez family's mole recipe online at [bluebonnet.coop/family-recipes](http://bluebonnet.coop/family-recipes).

Would you like to share the story of your beloved holiday dish? Write about it (150 words or less) and email to [socialmedia@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:socialmedia@bluebonnet.coop) by Dec. 20. Include the recipe if you want. We'll share some on Bluebonnet's social media.

## Continued from Page 17

Electricity brought radio and television programs into Central Texas homes, with commercials for products that influenced grocery sales. The baby boom generation spurred a grocery boom in the 1950s and 1960s, when food companies invented new convenient products such as Shake 'n Bake, Cool Whip, Frosted Flakes, Minute Rice and Doritos.

Waves of new appliances over the decades — blenders, stand mixers, pop-up toasters, juicers, food processors — simplified cooking. Even microwaves, introduced during the Cold War era, became mainstream in the 1970s.

The innovations continue: Today's new kitchen appliances continue expanding home cooks' culinary repertoires and imaginations, creating new traditions for tomorrow's generations. ■

Sources: *Texas Historical Commission, Texas State Historical Association, Smithsonian Magazine, Business Insider, History.com, Texas Collection at Baylor University, Texas Foodways Alliance, "Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America" by Laura Shapiro*

## Graham Cracker Cookies

Cathy Stuckert, a retired teacher and speech and language therapist in Brenham, got this layered cookie bar recipe from a colleague about 50 years ago. This recipe is in "From Our Kitchen to Yours with Love," a 1991 cookbook from St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Brenham, where the cookies are still a hit. The recipe calls for PET milk, a brand of unsweetened condensed milk that dates back to the late 1880s. Graham crackers date back to 1880 and were named after New England minister Sylvester Graham, who advocated a strict religious diet that included whole wheat-germ flour.



**20 whole graham crackers, divided**  
**2 8-tablespoon sticks butter, divided**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**1 egg, beaten**  
**1/2 cup PET evaporated milk, plus 3 tablespoons, divided**  
**1 cup chopped pecans, toasted**  
**1 cup shredded coconut, toasted (preferably finely shredded, like Angel Flake from Baker's)**  
**2 cups powdered sugar**  
**1 teaspoon vanilla**

Lay out two stacks of graham crackers, 7½ crackers in each stack. Crumble the remaining 5 whole graham crackers into very small pieces for use in the filling. Set aside. Line a 9-by-13-inch pan with one of the stacks of graham crackers as the bottom layer.

Prepare the filling: On low heat on the stovetop, melt 1½ sticks butter with granulated sugar. Add the beaten egg combined with the ½ cup evaporated milk. Then raise heat and boil for one minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and add the pecans, coconut and crumbled graham crackers. Mix, then pour/spoon over the bottom layer of whole graham crackers. Lay the second layer of whole graham crackers side by side over the filling.

Prepare the icing with the remaining butter, the remaining evaporated milk, and the powdered sugar and vanilla. Pour the icing to cover the top layer of graham crackers. Place in the refrigerator to chill completely. Cut into squares and serve cold. Store in refrigerator.

## Mandarin Orange Cake

Boxed cake mixes came out in the early 1930s, but recipes like this Mandarin Orange Cake from the 1983 cookbook, "Favorite Recipes of Fayette Co. Extension Homemakers Club," show the "helper products" stayed popular. This recipe is from Ruby Martinek, a teacher for more than 40 years, starting in Ellinger in the early 1930s. Her daughter, Jan Jurecka, still lives in Ellinger and has fond childhood memories of her mother's cooking.

**1 (15.25-ounce) box yellow cake mix**  
**¾ cup vegetable oil**  
**3 eggs**  
**1 (11-ounce) can mandarin oranges**

**Topping:**  
**1 (16-ounce) carton refrigerated (not frozen) Cool Whip**  
**1 (3.4-ounce) packet instant vanilla pudding**  
**1 (8-ounce) can crushed pineapple, drained**

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour 9-by-13 inch baking dish. Combine cake ingredients and mix. Bake for 25 to 35 minutes. While the cake cools, mix topping ingredients by hand in a small bowl. Spread over cooled cake.



# Renewables, solar take center stage at Energy Expo

By **Connie Juarez**

**RANDY HUMPHREY** of Elgin, a Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member, installed solar panels at his home last year. The system is capable of generating 11.89 kilowatts of electricity. He wanted to lower his electricity costs and was pleased with the results.

Humphrey wanted to share his experience and offer some advice. “Do your research. Know that it still costs you money, but you can control your costs of electricity now and in the future,” Humphrey said.

Humphrey attended the cooperative’s Energy Expo event on Oct. 19 to inform guests about renewable energy systems. He was joined by Charles Brading and Jeffery Geuea, both Bluebonnet members from Bastrop, who spoke to others about the benefits and potential challenges of installing solar panel systems.

Nearly 60 Bluebonnet members and guests — all ready to learn about the latest in residential solar energy systems, battery energy storage and electric vehicles — attended the event at the cooperative’s headquarters in Bastrop. It was the ninth time the cooperative has hosted the event.

Speakers, information sessions, displays and Bluebonnet employees provided information about renewable energy systems and answered attendees’ questions.

Members Diana and Loren McGuire, who plan to move from Austin and build a home in Caldwell County, attended the Energy Expo to gain insight into adding a solar energy system during the early stages of home construction. “We didn’t know much about solar energy at Bluebonnet and wanted to understand it better,” Diana McGuire said.

Her biggest takeaway was how to get an accurate comparison when considering different installer proposals, she said.

The program began with presentations by representatives of the Texas Solar Energy Society on the fundamentals of home solar energy systems. The society also hosted solar and battery-system vendors to answer visitors’ questions on site. The Texas Solar Energy Society is a statewide non-profit organization committed to advancing solar energy in Texas.

Throughout the three-hour event, Bluebonnet employees explained the specifics of connecting energy systems, ways to monitor electricity consumption and how to track excess power generated by a solar system that is returned to the electric grid.

Currently, about 3,500 Bluebonnet members use solar energy systems — approximately 15% more than last year. “This really shows how much interest there is in alternative energy in the area,” said Bluebonnet member service supervisor Erica Contreras.

“We were really pleased with the turnout,” she said. “It was great to see so many of our members engaged and excited about renewable energy.”



Celina Flores, a Bluebonnet member service representative, speaks with John Jakovich of Paige at the Energy Expo on Oct. 19.



Above, left: Bluebonnet members Diana, left, and Loren McGuire of Harwood attended the event to find out more about installing solar power on their new house. Above, right: Randy Humphrey of Elgin installed solar power at his home in 2023. He was one of three members who attended the event to talk about their experience with renewable energy.



Above: Bluebonnet members Christina Zamora, left, and Anita Lira consult with member service representative Felicia Jackson at the Energy Expo. Left: Erica Contreras, a member service supervisor for Bluebonnet, helps Tia Willis of Manor register at the event. *Sarah Beal photos*



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Before 2000, when Bluebonnet members had questions or problems, there were just two operators to answer their calls. With growth came more questions about payments and bills, requests for new service and reports of power outages. By the early 2000s, a dozen temporary hires answered calls. In 2005, Bluebonnet opened its call center near Bastrop, where eight employees worked. Sharon Paul (top left, in 2003), started at the cooperative in 1984 and joined the call center team in 2006. “It takes a special kind of person to be a call center representative,” Paul said. “You have to know a little bit about everything.”

# this is **NOW**

Today, 26 employees — including Sharon Paul, bottom left — answer members’ calls to 800-842-7708. They still answer questions about bills or new service, and also address more complex concerns regarding payment assistance or solar power systems. In the last year, representatives answered 14,371 calls per month, on average. Members can still speak to a representative 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and now they can pay a bill automatically by phone. Today, a member has four ways to report an outage: by phone, at bluebonnet.coop, by texting ‘OUT’ to 44141 or via the Bluebonnet mobile app. “We still pride ourselves on providing quality member support,” Paul said.

In 2024, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative has celebrated 85 years of providing safe, reliable and affordable electric service to its fast-growing membership. As the milestone year ends, Bluebonnet continues planning for the future.



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## OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Dec. 25-26 for the Christmas holiday. If you have a power outage, text OUT to 44141, report it at bluebonnet.coop or on the MyBluebonnet mobile app, or

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

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# 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-Feared 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

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29 >



\$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.

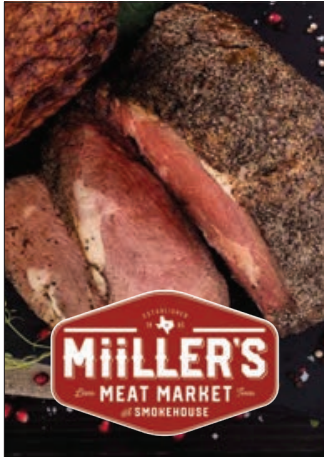
**UPCOMING: SUMMER PASTAS** DUE JANUARY 10





# HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

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



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## 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

**Fredericksburg** **Pearl Harbor Commemoration**, (830) 997-8600, pacificwarmuseum.org

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

**La Grange** **Beat Root Revival**, (979) 968-9944, thebugleboy.org

**Marble Falls** **Christmas Home Tour**, (830) 798-2157, fallsmuseum.org

**Palestine** **Christmas on Main**, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

**Sealy** **Fantasy of Lights Parade**, (979) 885-3222, sealychamber.com

**Woodville** **Christmas Twilight Tour**, (409) 283-2272, heritage-village.org

**Richardson** **[7, 14] Hot Cocoa Crawl**, citylinedfw.com

8

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

12

**New Braunfels** **New Braunfels Conservation Society Christmas Market**, (830) 629-2943, newbraunfelsconservation.org

13

**Seguin** **[13-14] Country Christmas**, (830) 379-0933, 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

14

**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

15

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

19

**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

31

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

### **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

**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 fasciated 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.



2



3



4

## 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).

**TCP** 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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