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FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

OCTOBER 2025

## Grapes Stake Their Claims

New American Viticultural Areas  
would help define Texas wines

**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**  
SEE PAGE 16

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# October 2025



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*By Amanda Ogle  
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

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Harvesting at Uplift Vineyard in July begins at dusk.

*Photo by Erich Schlegel*

#### ABOVE

For decades, Jerry Nichols was the unofficial first lady at Wood County Electric Cooperative.

*Photo by Jay Patrick*



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The best food I've ever had at a fair is ...



**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 August prompt: **Another day, another ...**

Texas scorcher.

BENNY CALVIT  
BOWIE-CASS EC  
DE KALB

Book read.

EMMA MACHALICA, AGE 12  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES  
GRANDVIEW

Day to say I love you.

ROBERTA SHOWERMAN  
VIA FACEBOOK

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CAROL MERCER  
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Chance to make a difference.

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From the Oil Fields

**RECOMMENDED READING**

October is National Co-op Month. In October 2015 we looked at some of the terrific work co-ops do—in Texas and worldwide. Read the story at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).

# Taco Timing

**NATIONAL TACO DAY** moved to the first Tuesday in October in 2024. Marketers liked the idea of Taco Tuesday.

Of course, in Texas, every day is taco day. Still, mark your 2025 calendars for October 7. And remember that we had the best reader recipes for tacos in March 2021—available online any day of the week.

## Get Over It

Sugar Land wants to rise above all the snarling traffic around Houston.

The southwest suburb is looking at two solutions that could have commuters whizzing around overhead. Electric, self-flying taxis using vertical takeoff and landing is one possibility. Another is a system of on-demand, electric gondolas, left, that would glide on cables above city streets.

"We're told to be trailblazers and not be afraid to take risks," says Melanie Beaman, the city's transportation and mobility manager.



AUGUST 2025 Disc Jockeys

“Some think it’s just for college kids, slackers and stoners when, in fact, it’s a great sport for people of all ages (I’m 68).”

GREG MCCARTY  
PEDERNALES EC  
BUDA



WYATT MCCSPADDEN

### Before There Was Golf

My husband’s family is proud of the fact that his uncle, Fred Morrison, invented the Frisbee, first called the Pluto Platter [*Disc Jockeys*, August 2025]. Several family members, including my then-teenage future husband, demonstrated the invention at state fairs before it was finally bought by Wham-O.

Kathleen Warr  
San Bernard EC  
Hockley

### Fire Prevention

I could add another tip: During holidays that normally have fireworks involved or during an extended dry spell, at each outdoor faucet I will stage a water hose with an attached nozzle [*Every Part of Texas Is at Risk*, August 2025]. If a fire starts that could affect our house, I can fight it till the fire department arrives.

Ted Pasche  
CoServ  
Argyle



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### Learned Our Lesson

The quote from “Anonymous” was an insult to every educator in this state [*Currents*, August 2025].

The quote means, “After you’ve forgotten how to read, forgotten mathematics, forgotten EVERYTHING that you learned in school ... then you’re truly educated.”

Preposterous! As a retired educator, I can assure you that dedicated educators are teaching Texas students what they need to continue in life—in college, on-the-job training or life experiences—which they wouldn’t even be able to comprehend without those “useless things” they learned in school.

Susie McCalla  
Central Texas EC  
Kerrville

### One Rare Sight

A little over 40 years ago, I lived in north-east Arkansas for a while, and I kept a tiny carved agate armadillo on my desk [*Dillo Dirt*, July 2025]. One day a woman in the office finally picked it up and said, “What is this?”

She had never seen one.

Mona Tucker  
Rusk County EC  
Carthage

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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.

Texas Co-op Power

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Growers continue to refine and expand the distinctive character of Texas wines

# PUTTING GRAPES ON THE MAP

BY AMANDA OGLE • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

**D**rive across Texas and you expect to see cattle, oil pump jacks, and cotton or corn.

But grapes?

They're more Texan and more common than you might think—increasingly so. And they've been here far longer than those pump jacks.

In fact, more than 14,000 acres of grapevines provide for some 600 winemaking facilities in Texas, according to the Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association. That's way up from 3,000 acres and 200 wineries just a decade ago, a reflection of the rapidly expanding \$24 billion Texas wine industry.

Spanish missionaries brought grapevines with them to Texas in the 17th century, and attempts at winemaking with wild mustang and muscadine grapes occurred until Prohibition.

Modern winemaking picked up in the 1960s as researchers at Texas Tech University planted grapes in the High Plains of the southern Panhandle, and producers are still refining what grows best where.

The state has eight American Viticultural Areas, distinct appellations of origin used on wine labels. AVAs define grape-growing regions and identify specific geographic or climatic features that affect the characteristics of grapes.

The Texas High Plains AVA is the most productive in the state, with more than 8,000 acres of vineyards, followed by

ABOVE Claire Richardson is a winemaker at Burnet-based Uplift Vineyard near Lake Buchanan.

OPPOSITE Drew Tallent with a handful of iron-rich Hickory Sands soil at Tallent Vineyards, north of Mason.





ABOVE From left, Bob Young, Bending Branch Winery CEO; Tallent; and Jen Cernosek, Bending Branch general manager, at Tallent Vineyards.

OPPOSITE Ron Yates of Spicewood Vineyards. He sources grapes from the proposed Dell Valley American Viticultural Area in the Chihuahuan Desert of far West Texas.

the Texas Hill Country AVA with about 2,500 acres. The oldest, the Mesilla Valley AVA, established in 1985, straddles Texas and New Mexico in the El Paso area.

As the Texas wine scene continues to expand, more oenophiles are learning about what they taste in the state's specific terroirs, nailing down hyperlocal characteristics that help them understand exactly what types of wines they like from each region.

"The entire country of France has more than 360 different appellations," says Valerie Elkins, managing director of membership operations for William Chris Wine Co., based in Hye, between Fredericksburg and Johnson City. "Yet Texas is larger than France, and we only have eight defined AVAs. These AVAs help the consumer to identify regions and regional expectations, so establishing more AVAs helps get more national and international understanding."

"If you were to go to a restaurant today and order a chardonnay, you'd look for a California Russian River Valley chardonnay because that's one of the regions where those grapes grow the best. We don't really have that in Texas yet."

Grape and wine producers await the approval of three viticultural areas by the U.S. Treasury's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau. The process for establishing an AVA is tedious and slow. If approved, these new appellations would be Texas' first since 2005.

## LLANO UPLIFT AVA

Located entirely within the Texas Hill Country AVA, the Llano Uplift AVA would cover 1.3 million acres. The greater Hill Country region sits over an ancient limestone seabed, meaning the soils are more alkaline compared with the slightly acidic soils of the uplift, which is marked by a geological formation made primarily of granite rather than limestone.

According to Justin Scheiner, associate professor and viticulture specialist at Texas A&M University and the petitioner behind this AVA proposal, the Llano Uplift has its own aquifer system, which impacts nutrient availability and water quality and allows for different rootstocks to be planted. The uplift gets less rain than surrounding areas, which contributes to the distinct character of wines made from the vineyards here.

"Aromatically, the wines in the Llano Uplift AVA exhibit more floral, delicate and perfumed characteristics," says Claire Richardson, winemaker at Burnet-based Uplift Vineyard, which is within the proposed Llano Uplift AVA and a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative.

"The wines are typically medium in body and have a distinct tannin structure that could be described as dusty or powdery," she says, noting that depending on the vintage and variety, herbal characteristics can be present in the wines, including mint, eucalyptus and subtle green pepper.

## HICKORY SANDS DISTRICT AVA

This proposed viticultural area is located entirely within the western part of the proposed Llano Uplift AVA and on the edge of the Edwards Plateau in Mason County. Soils here are rich in iron, with granite and sandstone. Water from the Hickory Aquifer is important for irrigation.

Bending Branch Winery, based in Comfort and a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative, sources Hickory Sands grapes from Drew Tallent of Tallent Vineyards, one of the catalysts behind the application for this AVA proposal.

“Vines are able to root deeply into the soils of the Hickory Sands,” says Jennifer Cernosek, general manager of Bending Branch. “The Hickory Sands aquifer gives great water content to the soil, and the well-drained soil contributes to the fruit-forward nature of the wines from these grapes.”

Cernosek says that the wines Bending Branch makes from Tallent’s grapes tend to be softer in tannins, have a deeper mineral profile and are earthier.

“There’s a vanilla note in the wines that comes through across various grape varieties,” she says.

## DELL VALLEY AVA

In the Chihuahuan Desert of far West Texas, the proposed Dell Valley AVA is in Hudspeth County, west of the Guadalupe Mountains and east of El Paso.

The higher elevation here, 3,640–4,200 feet, provides diurnal shifts, which means it’s hot during the day and cold in the mornings, so that grapes can produce sugars in the heat and acids as they cool.

Ron Yates of Spicewood Vineyards, a member of Pedernales EC, sources grapes from Dell Valley. He says the distinctive altitude, soil and farming techniques come through in the grapes.

“For me, it’s probably the best-value fruit we have in the



state,” he says. “Not a lot of folks are getting it, and it makes great wine. That mountain air up there is almost no humidity, so disease pressure for the grapes is less. Plus, deer aren’t roaming and eating your grapes.

“It’s probably one of the only places in the state that I have found where we can make lower-alcohol wine, and it’s still really jumping out with flavors and fruit.”

## ABOUT TIME

Establishing a new AVA involves filing a petition that takes time to be “perfected” to meet TTB regulation requirements, a period for public comment and then rulemaking finalization. It can take years.

But the Llano Uplift AVA, filed with the government in 2022, is close to becoming official; it’s third in line to enter a public comment period, followed by Hickory Sands, filed in 2023, which is 10th in line.

However, while the AVAs aren’t yet official, you can still enjoy wines from each of these areas at wineries and vineyards across Texas and beyond.

“Texas is becoming known as a world-class wine region,” says Elkins of William Chris Wine. “Breaking down our grow regions to show the unique characteristics of the soil and growing conditions will help raise awareness for the variety of terroir Texas has and continue to make Texas-grown wine more prominent in the national and international wine world.” ■



## Worth the Squeeze

Grapes to sample from each of the proposed AVAs

### LLANO UPLIFT

Montepulciano and sangiovese, both used in Italian red wines

### HICKORY SANDS

Red grapes merlot, mourvèdre, touriga nacional, tannat and tempranillo, and white grape viognier

### DELL VALLEY

Cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon, chenin blanc, petit verdot, tempranillo, muscat, riesling, chardonnay and sémillon



Managing an  
electric cooperative  
was a job too big  
for one man

# Her Life *of* Service

BY D'ANN NICHOLS DRENNAN  
PHOTO BY JAY PATRICK

When Jerry Jordan said “I do” to Juan D. Nichols in 1951, she didn’t realize all she was saying yes to.

Jerry, born in 1933, was 3 or 4 when electricity came to her family’s farm near Newsome in East Texas.

“My grandparents’ and my parents’ houses were on the highway, so we were fortunate,” she says. “We were one of the first to get power.” While she doesn’t remember her own home before electric lights, she recalls visiting family and friends who didn’t have such luxuries. “It made me feel very lucky.”

She never dreamed she’d devote herself to the electric industry. She says that her first husband was a sailor in Korea, her second a college student, her third a fertilizer salesman and her fourth the general manager of Wood County Electric Cooperative. With a twinkle in her clear, green eyes, the 92-year-old whispers conspiratorially, “They were all the same man.”

In 1961, Jerry was happily settled with Juan and their three small children in Woodway, just outside of Waco.

“But Juan D. didn’t want to live anywhere other than Wood County,” where he grew up, she says. A family friend who served on the board of directors at Wood County EC told Juan about a new position opening up at the East Texas co-op: power use adviser.

Juan met Virgil Shaw, the co-op’s founding general manager, at his farm just east of Quitman on a Saturday in late fall. Jerry remembers that Juan rushed back to where she and the children were visiting with her in-laws and said, “Jerry, come on, he wants to meet you too.”

Jerry purses her lips. “Juan D. told me I didn’t have time to change, so I hopped in the car and off we went.” She must have made a good impression because Shaw hired Juan that day.

Jerry Nichols, at her Quitman home, holds a portrait from her wedding to Juan D.



“It wasn’t unusual,” Jerry explains, “for an employer to expect the wife to help the man—without compensation, of course.”

She knits her still-dark brows. “Back then, I signed everything as Mrs. J.D. Nichols, never my name. When my daddy died, the clerk sent me out of the room so Juan D. could sign the papers to inherit my property. I couldn’t get a credit card, couldn’t take out a bank loan without my husband’s signature.” Jerry smirks. “Even though I managed our money better than he did!”

When Juan and Jerry moved to Quitman, about 35 miles north of Tyler, there were no houses available to purchase. They rented a little green house in town. Jerry remembers it snowed that winter, and flakes drifted in around the closed window and piled up on the dining table next to it.

They soon bought a lot on Meadowbrook Lane and built a modest ranch-style home. It was the first all-electric residence in Quitman. Juan installed extra meters to measure how much electricity it took to run the range, water heater, and central heating and air. Jerry didn’t get along with the electric stove. “Not to start with!” she exclaims. “I hated that

electric stove. Boy, when it boiled over, it made a mess!”

Not long after they moved in, there was a gas outage in town, and a gas company employee showed up at the door. Jerry told him, “I don’t have any gas.”

“Everybody has gas,” he answered. “For your stove, your heating and your hot water.”

Jerry’s voice is still smug as she repeats what she told him: “Not in my house.”

A college graduate with an English degree, Jerry didn’t want to leave behind her young children to teach school. At that time, public school began in first grade. So Jerry started the first kindergarten in Quitman in the garage of their new home. She operated Kiddie Kollege until 1970, when she and Juan were expecting their fourth and last child.

On January 1, 1968, Juan was promoted, becoming the second general manager of Wood County EC. At age 37, he was one of the youngest managers in the state.

Not long after Juan began working for the co-op, Jerry noticed that several wives of members of the board of directors would drive their husbands to the monthly meetings and wait in their cars outside. With a laugh, she explains that the men were “too old to drive—they were in their 60s and 70s!”

Jerry invited these ladies to her home. For more than three decades, she served coffee and dessert and visited

## National Cooperative Month

October is when the more than 30,000 co-ops in the U.S. celebrate their unique business model and the cohesive communities they create and support. Included in that number are 894 electric distribution and generation and transmission cooperatives with some 42 million members. That includes 77 co-ops that power the lives of some 3 million Texans with 363,000 miles of line across the state.



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Jerry at the Nichols' house on Meadowbrook Lane, the first all-electric residence in Quitman. A moment from Juan D.'s roast when he retired from Wood County Electric Cooperative. The family gathered to celebrate Jerry and Juan D.'s 70th wedding anniversary.

ABOVE The Nicholsons in 1973.

RIGHT Jerry when she served as president of the Sabine River Authority of Texas.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: COURTESY, JERRY NICHOLS

with the wives one Monday a month while their husbands conducted business.

"It was a consuming job for both of us," Jerry says. In those days, when an ice storm hit, Juan went to the office until the lines were cleared. Jerry cooked huge pots of chili or stew so the lineworkers could have a hot meal when they came in.

The co-op didn't have 24-hour dispatching until 1981. Before that, people called the Nichols' home phone whenever their power went out. Jerry recalls one night when the harsh ring woke Juan from a deep sleep. She heard him ask three times for the caller's last name, then finally inquire, "How do you spell that?" Jerry laughs as she remembers hearing Juan repeat back, "J-O-N-E-S."

In the '80s, the co-op hired lawyers from Washington, D.C., and consultants from Georgia to help with wholesale power purchases and other national issues affecting rural cooperatives. "There weren't many options for hotels near us in those days, so I always hosted whoever was in town at our home," Jerry remembers. "At first, I was intimidated, but I discovered these men were grateful to have a home-

cooked meal and spend time with our family."

Even though Jerry was a supportive wife, she wasn't content merely to serve stews and sip coffee. She took a leadership role in her community and in statewide organizations.

Jerry was active in the Quitman PTA, donating her time to the schools her children attended, and she was the editor of the Texas Rural Electric Women's Association newsletter.

Her proudest accomplishment came in October 1991, when Gov. Ann Richards appointed Jerry as the first female director of the Sabine River Authority of Texas. Initially, a staffer was assigned to be Jerry's "chaperone" at every board function. After the second encounter, Jerry decided, "Enough is enough."

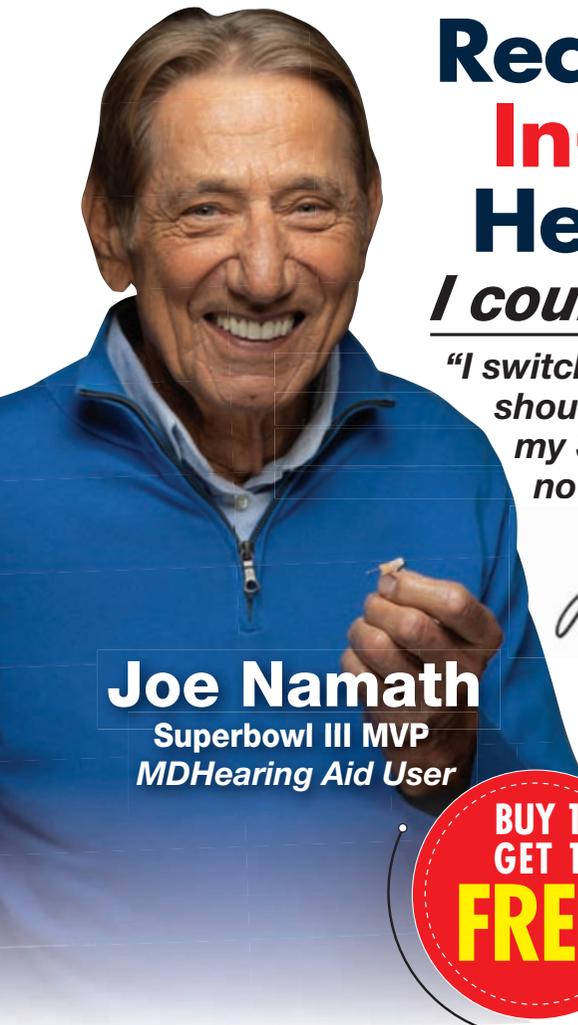
At the next meeting, she walked up to the huddle of male directors.

"They didn't have anything to say that would shock me," she exclaims, tapping a red-polished nail on the arm of her chair. "I shared these experiences with Juan D. Hopefully, I helped make it easier for women to become leaders in our co-op."

Jerry encouraged Juan to recruit women for executive positions and the board. In 1991, Cathy Roberts was chosen to fill an unexpired term, becoming the first female board member of Wood County EC. When Juan retired in 1997, he recommended Debbie Robinson to succeed him as general manager. She was one of the first women in the nation to lead an electric cooperative.

Juan died the day after Christmas in 2021, but Jerry continues to live in the house they shared. She has four children, eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren, who she says are the center of her world.

Jerry rocks gently in her recliner, a smile lighting her face. "I don't know how I got so blessed," she says. "Juan D.'s and my work with the co-op provided us with opportunities I never could have imagined." ■



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By Addie Broyles

**Y**ou know Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative as the company that keeps your lights on. Other cooperatives in the Bluebonnet territory are flipping switches of their own — in ways you might not expect.

Every time an item is purchased at the Burleson County Co-op Store in Caldwell, it's not just a sale. It's a return on the investment its members paid to own a stake in the feed store.

When Aubrey and Perrine Noelke of Belle Vie Farm & Kitchen near Thrall sell their pasture-raised meats at Chaparral Coffee in Lockhart, the sale ripples through the Central Texas Farmers Co-op, where success is shared.

And when members of the Washington County Wildlife Society gather to learn about being good stewards of the wildlife roaming their properties, the cooperative-model group's wisdom is shared with its more than 350 members.

According to the National Cooperative Business Association, about one in three Americans belong to a cooperative of some kind.

Cooperatives — not just electric cooperatives like Bluebonnet — have been the lifeblood of rural America since the early 1900s, when residents started organizing cooperatively run businesses to help them do everything from negotiating a good price for corn to advocating for fair working conditions.

By definition, a cooperative is a business or organization owned and run by the people who use it. Whether they are farmers, consumers or community organizations, the members call the shots and share the benefits, instead of earning profits for outside investors. Co-ops focus on members' needs, and each member typically has an equal vote in how the cooperative is run, no matter how much cotton they grow or how much electricity they buy.

That is central to the core principles of all cooperatives, no matter what industry they serve. **See the 7 cooperative principles, Page 19.**

The roots of co-ops in America date back to the 1750s with the first mutually run insurance groups. In 1844, the Rochdale Pioneers, a group of weavers and artisans in England, founded the first consumer cooperative,

**Continued on Page 20**



Central Texas Farmers Co-op member Aubrey Noelke checks on the pasture-raised pigs at his farm near Thrall.

The pigs dine on dropped fruit and nuts from the native trees they live under.

Their diet is supplemented with organic grains.

*Sarah Beal photo*



Whether you're buying feed, farming cattle  
or just flipping a light switch, you're benefiting  
from a member-owned cooperative

# THE COOPERATIVE WAY



## WHAT IS A CO-OP?

Cooperatives are member-owned and democratically run businesses or organizations that return profits through capital credits or dividends. Each member gets one vote — whether farmer, consumer, worker or business — in how their cooperative is run. The U.S. Department of Agriculture names October as National Cooperative Month, launched in 1964 to honor co-ops' impact on communities and the economy. Nearly one-third of Americans belong to one. The United Nations has identified 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives.

## CENTRAL TEXAS FARMERS CO-OP

Eight member producers from Hays, Caldwell, Blanco, Bastrop, Travis and Williamson counties

- Community-supported agriculture model founded in 2016
- Buyers purchase seasonal subscriptions for shares of meat, poultry, vegetables, eggs and cheese from all member farms
- Goods can be purchased weekly at any of the five pickup locations, one of which is Chaparral Coffee in Lockhart
- [centraltexasfarmers.com](http://centraltexasfarmers.com)



## INSIDE

Bluebonnet is part of Texas' power legacy, **Page 18**

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Bluebonnet-area cooperatives, **Pages 20-21**

**Follow Bluebonnet on social media all October for giveaways — and ways to celebrate co-op values.**

## BLUEBONNET IS A PART OF TEXAS' POWER LEGACY

Electric cooperatives like Bluebonnet play a vital role in powering communities, especially in rural areas. In honor of National Cooperative Month, we're highlighting how your member-owned organization operates on the principles of local governance, service and community investment.

Founded on Aug. 2, 1939, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative — originally known as the Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative — was created to bring electricity to rural Central Texas under the Rural Electrification Act signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936. As one of the earliest co-ops in Texas, Bluebonnet quickly expanded access to power in underserved communities.

By 1940, the cooperative had 646 miles

of line and 1,468 members. In 1965, it was renamed Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. Today, Bluebonnet serves more than 142,000 meters across 12,700 miles of power lines in 14 Central Texas counties. Over the past five years, that number has grown by 32%, making Bluebonnet one of the fastest-growing electric cooperatives in the nation.

The co-op prioritizes system reliability, preventive maintenance and long-term infrastructure planning to deliver safe, affordable power. Its electric rates remain among the lowest in Texas, and its member-service commitment continues to meet the needs of a rapidly growing region. Bluebonnet also supports local communities through grants, scholarships and civic involvement.



Trey Townsend, left, and his dad, Bubba, at a new construction site in Red Rock. *Sarah Beal photo*

## A TIMELINE OF AMERICA'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES



### 1900-1929

Electricity transformed U.S. cities, boosting quality of life and productivity. By the late 1920s, most urban homes were wired. Private utilities, however, deemed rural areas too costly to serve due to distance and sparse populations.

### 1937-1940

Dozens of co-ops — many in Texas — energize homes for the first time. The electric cooperative that became Bluebonnet is founded in 1939.



### Mid-1960s

Cooperatives begin computerized billing and records.

### 1935

President Franklin D. Roosevelt establishes the Rural Electrification Administration to bring electricity to rural America through low-interest loans.



### 1940

Nearly 600 cooperatives in 46 states serve nearly 1.5 million rural Americans. With support from REA, co-ops build 200,000+ miles of power lines.



# THE 7 COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES

These principles were adopted in 1995 by the International Cooperative Alliance, a global organization that supports and promotes cooperatives across all industries. They reflect the core values that define cooperatives: democratic governance, member ownership and a focus on serving members' needs rather than generating profit.

- 1. Open and voluntary membership:** Open to all who can use the services and accept membership responsibilities.
- 2. Democratic member control:** Members actively participate in governance and have equal voting rights.
- 3. Members' economic participation:** Members financially support the cooperative in a fair and proportional way based on their use of its services and share in the cooperative's financial benefits.
- 4. Autonomy and independence:** Cooperatives remain self-sufficient, member-controlled organizations. Even when they partner with outside entities, they maintain their independence and identity.

- 5. Education, training and information:** Ongoing learning and communication helps members, employees and leaders make informed decisions and support the cooperative's success.
- 6. Cooperation among cooperatives:** Working with other local, regional, national and international cooperatives strengthens services and benefits members and communities.
- 7. Concern for community:** Cooperatives are committed to the long-term well-being and development of the communities they serve.

Sources: *International Cooperative Alliance, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association*

## Late 1960s-1970s

Utilities introduce control centers for real-time monitoring of electric grids and management of power loads. Coordination among co-ops improves power reliability and planning.



## 2000s-2010s

Co-ops begin adopting technologies that remotely collect electric usage data and automate parts of the power distribution system, allowing the grid to detect faults, reroute power and alert control centers.



## 1980s-1990s

Electric co-ops implement supervisory control and data acquisition, or SCADA, systems to monitor power lines and substations, and geographic information system technology to improve outage response.

## 1995

The International Cooperative Alliance adopts the Seven Cooperative Principles. **(See above.)**



## Today

Nearly 900 electric distribution cooperatives serve 42 million people across 48 states, powering over 22 million homes, businesses and farms.



## Continued from Page 16

establishing the model and principles that guide today's cooperatives.

The National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International reports that today, there are approximately 65,000 cooperatively run organizations in the United States.

Of all cooperative businesses, electric cooperatives are among those with the largest membership. Some products and businesses that are household names are run by cooperatives, including Ace Hardware, Do-it-Best Corporation, Blue Diamond Almonds, Sunkist, Land O'Lakes, Ocean Spray, Bob's Red Mill and REI.

CHS Inc., a Minnesota-based grain and agriculture supply co-op, generates the most revenue of any cooperative in the United States — more than \$45 billion annually, according to the National Cooperative Bank.

Nearly 900 electric cooperatives operate across 48 states, serving 42 million Americans and powering more than half the nation's landmass. Electric co-ops maintain over 2.7 million miles of distribution lines nationwide and employ more than half a million people.

In Texas, 76 electric cooperatives serve around 3 million members, according to Texas Electric Cooperatives, an association that represents the interests of the state's member co-ops. The association advocates for cooperatives at the state and national levels and provides products and services for its members, including the publication of this magazine.

"Texas electric cooperatives have a long history of working to improve the quality of lives of their members and their communities," said Martin Bevins, Texas Electric Cooperative's vice president of communications and member services.

"Across the state and the country co-ops invest in their members' future by providing countless student scholarships for higher education and sponsoring the Government-in-Action Youth Tour which has been providing a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Washington D.C. for co-op youth since 1965. Communities are often safer because of the support co-ops provide to volunteer fire departments and first responders. In fact, two of the seven guiding cooperative principles: Concern for Community and Education, Training and Information are at the center of why co-ops stay focused on programs like these," Bevins said.



Manager Glenn Tydlacka began working at Burleson County Co-op Store in 1973 after graduating from high school and became manager in 1979. Sarah Beal photo

### BURLESON COUNTY CO-OP STORE

Caldwell, 111 W. Mustang St., about 260 members

- One of the last remaining cooperative feed stores in the Bluebonnet region
- Organized in 1945 by Ben Wolz, who was also a 40-year member of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board. His son, Lyle, was a Bluebonnet Board member for 30 years
- The farmer-owned cooperative provides everything from feed, fertilizer and seed to veterinary supplies and sporting goods
- \$10 one-time membership fee
- Members receive a dividend based on their annual purchases

Texas is also home to thousands of cooperatives across nearly every sector of the economy, particularly agriculture, according to Christy Lewis, executive director of the Texas Agricultural Cooperative Council. Lewis works with about 250 rural cooperatives across Texas, including those that support farm supply stores, cotton gins and grain elevators.

One of the largest agricultural co-ops in the country is Farmers Cooperative Compress in Lubbock. With approximately 9,300 grower-owners, it is the largest cotton warehousing entity in the world.

Cooperatives like these can help ranchers and farmers negotiate better prices on everything from meat processing to seed. Lewis predicts that cooperatives will play an increasingly critical role in the future of smaller, family-owned farms and ranches across rural Texas.

Rural communities thrive with the help of cooperatively run businesses. The co-ops are often deeply involved in community matters because the residents are also the people making co-op decisions.

Bluebonnet, for example, follows a long-standing tradition of providing more than just electricity to the communities it serves.

The cooperative allocates money each year to support community groups and events, schools and scholarships.

In 2025 so far, Bluebonnet has provided 250 cooling fans, 2,160 cases of water and sponsored or made cash donations to 100 events across the service area, including the Lee County Fair in Giddings, the Watermelon Thump in Luling, the Back-to-School Bash in Cedar Creek, the Washington County Fair Shrimp Boil in Brenham and the annual Resource Fair in Manor.

Phyllis Hillhouse can describe how Bluebonnet's efforts helped her forge a stronger bond with the members of her community.

She manages Zedler Mill, a historic cotton gin along the San Marcos River near Luling. Last year, she worked with Bluebonnet representatives to host an event celebrating the mill's 100th anniversary. The cooperative set up cooling fans to keep about 800 guests comfortable, and provided an exhibit showing how electricity works.

Being an 18-year member of Bluebonnet has brought Phyllis and her husband, James, other benefits.

When she receives her electric bill, she does a little dance, she said. That's because the bill is as much as 40% lower than the



Washington County Wildlife Society member Cary Dietzmann on his land in Brenham. Cattle grazing removes older, coarse vegetation that deer don't prefer, allowing tender new growth to emerge — a favorite food for deer.  
*Sarah Beal photo*

## WASHINGTON COUNTY WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Five wildlife management associations, more than 350 members

- Groups of landowners work cooperatively to find ways to maintain their properties' habitats and wildlife
- Founded 25 years ago
- The first group of this kind was created in the 1970s to help landowners develop management plans for deer populations threatened by overhunting
- \$20-a-year dues; twice yearly meetings with dinner and educational programs from game wardens, biologists and others about land stewardship that extends beyond property lines



*Joe Stafford photo*

'I am telling you, this is the best electric service I've had.'

— Phyllis Hillhouse,  
18-YEAR BLUEBONNET MEMBER

ones she received in other Texas cities where she has lived. Earlier this summer, she said the bill for their 3,500-square-foot home was less than \$150 for each of three consecutive months. "And we keep it cool," she added.

Hillhouse even had good things to say about the few power outages they have experienced.

"The few times that our electricity has gone out, I get the warning on my phone," she said of Bluebonnet's outage text notifications. "They keep me posted. Then, I look out and see trucks troubleshooting. They are Johnny-on-the-spot."

Whether it's Bluebonnet, the Burleson County Co-op Store, the Central Texas Farmers Co-op or the Washington County Wildlife Society — or any other type of cooperative — the core principles create connections and shape futures.

That is because cooperatives don't just serve people — they are people. It is ownership with a heartbeat. ■

Sources: *Texas Electric Cooperatives, Corporation Works, National Cooperative Bank*

## MANY KINDS OF COOPERATIVES

From electric utilities and feed stores to coffee shops and cotton gins — cooperatives take many forms. Here are some of the primary types:

**UTILITY CO-OPS:** Member-owned public utility providers for services like water, electricity or telecommunications.

**CONSUMER CO-OPS:** Businesses like Burleson County Co-op Store in Caldwell, which lets customers become members and earn a year-end dividend, or companies like REI and Ace Hardware are owned by customer-members.

**WORKER CO-OPS:** Businesses owned and run by their workers, such as Patchwork Farm in Manor.

**INSURANCE CO-OPS:** Member-owned mutual insurers serving policyholders, like Nationwide and Farm Bureau Insurance.

**HOUSING CO-OPS:** Residents pool resources to own and control their buildings or communities, usually in urban areas.

**PRODUCER CO-OPS:** Producers join to market or process goods, such as the Central Texas Farmers Co-op. Cotton gins and grain elevators are classic examples.

**PURCHASING CO-OPS:** Individuals, organizations or businesses — like childcare providers or schools — combine buying power to get better prices and terms. Many area schools use co-ops like BuyBoard, TIPS-USA or Texas SmartBuy.

Sources: *Cooperation Texas, National Cooperative Business Association*

DON'T BE

# SCARED

Have fun and stay safe with these Halloween tips

**F**or little ghosts, glittering princesses and small superheroes, Halloween is a thrilling night of make-believe and spooky fun. But during the sugar-fueled race to the next porch, safety is paramount. Keep the magic alive with planning, parental supervision, eagle eyes and some essential items. Then the night can end with treats, not trouble.

■ **ACCOMPANY** young children. Let them start trick-or-treating before sundown. You can always end early and continue the fun at home.

■ **STICK TO FAMILIAR** routes, obey traffic signals and signs, and look both ways before letting kids cross roads. Try to keep them from running — uneven surfaces and curbs are lurking.

■ **PUT REFLECTIVE STICKERS** or tape on costumes and candy bags so vehicles can see them. Consider face paint and makeup instead of masks, which can obstruct a child's vision.

■ **CARRY A FLASHLIGHT** and accompany little goblins up long driveways or across large lawns.

■ **BRING SNACKS** and water for longer walks in rural areas.

■ **SKIP DARK** or secluded paths or houses, unless you know the owners.

■ **SET A GROUP MEETING PLACE** for a certain time, especially if older siblings are racing ahead. Cell phone service could be spotty.

■ **INSPECT CANDY** for torn wrappers, allergens or anything unfamiliar.

■ **DRIVERS, SLOW DOWN!** Watch out for kids in dark costumes darting across roads.



# Director Jurk earns NRECA Gold credential

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board member Russell Jurk earned a Director Gold credential from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, which represents more than 900 of the nation's electric cooperatives. Jurk has served as a Bluebonnet director from District 4, Lee, Milam and Williamson counties, since 2011.

To earn this certificate, Jurk completed two other certifications — Certified Cooperative Director and Board Leadership Certificate — and three courses. He will complete three continuing education courses every two years.

The Director Gold credential recognizes directors who have demonstrated a commitment to continuing education and who understand the responsibilities of board leadership to meet evolving industry demands while upholding democratic values.



Above, Russell Jurk, center, is congratulated by Bluebonnet Board Chairman Ben Flencher, left, and Bluebonnet General Manager Matt Bentke.



## Shining pink for a purpose

In October, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is recognizing Breast Cancer Awareness Month across its service area. Field crews will display pink ribbon decals on their trucks and wear pink hard hats throughout the month. All five of the cooperative's member service centers — in Bastrop, Brenham,

Giddings, Lockhart and Manor — will be illuminated with pink lights at night. Visit any of these member service centers from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday to pick up a free pink ribbon pin and show your support for the cause. *Sarah Beal photo*

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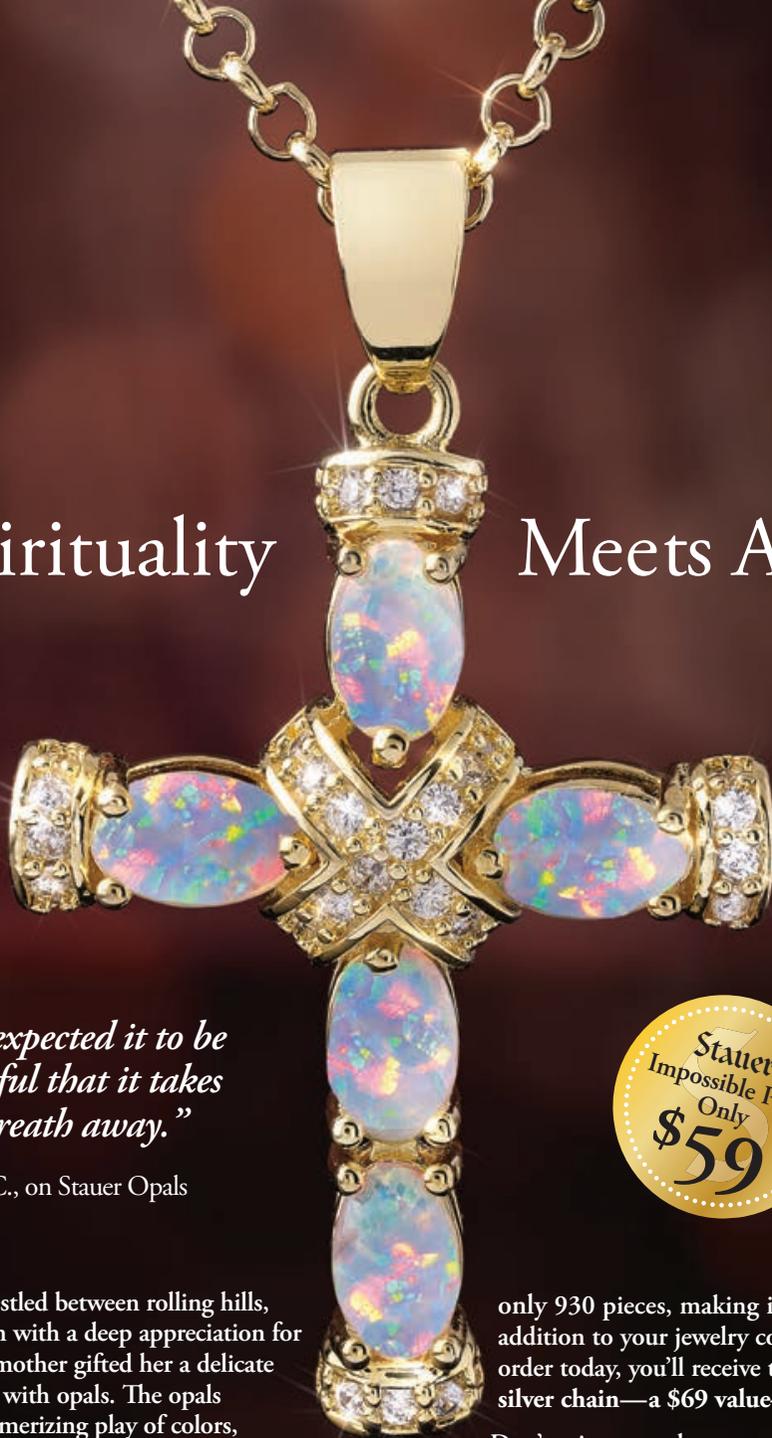
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— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals



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# Funny Business

Rodeo clown Red Sublett traveled the world wrangling laughs

BY CHUCK LYONS

IT WAS CLAIMED, journalist Jerry Armstrong once wrote, that rodeo clown Red Sublett would ride anything that “a saddle, a riggin’ or a rope could be used on”—horses, mules and bulls, of course, but also cows, buffaloes, zebras and at least one ostrich. Sometimes he rode them straight, sometimes backwards but always with zany antics that left the crowd laughing.

Sublett was “the greatest and the highest-paid arena comic of his day,” Armstrong wrote.

He was born John Dixon Sublett in Arlington in November 1893, and he died, by then known to everyone as Red, in Dallas a scant 56 years later.

His family had settled in the countryside when the prairies were still unfenced.

The town of Sublett, now part of Arlington and some 18 miles southeast of Sublett’s modest, pink granite headstone in Mount Olivet Cemetery, bears the family name.

Sublett’s father moved his family from Texas to Oklahoma via horse-drawn covered wagon with two milk cows tied to the tailgate.

Before World War I intervened in 1917, Sublett worked rough stock on ranches, including the 101 Ranch in Oklahoma and later the Four Sixes in Texas. Before that, at just 16, he had ridden broncs and steers for Booger Red’s traveling cowboy show and Lucille Mulhall’s show.

He enlisted in the war effort and saw action in France with the medical corps before returning to his rodeo antics.

At a rodeo in Magdalena, New Mexico,

the story goes, producer Tex Austin and announcer Foghorn Clancy took Sublett aside and told him he was getting plenty of big laughs just being himself and that he should become a rodeo clown.

It paid better, they said.

As rodeo evolved from its beginning in ranch corrals in the early 1900s, promoters realized their audiences drifted away whenever there was a break in the action due to injuries and other delays. So the rodeo clown was created to keep spectators entertained during those breaks.

When bull riding became a regular part of rodeos in the 1920s and ’30s, the clown’s role—and importance—grew as he stepped in to distract the bull and allow its rider to get out of danger. Today’s rodeo protection teams, made up of highly trained athletes, are still a vital part of competitions—work that started with the clowns.

“The early clowns were cowboys who could rope and ride with the best of them ... and they were, above all, showmen,” wrote Jeanne Joy Hartnagle-Taylor in her 1993 book *Greasepaint Matadors*.

Sublett fit that description perfectly.

He picked up a trained mule named Spark Plug that he claimed could be taught to do just about anything, and together the duo performed in rodeos throughout the U.S. and abroad, including shows in London, Paris and Dublin. They also performed in films with actors Wallace Beery, Bob Steele and Pearl White.

Spark Plug died in Fort Worth in 1931, and Red’s career began sliding to an end. He died from a heart condition in the veterans hospital in Dallas on April 14, 1950.

His headstone reads, “World Famous Dean of Rodeo Clowns.” ■

# Candies and Fudge

Can't beat these treats—and no baking is involved

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

My *mami* has been whipping up these delights every holiday season for as long as I can remember. She had us kids shaping coconut balls by the dozen. She gifted them, served them at family gatherings and even shipped them to relatives.

## No-Bake Chocolate Coconut Joys

**¼ cup (½ stick) butter, melted**  
**1½ cups sweetened shredded coconut**  
**1 cup powdered sugar**  
**½ cup semisweet chocolate chips**  
**¼ cup chopped pecans**

1. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, stir together butter, coconut and sugar. Shape into 1-inch balls. Place on prepared baking sheet.
3. Gently press your thumb or the back of a teaspoon measuring spoon to make an indentation in the middle of each ball.
4. In a microwave-safe bowl, heat chocolate chips in 30-second increments, stirring each time, until fully melted.
5. Fill each indentation with melted chocolate. Sprinkle with pecans. Refrigerate until firm.

MAKES 24 PIECES

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





## Aunt Ruth's Candy Cornflakes

TAMMY CARR  
SAM HOUSTON EC

It doesn't get much simpler than this. These easy, quick, no-bake peanut butter treats are a perfect mix of sweet and crunchy.

**1 cup corn syrup**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**1¼ cups peanut butter**  
**6 cups cornflakes**

1. Line 2 baking sheets with wax paper and set aside.
2. Combine corn syrup and sugar in a large saucepan and bring to a boil, stirring continuously until sugar is melted.
3. Remove from heat, add peanut butter and mix well.
4. Add cornflakes and mix to combine. Drop by spoonfuls onto wax paper to create a rounded candy. Cool until set and firm.

MAKES 24 PIECES

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

## Pumpkin Fudge

GERI HUPP  
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC



Hupp's pumpkin fudge with white chocolate and cinnamon is sure to be a hit with candy lovers. It's creamy, smooth and perfect for the fall. I advise making a triple batch because this rich fudge will go fast!

**⅔ cup evaporated milk**  
**2½ cups sugar**  
**¾ cup canned pumpkin purée**  
**1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**  
**½ teaspoon salt**

**1 jar marshmallow crème (7 ounces)**  
**2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter**  
**1 cup white chocolate chips**  
**1 teaspoon vanilla extract**

1. Line a 9-by-9-inch baking pan with aluminum foil and set aside.
2. In a large saucepan, heat evaporated milk and sugar over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Bring to a boil.
3. Stir in pumpkin purée, cinnamon and salt. Return to a boil.
4. Stir in marshmallow crème and butter. Return to a boil. Cook, stirring occasionally, 18 minutes.
5. Remove from heat. Add chocolate chips and vanilla. Stir until creamy and all chocolate chips are melted.
6. Pour into prepared pan. Cool completely until firm.
7. Remove from pan and cut into squares. Store in a cool, dry place.

MAKES 16 PIECES

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**BARBECUE SIDES** DUE OCTOBER 10

Superior sides can make a good barbecue great. For our March issue, we're serving up your best fixin's, with the top trimming earning \$500.

**UPCOMING: FIVE-INGREDIENT DINNERS** DUE NOVEMBER 10



## Confetti Fudge

LINDA FOREMAN  
TRINITY VALLEY EC

This is the prettiest fudge I have ever made. Flecks of dried fruit swirled into a creamy white chocolate marshmallow base really do give the appearance of festive confetti.

- ¾ cup (1 ½ sticks) butter, plus more to grease pan**
- 3 cups sugar**
- ¾ cup sour cream**
- 1 package white chocolate chips (12 ounces)**
- 1 jar marshmallow crème (7 ounces)**
- ¼ cup chopped dried cranberries**
- ½ cup chopped dried apricots**
- ¼ cup chopped golden raisins**

1. Butter a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a large saucepan, combine butter, sugar and sour cream over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium and cook 5 minutes, stirring



constantly to prevent scorching.

3. Remove from heat and stir in white chocolate chips and marshmallow crème until smooth.
4. Stir in cranberries, apricots and raisins. Carefully pour into prepared pan.
5. Cool completely until firm. Cut into individual servings.

**MAKES 12 PIECES**

## Sweet Sentiments

This upcoming holiday season, I'm gifting edible treats wrapped to impress! Here are a few fun ideas that take gifting to the next level.

**A candy-filled Mason jar** makes for a great reusable gift. Layer with parchment paper, top with a lid and tie a vibrant ribbon.

**Make use of spare tins.** Embellish with greenery, ribbon, bows or cupcake liners filled with candy.

**Wrap candy in cellophane then tuck it in a kitchen towel** for two gifts in one. I love this look!

—Vianney Rodriguez

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# HOLIDAY GIFT **TCP** GUIDE

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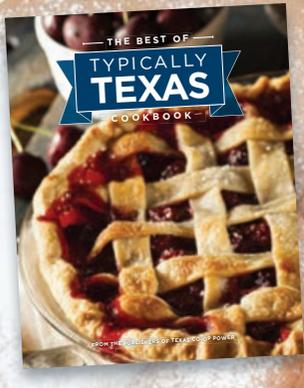
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## Texas Bluebonnet Calendar

**Large 20-by-15-inch calendar with 12 watercolor scenes.**  
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Terlingua's Traces

Pay your respects at this ghost town's eerie, ancient cemetery

BY CHET GARNER

IF YOU HEAD TOWARD the Big Bend and then go into the region between the national park and state park, you'll feel like you're driving onto an alien planet. Sweeping desert views in every direction punctuated by rocky cliffs of tan and red are both beautiful and bizarre.

Eventually you'll reach the notable ghost town of Terlingua (population 130 or so), a few miles from the Mexican border. It's hard to imagine how folks live in such a faraway locale, but a trip to the cemetery confirms that Texans have been living out here for a very long time.

Like every tourist, I started my visit with a bowl of red at the Starlight Theatre, a destination restaurant built inside the stone shell of an old movie theater. After filling my belly, I wandered down the street and stepped onto the hallowed ground of the town's historic cemetery.

This is not your typical green acres of eternal slumber but a dusty patch of desert with uneven stacks of rocks marking graves, along with handmade crosses, rusted metal ornaments, plastic flowers and even a few beer bottles.

The silence was broken only by the wind and the abrupt buzz of a grasshopper that I kept mistaking for a rattlesnake. Most of the graves date back to the early 1900s, when families moved here to seek their fortune in the long-defunct mercury mines. Many of the graves note the same death year: 1918, when the Spanish flu ripped through the community.

As the last bit of sunlight disappeared behind the mountains, the graveyard glowed with a dusty kind of reverence. It's clear the community still feels a great deal of pride and connection to its past. It serves as a reminder that not all who wander to this part of Texas are lost, and some choose to never leave. ■

ABOVE Chet explores the graves at the century-old Terlingua cemetery.

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



## Know Before You Go

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

## OCTOBER

9

**Groves [9-12] Pecan Festival,** (409) 962-3631, grovescofc.com

10

**San Marcos [10-11] Aviation Discovery Fest,** (512) 396-1943, centraltexaswing.org

11

**Corsicana Airsho,** (903) 467-7170, coyotesquadron.org

**Hillsboro Hill County Master Gardeners Tree Sale,** (254) 582-4022, hill.agrilife.org

**Luling Night in Old Luling,** (830) 875-0123, lulingcc.org

**Sanger Car and Motorcycle Show,** (940) 395-1306, facebook.com/sangerpost268

**Chappell Hill [11-12] Scarecrow Festival,** (979) 836-6033, chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com

**Edom [11-12] Art Festival,** (903) 258-5192, edomarts.com

16

**Lufkin Beatles to Bourbon Street: The Fabulous Equinox Orchestra,** (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

**Mansfield Haunt the Block,** (817) 728-3390, visitmansfieldtexas.com

**Brenham [16-19] Texas Arts & Music Festival,** (979) 337-7580, texasartsandmusicfestival.com

17

**Dripping Springs [17-18] Lone Star Gourd Festival,** (512) 964-5540, texasgourdsociety.org

18

**Calvert Hooves & Heels Historic 5K**, (512) 639-7886, [historicalcalvert.org](http://historicalcalvert.org)

**China Spring Oktoberfest**, (254) 836-1825, [stphilipcs.com](http://stphilipcs.com)

**Llano Invitational Bullriding**, (303) 912-1646, [llanobullriding.com](http://llanobullriding.com)

**Waco Oakwood Cemetery's Walking Tales**, (254) 717-1763, [facebook.com/heartoftexasstorytellingguild](https://facebook.com/heartoftexasstorytellingguild)

21

**Hallettsville St. Peter Lutheran Church Women in Mission's Country Store**, (361) 798-2808, [stpeterhallettsville.org](http://stpeterhallettsville.org)

24

**Palestine [24-25] Hot Pepper Pop-Off and Festival**, (903) 729-6066, [palestinechamber.org](http://palestinechamber.org)

25

**Flower Mound Smoke & Whiskey Fest**, (469) 360-7757, [fmsmokefest.com](http://fmsmokefest.com)

**Waxahachie Crossroads of Texas Go Texan Country Festival**, (469) 309-4040, [waxahachiecvb.com](http://waxahachiecvb.com)

**Granbury [25-26] Harvest Moon Festival of the Arts**, (682) 936-4550, [granburysquare.com](http://granburysquare.com)

**Grapevine [25-26] Trick 'R Treat Trains**, (817) 410-3185, [grapevinetexasusa.com](http://grapevinetexasusa.com)

## NOVEMBER

6

**Round Top [6-9] Film Festival**, [roundtopfilmfest.org](http://roundtopfilmfest.org)

### TCP *Submit Your Event*

We pick events for the magazine directly from [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com). Submit your January event by November 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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# Heroes

They come from all walks of life and are our family, friends and neighbors. This month, please join us as we salute those who make a difference.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

**1 TAMRA BOLTON**  
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

"My dad, Stuart McAnally (top row, left), and some of his 31st Naval Construction Battalion buddies before they shipped out to the Pacific theater in September 1944. They had no idea they would end up on Iwo Jima."

**2 PEGGY MCCALL**  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

"Tom Wertman, our neighbor and Sisterdale Volunteer Fire Department volunteer, fights a fire near Comfort."

**3 VIRGINIA MURPHY**  
COSERV

"My daughter, Maureen, gave one of her kidneys to her brother, Sean, who desperately needed a kidney in 2023."

**4 LAURA BOEHM**  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Marines breaching into Australia.



## Upcoming Contests

- DUE OCT 10 From the Oil Fields**
- DUE NOV 10 Still Life**
- DUE DEC 10 Gates**



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

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Heroes photos from readers.



## On the Dots

A little paint can go a long, long way

BY JULIE ROYCE  
ILLUSTRATION BY RAUL ARIAS

**A SHORT DISTANCE** from where State Highway 62 meets U.S. Highway 96 sits a small white house painted with bright blue polka dots. Located in the small town of Buna, about 40 minutes north of Beaumont, this landmark was built by my grandfather, Virgil Newton Davis.

Some say this eccentric piece of history put Buna on the map.

I'm the daughter of Virgil's third son, Jud. I grew up on a family homestead in Buna until I was 14. Although I never had the opportunity to meet my grandfather, as a child I heard all kinds of stories about him.

Family described him as a hardworking man of few words with an odd sense of humor who loved his coffee black and bitter. I soaked up stories about his adventures throughout the Southwest,

busting broncos before settling in Kingfisher, Oklahoma, where he became a rancher and a father of six.

But he's a Texan through and through, and my Texas roots run deep because of Granddaddy. He was born in Newton County, in the Old Laurel community, in 1896. Although he left the state as a teenager, he returned just as the U.S. entered World War II, making his way to Buna with his family in tow.

In 1948, he built the Buna Polka-Dot House, a home that would become a part of my family's legacy. Virgil took inspiration from Native American homes that dotted the stark plains of Oklahoma. Those homes were colorfully embellished with petroglyphs and other designs. He decided to bring some of that color to the area just outside the Golden Triangle.

I often think about this modest structure, made of lath and plaster stucco and covered in blue dots applied with an old cloth attached to a two-by-four. Was he trying to create a bright spot among the dust and gray that was still clouding most of the South in the aftermath of the war and the Great Depression, or was this stoic man really just a jokester at heart? Maybe it was both.

Personally, I like to imagine him as a jokester. I mean, he was building a duplex with plans to paint horseshoes and teardrops on either side when he suddenly passed away in 1950. If that décor didn't make people laugh, what would?

Decades later the Buna Polka-Dot House is as meaningful to this small community as it is to my family. It's the backdrop of many community events, was the home of the chamber of commerce for a period and was the subject of many pieces of folk art.

My only wish is that Granddaddy had lived long enough to see how cherished it has become. ■



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