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WILDLIFE REHABBERS

THE JAZZ OF
BOOTS DOUGLAS

WHAT LOVE
LOOKS LIKE

Texas Co-op Power

FOR RUSK COUNTY EC MEMBERS

FEBRUARY 2026

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"This knife is beautiful!"

— J., La Crescent, MN



"The feel of this knife is unbelievable...this is an incredibly fine instrument."

— H., Arvada, CO



February 2026



10

06 From Posts to Pillars

Border towns sprang to life from Rio Grande fortifications that are still finding new uses.

By Eileen Mattei
Illustration by Bonnie Hofkin

10 Giving a Hoot

Texas' sick and injured critters depend on a corps of passionate volunteers.

By Martha Deeringer
Photos by Tiffany Hofeldt

04

Currents
The latest buzz

05

TCP Talk
Readers respond

16

Co-op News
Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

25

Footnotes in Texas History
Boots Across Texas
By Clay Coppedge

26

TCP Kitchen
Cheesecake
By Vianney Rodriguez

30

Hit the Road
Honky-Tonk Heaven
By Chet Garner

33

Focus on Texas
Photo Contest: From the Oil Fields

34

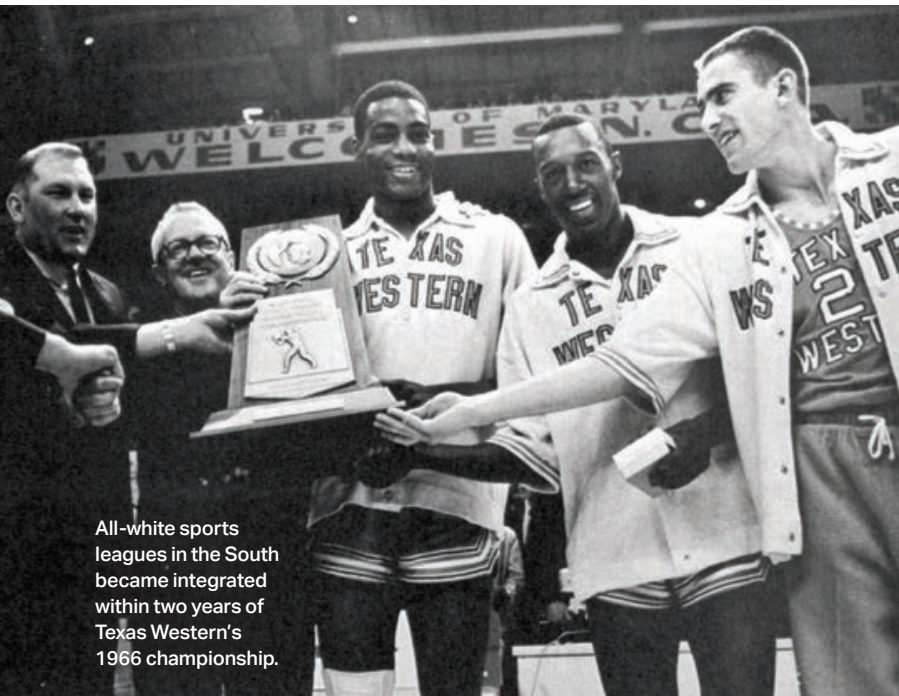
Observations
What Love Looks Like
By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

ON THE COVER

Lemon Cheesecake from the kitchen of Vianney Rodriguez, TCP's food editor.
Photo by Jason David Page

ABOVE

Bones, an opossum at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo, gets snuggles from Mariah Thompson.
Photo by Tiffany Hofeldt



All-white sports leagues in the South became integrated within two years of Texas Western's 1966 championship.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Significant Milestones

THE FIRST NEGRO HISTORY WEEK, the predecessor of Black History Month, took place 100 years ago this month, in February 1926. Its creator, Carter G. Woodson, is considered the Father of Black History.

March 19 will mark 60 years since Texas Western College (now the University of Texas at El Paso) pulled off a landmark victory over basketball powerhouse Kentucky in the NCAA national title game. The Miners were the first championship team to start five Black players.

The first African American to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps is considered to be Texan Alfred Masters of Palestine, who was sworn in June 1, 1942—after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order to desegregate the armed forces. But in 1776, John "Keto" Martin, an enslaved man in Delaware, was recruited into the Continental Marines to fight the British.



TCP *Contests and More*

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Don't Skimp on Shrimp

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Making a Splash

RECOMMENDED READING

"Caring about animals is contagious." So says an animal rescuer from the last time we wrote about these champions of the natural world. Check out *Wildlife Ambassadors* from May 2012.



ENTER ONLINE

\$3.2 Million

Total value of scholarships awarded to more than 1,400 students by Texas' electric cooperatives for the 2025–26 school year. That funding is mostly made possible by legislation allowing co-ops to use unclaimed capital credits for this purpose.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The perfect Valentine's gift is ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our December prompt: **Dear Santa, I would like ...**

Every child in this world to get at least one gift from you and a warm meal.

SHERRY VEGA
BLUEBONNET EC
BASTROP

For every family to be together, safe and full of love this Christmas.

RAIHAN KHONDKER
PEDERNALES EC
LEANDER

A cheeseburger, tater tots and a frosty mug of A&W root beer from the Hi-D-Ho Drive In in Lubbock (1964).

TOMMY NOVAK
SOUTH PLAINS EC
SHALLOWATER

To be free of cancer. Can he do that?

SUSAN HOOLE DAUGHERTY
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

DECEMBER 2025 Turn of Fortune

“This has got to be my all-time favorite story. Gloria and Hector López have shown how life should be.”

MARTHA GARCIA
NUECES EC
EDINBURG



ROBERT NEUBECKER

The Serendipity of TCP

The December issue blew my mind! After reading *The Best Food I've Ever Had at a Fair Is ...* [Currents], I told my wife about the Frito pie comment from Robin Perry. I described the Frito pie I used to buy for a quarter during school lunch as a kid in Levelland after walking to some department store. But I couldn't remember the name of the store. Genie Ballew's letter on the next page mentioning G.F. Wacker rang that bell!

Gary Alan Henson
CoServ
Lewisville

Prayers Continue

I wonder what terrible memories these kind people have to live with after seeing what they've seen [Giving Thanks, November 2025]. I still pray for them.

Anita Frye
Via Facebook



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Brick by Brick

I spent over nine years (2013–22) traveling the state (all 254 counties) photographing over 5,000 old churches and schools. There were many that I didn't have names for, and El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús was one of those.

I photographed it in 2015 and labeled it “Ruidosa—old adobe church.” Thanks to *The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road* [December 2025], I now have a name for it.

Someday I hope to write a book, and you just made my research a bit easier. Perhaps someday I can participate in an Adobe Day.

Cheryl Schwartz
Nueces EC
Port Aransas

Breakfast Patrol

I discovered this delicacy on New Year's Day 1986 as a rookie police officer [*Our Kind of Weird*, December 2025]. Each New Year's Day, our chaplain and his wife invited officers to their house and treated us to a come-and-go breakfast. This was one of the delicious entrées we were served.

Joe Lasater
United Cooperative Services
Glen Rose

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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NEW MEXICO

TEXAS

Chaparral

El Paso
Fort Bliss

Marfa

Lajitas

Rio Grande

Del Rio

MEXICO

Eagle Pass
Fort Duncan

Laredo
Fort McIntosh



Border towns sprang to life from Rio Grande fortifications that are still finding new uses

From Posts to Pillars

BY EILEEN MATTEI

ILLUSTRATION BY BONNIE HOFKIN

When Anthony Knopp first came to the campus of Texas Southmost College in 1976, his office was in an old barracks, and some faculty members lived in single-story, 100-year-old former military buildings, recalls the retired history professor.

While the old structures lacked modern amenities, Knopp made the most of teaching at a historic site. “When studying U.S. history, particularly relations with Mexico and 20th-century wars,” he says, “I was able to connect students to what was here at Fort Brown.”

Today, a former 48-bed hospital houses the college president’s offices on the campus in Brownsville, in the Rio Grande Valley. Fort Brown’s hospital annex (built in 1868), commissary (1904), guardhouse and morgue (1870) support various college departments.

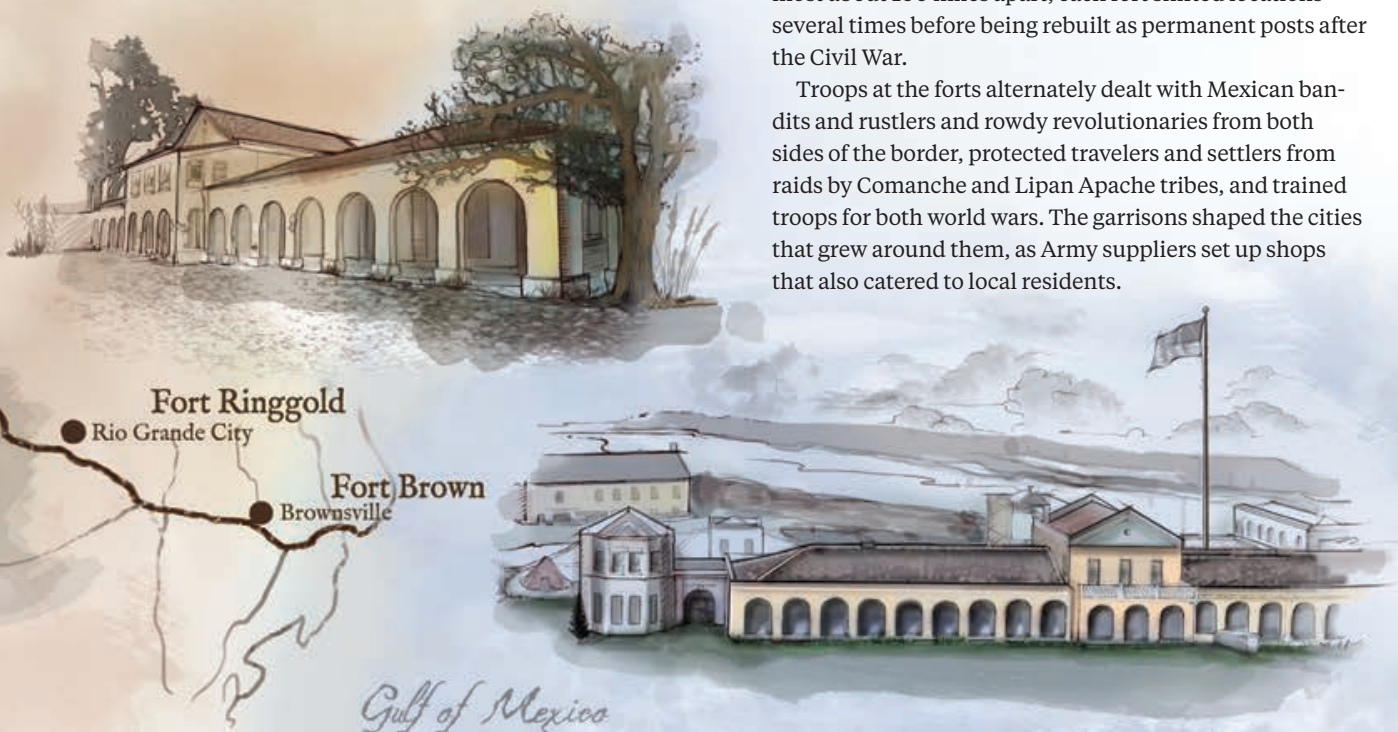
Fort Brown and four other U.S. Army forts, established along the Rio Grande in the years after Texas became a state in 1845, endured for decades as military installations.

Unlike Texas frontier forts of the 1800s, such as Fort Concho in San Angelo and Fort McKavett in Menard County, which were rapidly abandoned as the frontier moved west, the border forts in Brownsville, Rio Grande City, Laredo and Eagle Pass remained defensive posts, off and on, for nearly 100 years. Fort Bliss in El Paso is still in use.

Today—178 years after the Mexican-American War—repurposed buildings from these border forts contribute to the vitality and identity of those Texas towns. Retaining their 1800s ambiance, the former Army headquarters, barracks and hospitals serve as schools, colleges, museums and parks.

The border forts had much in common, each named for veterans of the Mexican-American War, fought immediately following Texas statehood. At Rio Grande crossings, most about 100 miles apart, each fort shifted locations several times before being rebuilt as permanent posts after the Civil War.

Troops at the forts alternately dealt with Mexican bandits and rustlers and rowdy revolutionaries from both sides of the border, protected travelers and settlers from raids by Comanche and Lipan Apache tribes, and trained troops for both world wars. The garrisons shaped the cities that grew around them, as Army suppliers set up shops that also catered to local residents.





ABOVE Troops perform drills in the late 1800s at Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City.

LEFT Much of the Fort Brown site serves as the campus of Texas Southmost College in Brownsville.

Fort Brown

Count riverboat pilot Mifflin Kenedy among the early merchants who cashed in on Army contracts. He ferried troops and equipment from Fort Brown, near the Gulf Coast, up the Rio Grande during the Mexican-American War.

He later started a steamboat company, married a wealthy widow and acquired hundreds of thousands of acres. He is the namesake of the Kenedy Ranch, the town of Kenedy and Kenedy County.

Fort Brown evolved from a star-shaped earthen fort to a commanding presence after the Civil War, when 70 buildings were erected of locally made border brick. With wide arches fronting shaded breezeways, Fort Brown's 1869 hospital (said to be the most beautiful hospital in the Army) was of crucial importance during epidemics of yellow fever and cholera as the only hospital in Cameron County until 1909.

Quartermasters negotiated contracts with local businesses for goods and services such as beans, flour, coffee pots and hay for horses. Although a brick wall separated the town from Fort Brown and its palm-lined parade grounds, traffic flowed between them.

"Interactions resulted in marriages," Knopp says. "Married soldiers either stayed in the area or returned."

Fort Brown provided several forms of entertainment for the town: parades, concerts and sporting activities. Sunday afternoon polo matches, a cavalry favorite, drew locals as did concerts at the post bandstand, held twice a week.

A tree-shaded "lovers' lane" curled between the fort and the river. Troops marched in local parades and Charro Days celebrations. Off-duty troops ate at local restaurants. The officers' club hosted dances while enlisted men attended dances on the patio of El Jardin Hotel. Soldiers' sisters and daughters met and married local men, too.

Deactivated in 1944 when the last U.S.-based mounted soldiers left, Fort Brown almost immediately started a new life as part of what is now Texas Southmost College. New campus construction echoes the border brick architecture of bygone days.

Fort Brown tours, arranged by the Brownsville Historical Association, link the past to its visible remnants.

Fort Ringgold

Upriver at Rio Grande City, Fort Ringgold followed Fort Brown's trajectory. Veterans of the Mexican-American War went into business, not always successfully.

Capt. Forbes Britton and partners failed at making their Rio Grande City riverboat landing a major stop for Kenedy's steamboats. But construction booms after the Civil War and continuing through World War I boosted the local economy.

At Fort Ringgold, barracks, a jail, an arched brick hospital and officers' quarters surrounded a parade ground, which was larger than a football field.

"The parade ground gives a real picture of what Fort Ringgold looked like 150 years ago, about 1870," says Aminta Reyna Alaniz, a Rio Grande City historian and tour guide. The post bugler played reveille and taps in front of a megaphone longer than 5 feet on the parade ground, signaling the troops as well as townsfolk.

Alaniz identifies 17 fort buildings—from the guardhouse and bakery to warehouses and six barracks—that are today used by the Rio Grande City Grulla Independent School District.

The school district purchased the fort's 325 acres and buildings in 1947 with plans for an education complex and park. Along F Troop and 12th Cavalry streets, tan- and white-painted brick buildings house registration, curriculum and instruction units.

Near a two-story enlisted cavalry barracks that once housed about 100 soldiers (and later was used as an elementary school), girls played softball on a recent Sunday afternoon. The expansive parade ground hosts marching band practice and school Christmas displays.

Until recently, Alaniz says, an electronic sound system broadcast a digital bugle call morning and night. But even those echoes have ended.

Fort McIntosh

Fort McIntosh was built at a long-established Rio Grande crossing in 1849, opposite a former Spanish presidio. Laredo grew along with the fort, which held as many as 400 soldiers



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
A colorized postcard from the early 1900s shows barracks at Fort McIntosh in Laredo. An 1850s engraving of Fort Duncan near Eagle Pass. Fort Bliss in El Paso, with the Franklin Mountains in the background.

on over 400 acres with a requisite hospital, jail, barracks and cemetery.

In 1946, the International Boundary and Water Commission and the city of Laredo divided up the former fort. The city created what is now the Fort McIntosh campus of Laredo College in 1947.

Inside the Fort McIntosh Historic District, streets are named for post commanders and soldiers. The brick hospital has become Laredo College's purchasing department. The former officers' quarters houses the campus student ministry, and the old commandant's house became a museum furnished with Victorian-era pieces.

The bakery is occupied by a customs brokers association. Other refurbished McIntosh campus buildings are used for classrooms. The cemetery is empty, the remains relocated.

Fort Duncan

In Eagle Pass, Fort Duncan, constructed across from what was then a tiny Mexican village, was home for infantry troops in 1851 and a mounted rifles unit in 1856.

Buffalo soldiers, all-Black units created after the Civil War, were assigned to Fort Duncan, considered a safe stopping point for travelers on the California road. Before and during World War I, some 16,000 troops trained at Fort Duncan.



COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

The town of Eagle Pass took over the fort property in 1938, creating a public park and loaning it back to the Army during World War II. Today the post headquarters is the Fort Duncan Museum, and seven other original buildings have been restored and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Fort Bliss

In 1848, more than 400 miles up the Rio Grande, a fifth border fort was established at El Paso. It too moved locations multiple times as El Paso flourished around it.

Hoping to remain prosperous, the residents in 1890 purchased and donated land for a permanent Army post, which remains active today.

Unlike the other forts in this list, Fort Bliss grew after World War II. It now covers 1.1 million acres of Texas and New Mexico and is among America's largest Army posts, home to about 20,000 troops.

Replicas of Fort Bliss' early adobe buildings were constructed for the fort's centennial in 1948 and house a museum, which is open to the public.

But at the other four border forts, troops and time marched on. Swords were beaten into street signs. Some of those streets are named for the soldiers who shaped those towns' histories. ■



COURTESY EL PASO PUBLIC LIBRARY



BY MARTHA DEERINGER
PHOTOS BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

GIVING A HOOT

Texas' sick and injured critters depend on a corps of passionate volunteers

One night in 2024, a couple traveling a Panhandle highway couldn't avoid hitting a coyote that darted in front of them. The animal was alive but wedged in the car's grille.

After the couple called 911, the sheriff, fire department and Texas Highway Patrol all responded. They could do little more than use their vehicles to shield the car until a wildlife rehabber arrived and carefully removed the injured animal.

It had sustained a minor pelvic fracture and a broken hind leg, which required surgery. But the coyote made a full recovery and has since been released—thanks to a village of kindhearted people, including the team at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo.

We've all had our encounters with wildlife.

Maybe a bird just flew into your patio door and fell to the ground, looking dazed. Or maybe you discovered a tiny spotted fawn nestled among the zinnias in your flower bed. Did your dog bring you a gift of a baby bunny?

If so, passionate and knowledgeable people scattered around Texas know just what to do.

Wildlife rehabilitators are folks with big, soft hearts. They're volunteers who do not receive a single dime for their work and spend countless hours administering special diets and medications, most of which they pay for themselves. Wildlife rehabilitators cannot legally charge for their services, relying instead on donations and fundraising. Their reward comes when a recovered animal returns to its place in the natural world.

A recent Texas Parks and Wildlife Department study found that 40% of fawns brought in for care were actually uninjured and an even larger percentage of baby birds are "kidnapped" by animal lovers who are only trying to help.

LEFT Captain Jack, an Eastern screech owl, is a permanent resident at Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Amarillo. He can't be released into the wild because of his limited vision.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Polly is a badger who refuses to return to the wild whenever staffers release her. Stephanie Brady, the director at Wild West, holds Magee, a skunk who serves as an ambassador for the facility. Stella, another ambassador, is a Virginia opossum raised by humans. A 3-month-old bobcat that was part of a litter of five abandoned by their mother and awaiting release.





LEFT A gray fox named Lincoln has bonded with Brady.

or orphaned animals find that these rescue efforts are therapeutic and beneficial to their own normal trauma responses,” DJ says. “Our entire family pitches in under my supervision to help with caring for the animals and with the rewarding moments when they spread their wings and soar again.”

Since she has children at home, DJ doesn’t rehabilitate animals at greater risk to contract rabies, such as bats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons and skunks. One of her main concerns for wild creatures is damage done by insect spray and rat poison, which

can end up killing or injuring beneficial animals, such as songbirds and owls.

Haley Caswell, general manager of Buck Wild Rescue in Ingram, has been overrun since the catastrophic flooding there in July 2025. The small clinic has outdoor enclosures, and the owner, Katie Buck, lives on the property so someone is always there.

“One of the greatest challenges we face in rehab is determining an animal’s true need for help, pertaining mostly to baby animals,” Caswell says.

Another challenge is people who hurt themselves trying to help an animal.

“The first thing someone should consider if a wild animal needs help is personal safety,” Caswell says. “Wildlife can carry zoonotic diseases and may pose a risk of injury through bites, kicks and scratches. Some general signs to look for are parasites, animals covered in bugs and symptoms of dehydration—dull/dry fur, wrinkled skin and emaciation. If a baby animal has been picked up by a dog or cat, we always recommend bringing it [baby animal] in for antibiotics.”

Buck Wild is one of few rescues licensed to take in and rehabilitate most types of wildlife. They serve several counties spanning hundreds of miles. Each year they take in hundreds of orphaned, sick and injured critters, providing them with a safe environment and around-the-clock care. They also care for surrendered pets, which are kept separate from wildlife.

All donations go directly to animal care; they have no paid employees. Buck Wild requires three shifts of volunteers

DJ (last name withheld to protect her privacy since she works out of her home) has been licensed since 1999 and owns a rehabilitation facility in North Texas. Her whole family helps out with critter care.

“I have paid my kids in popcorn and Popsicles to go out and capture grasshoppers, june bugs or moths for the insect-eating animals in our care,” DJ says with a laugh.

She cautions fellow Texans.

“If someone finds wildlife on the ground,” she says, “I tell them to observe it from a distance first. If there is obvious blood or the animal is weak, it probably needs help, but if it is sitting normally and is bright-eyed, it’s best to leave it alone.”

Some baby birds leave the nest as fledglings and hop around on the ground, where their parents continue to feed them for several days before they take flight. Fawns are stashed somewhere safe by their mothers, who will return at dusk to feed them.

In Texas, as in almost any other state, wildlife rehabilitators are required to have state or federal permits issued by the TPWD and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Applicants in Texas must complete training and submit a letter of recommendation from a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or veterinarian. The TPWD website lists 160 licensed rehabbers across the state.

DJ lives with dozens of animals she has taken in plus her children, several of them adopted. Some of these children have been through their own traumas.

“Kids who have survived trauma and then help with hurt



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

If you find a wild animal that you suspect is sick or injured, don't approach it unless you know it's safe. Most mammals in Texas can carry rabies.

Observe from a distance: Does it appear to be injured or bleeding? If not, it's probably best to leave it be. Either way, don't give it food or water. Leave that to the pros.

If the critter does appear to need help, find a list of licensed wildlife rehabbers in your county by visiting tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/rehab/list. They may be able to pick up the animal without you having to do so yourself.

each day to meet the needs of their animals. They strive for minimal human contact with wildlife to ensure successful integration back into nature.

"Every species has different milestones through our rehab program," Caswell says, "from the hand-feeding incubator stage, to an intermediate weaning enclosure, to a fully outdoor enclosure where we ensure it has met the species-specific requirements of self-sufficiency."

Wild West in Amarillo was formed after founder Stephanie Brady rehabilitated over 200 animals in five months. Her 17 years of experience as a veterinary technician led her to realize that a home-based operation would not be big enough to handle the demand.

In 2016, a donated double-wide trailer on 5 acres made it possible for her to open the first wildlife rehabilitation center in the area. The venture has grown like broomweeds in a wet Texas spring. In 2024, with the help of 51 volunteers, Wild West cared for 3,128 wild animals—porcupines, coyotes, bobcats, a marmoset, and countless other mammals and birds.

"All rehabilitators are in constant need of medications, species-specific formulas, feeding syringes and nipples, blankets, towels, and further training," Brady says.

Caring for wildlife is an endless challenge, and unlike pets, they don't necessarily show appreciation for your help or love you back. It's a one-sided labor of love with nature's wild creatures.

"Releasing wildlife is altruistic," DJ says. "Your patients bite, scratch, vomit and poop on you in thanks, but the soar, the hop, the scramble and climb away is life-giving to the world we want to gift to our children. After all, this is God's world." ■



TOP Jessica Hammonds cuddles Polly, who came to the center from Oklahoma.

ABOVE A litter of bobcats discovered in a shed that was being torn down.

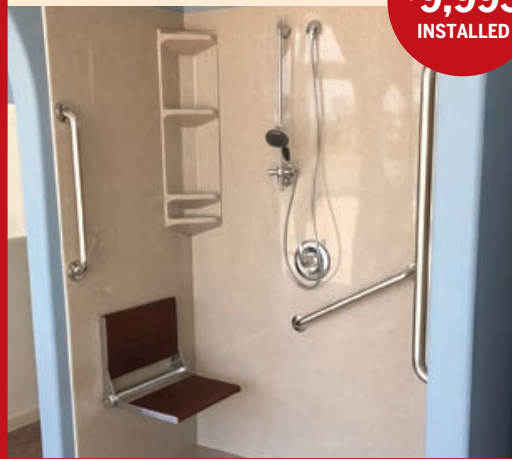


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WOMEN'S DIAMOND PENDANT



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A HEART-SHAPED
SETTING**

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MESSAGE FROM
CEO/
GENERAL
MANAGER
RHETT REID

Working Together To Lower Demand

WHEN TEMPERATURES drop, electricity use naturally rises. The cold drives us indoors, where we rely more heavily on heating systems, more lighting and household appliances. And heaters run longer and more frequently to maintain comfortable indoor temperatures.

Combine all of that with the fact that most people use electricity at the same times—typically in the mornings and early evenings—and the result is significant pressure on our electric grid.

Rusk County Electric Cooperative works closely with our generation and transmission provider to plan for these seasonal weather patterns and changes and ensure you have reliable power every day of the year. This partnership involves detailed resource and infrastructure planning to make sure electricity is available whenever you need it.

However, it's important to remember that our local system is part of a much larger regional and national grid.

During winter, when homes and businesses use more electricity simultaneously, overall demand

arises, Rusk County EC will provide timely updates and information to members.

To prepare for these scenarios and minimize risks, Rusk County EC and our generation partner take measures to strengthen reliability year-round. These include routine system maintenance, investments in grid modernization and comprehensive disaster response planning.

These proactive steps are designed to ensure our portion of the grid remains resilient even under extreme conditions. Still, maintaining a reliable electric system requires a collective effort, and every Texan plays an important role in lowering demand when the grid is under stress.

You can help by taking the following simple actions during periods of high electricity use, especially on the coldest days of winter.

Lower your thermostat slightly. Even reducing the temperature by a few degrees can help.

Delay using large appliances during peak hours, which are typically 5–9 a.m. and 4–9 p.m. in the winter. Run dishwashers, washing machines and

dryers during off-peak hours—typically midday or late evening.

Adjust your water heater. Set it to 120 degrees and space out showers to save energy and hot water.

Unplug unnecessary devices. Power used for lighting and electronics adds up and accounts for a significant portion of home energy use. Disconnect unused items and turn off lights in empty rooms to reduce waste.

Understanding how cold weather impacts electricity demand is key to maintaining system reliability. By practicing simple energy conservation habits at home, you not only save money on your monthly bill but also help strengthen the resilience of the grid that powers our community.

Together, through small actions and shared awareness, we can ensure that our homes remain warm, our lights stay on and our local grid continues to serve us reliably throughout the season. ■



KONSTANTIN YUGANOV | ISTOCK.COM

can approach—or occasionally exceed—available supply.

This is especially true during severe weather events such as ice storms, sudden temperature drops or equipment malfunctions that reduce generation capacity. In rare cases when demand threatens to outpace supply, the regional grid operator may call for temporary, controlled outages to prevent broader system failures. If such a situation



BE COOL WITH SPACE HEATERS

Space heaters are meant to provide supplemental heat, not replace your home's heating system. If used incorrectly, space heaters can pose fire and burn risks.

Heed these rules for portable heater use:

Read and follow the manufacturer's warnings and the operation and care guidelines before using a space heater.

Space heaters need space. Keep them at least 3 feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, drapes and furniture.

Never use space heaters around unsupervised children or pets. Always turn the heater off and unplug it when leaving the room or going to sleep.

Plug space heaters directly into an outlet. Do not use an extension cord.

Rusk County EC encourages you to always practice safety.

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Rusk County Electric Cooperative

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CONTACT US

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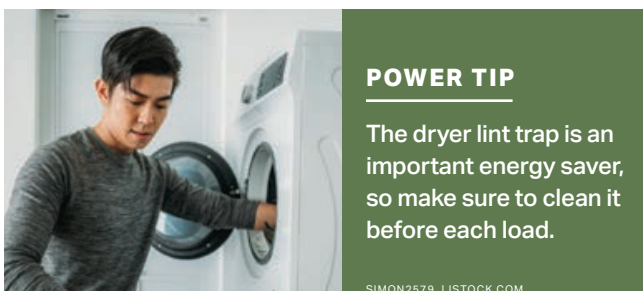
WE ARE DELIGHTED to announce that our recent food drive exceeded all expectations. Through the remarkable generosity of Rusk County Electric Cooperative employees, we collected and donated an impressive amount of food to the Henderson Interchurch Ministry. These contributions will directly support families in our community, offering essential nourishment and hope during times of need.

This initiative is a testament to our commitment to Cooperative Principle No. 7, Concern for Community. We believe that our role goes beyond serving our members—it extends to uplifting and caring for our entire community. The outpouring of support and participation reinforces our shared values and dedication to making a positive impact.

We are deeply moved by the heartfelt feedback we received from the community.

One message in particular resonated with us: “Thank all of you and everyone that participated! We’re truly grateful that others genuinely serve their community so selflessly and care about their needs and nourishment! We’re so grateful!”

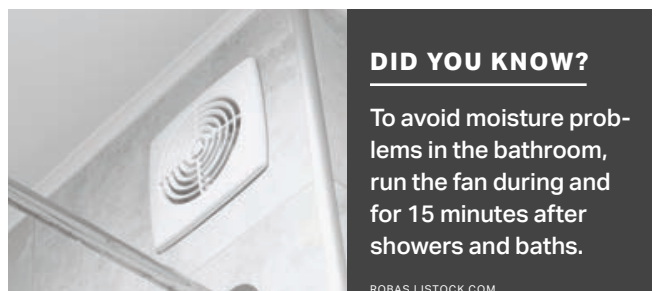
Such words inspire us to continue our efforts and reaffirm the importance of coming together for the greater good. Together, we’re making a lasting difference in the lives of those around us. ■



POWER TIP

The dryer lint trap is an important energy saver, so make sure to clean it before each load.

SIMON2579 | ISTOCK.COM



DID YOU KNOW?

To avoid moisture problems in the bathroom, run the fan during and for 15 minutes after showers and baths.

ROBAS | ISTOCK.COM



SAVE THE DATE

Rusk County EC 89th Annual Meeting

Thursday, April 30
Rusk County Expo Center

OKSANA SAZHNEVA | ISTOCK.COM

Why You Should Make Time for Your Annual Meeting

DID YOU KNOW every cooperative is required to conduct an annual meeting of its membership? The purpose is to hold the election for the board of directors, share important financial information, occasionally vote on other matters such as bylaws changes and, of course, give away some great door prizes.

Rusk County Electric Cooperative’s annual meeting is a community gathering where neighbors can meet new neighbors—or catch up with old acquaintances. As

our lives get busier, we must remember the value of face-to-face human connections.

Very few organizations are as uniquely positioned as cooperatives to connect a community.

The simple act of smiling, saying hello and shaking someone’s hand goes a long way, and as our country and commu-

nity face many challenges, including rising prices, overcoming these challenges is easier when we come together.

Rusk County EC’s annual meeting is designed to take care of the important business of your co-op and the equally important business of building a real sense of community. All cooperatives serve an economic and social purpose. While safe, reliable and affordable electric power is crucial to our mission, improving the quality of life for all members is at the core of what we do every day.

If you haven’t attended the annual meeting in the past or if it has been a few years, we urge you to take the time to be with your fellow co-op members.

We get out of life what we put into it. Rusk County EC is connected to you by more than just power lines. We are your neighbors, and we look forward to seeing you at your annual meeting.

We hope to see you April 30 at the Rusk County Expo Center. ■

Rusk County EC Bylaws Excerpt

SECTION 11. Nomination of Directors. It shall be the duty of the Board of Directors to appoint a nominating committee at the regular meeting of the Board of Directors in January. The nominating committee shall consist of not more than eleven members, at least one of whom shall be selected from each of the districts of the project so as to ensure equitable representation. No member of the Board of Directors may serve on such committee.

The committee shall prepare and post at the principal office of the Cooperative by the first Thursday of the month preceding the Annual Meeting a list of nominations for Directors.

Any fifty (50) or more members acting together, who are bona fide residents of the district from which the director is to be elected, may make other nominations by petition by the second Thursday of the month preceding the Annual Meeting and the Secretary shall cause to be posted such nominations at the same place where the list of nominations made by the committee is posted.

The Secretary shall cause to be mailed with the notice of the meeting or separately, but at least ten days before the date of the meeting, a statement of the number of Directors and nominees to be arranged by districts and shall specify separately the nominations made by the committee on nominations and also the nominations made by petition, if any.

The members may, at any meeting at which a Director or Directors shall be removed as herein provided, elect a successor or successors thereto without compliance with the foregoing provisions with respect to nominations, except that the new Director must reside in the same district as the Director in respect of whom the vacancy occurs.

Notwithstanding anything contained in this section, failure to comply with any of the provisions of this section shall not affect in any manner whatsoever the validity of any election of Directors. ■



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Kill a What?

EVER PRETEND TO know what an electrician is talking about when he or she tells you what needs to be fixed? If so, or if you just want to expand your electrical vocabulary, here's a glossary of common electrical terms.

Amperes, or amps, measure the rate of flow of electricity. It's comparable to the flow of water through a hose. Fuses and circuit breakers are rated in amps to indicate the amount of electricity they can carry safely.

Circuit breakers and fuses are safety devices that automatically cut the flow of electricity when a circuit is overloaded.

In a fuse, an element melts when overloaded, stopping the flow. In a circuit breaker, a switch is tripped when it's overloaded. Whereas a fuse must be replaced, a circuit breaker can simply be reset after the cause of the overload has been corrected.

Circuit breakers and fuses are preset to appropriate amperage ratings, and it's important for the safety of your home or business that the amperage ratings in the main service panel are followed.

The electrical service entrance normally consists of wires enclosed in conduit, a proper ground, your electric meter base and the main service panel—essentially the entire apparatus necessary to bring safe electricity into your home.

The main service panel (referred to as the "fuse box" in many homes) is a metal box that houses the circuit breakers or fuses. The main service panel serves as the point from which

electricity is distributed to branch circuits throughout your home for appliances, lights and outlets.

An overload is when a circuit has carried more electricity than it can handle, so the wires get hot and cause the circuit or breaker to trip.

Transformers are electrical devices that can increase or decrease the voltage of electricity. Some of them are underground in big green boxes, and some are affixed to power poles.

Volts measure electric force. They're the force behind the current, or amps, flowing through a wire. Just as the amp can be compared to the amount of water flowing through a hose, the volt can be compared to the amount of pressure pushing that water.

A watt is a unit of electrical power equal to 1 amp under the pressure of 1 volt.

A watt-hour is the measurement of electrical energy used, measured as 1 watt of electricity used for one hour.

A kilowatt-hour is 1,000 watt-hours, abbreviated kWh. On electric bills, this indicates the amount of electric energy used. A 100-watt lamp operated for 10 hours (100 watts x 10 hours) uses 1,000 watt-hours or 1 kWh.

Having a grasp of your home's electrical system isn't just about sounding smart; it's a key part of ensuring safety and managing your energy use efficiently. ■

Celebrate the Super Bowl Safely

THE BIG GAME is an event that brings together friends and family across the nation. Having a safety game plan in place will ensure that your Super Bowl party is a hit with guests.

No matter who you're rooting for, or if you're just in it for the commercials, make sure electrical safety is in your lineup this Super Bowl Sunday—and always.

Offensive Line

You might need extension cords to power slow cookers or electronics. Never attempt to extend the length of an extension cord by connecting it with another extension cord, and make sure cords are not pinched. Do not place cords in high-traffic areas or under carpets, rugs or furniture, and don't nail or staple them to anything. Don't overload circuits; avoid plugging too many devices into an outlet. Use a surge protector and keep all liquids away from electrical items.

Don't Fumble Safety

Save your risky bets for the game. Smoke alarms should be on every floor of your home and outside all sleeping areas. Keep a fire extinguisher nearby in case of emergencies. Ensure that any appliances, space heaters and extension cords have a safety label from a recognized testing laboratory.

Kicking It in the Kitchen

In your efforts to create the perfect Super Bowl spread, don't forget that safety is crucial. Even if it means missing a play or two, stay in the kitchen when food is cooking on the stovetop, and turn off burners if you have to leave the room. Make sure all countertop appliances are not near the sink and keep cords, pot holders and towels away from hot surfaces.

Tackle Securing the TV

An improperly anchored TV can pose a serious risk, especially with pets or children running around. To make sure it doesn't tip over, use a wall mount or secure straps to secure your TV to the wall or a stable piece of furniture. Remember to tuck away cables and cords so they don't create a tripping hazard. ■



ARSENIVAS | ISTOCK.COM



IVANMATEEV | ISTOCK.COM

Cheesecake With Dark Chocolate

CRUST

- 1 cup crushed nuts (macadamias or walnuts work best)**
- 1 cup flour**
- ¼ cup brown sugar**
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened**

FILLING

- 1 cup heavy cream**
- 1 package cream cheese (8 ounces), softened**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla**
- 2–3 squares dark baking chocolate, to taste**

1. CRUST Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a bowl, mix crushed nuts, flour, brown sugar and butter. Press evenly into a 9-by-9-inch baking dish. Bake 30 minutes.

2. FILLING With an electric mixer, whip heavy cream until it thickens. In a separate bowl, mix cream cheese, sugar and vanilla. Fold whipped cream into cream cheese mixture.

3. Grate dark chocolate squares, reserving some to top with, and fold into cream cheese mixture.

4. Spoon mixture over crust, smooth with back of spoon, and top with reserved grated chocolate. Refrigerate at least 1 hour before serving.

SERVES 16–18

TCP Find this and more delicious recipes online at TexasCoopPower.com.

Cream of the Crop

American cream draft horses were first bred in the U.S., but now they're nearly extinct

BY MARGARET BURANEN • PHOTO BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

ANNE MURRAY'S MOTHER thought she'd eventually grow out of it.

"Nobody in our family had horses, and my mom thought my interest in them was a passing phase," Murray says.

She kept asking for a horse anyway and squirreled away all of her Christmas and birthday gift money, finally buying her first horse, a paint, when she was 15. "When I had almost enough money, the Christmas before I bought him, all I asked for was horse items."

Decades later, Murray can say for sure that it wasn't a phase. Horses have become central to her life, and she's found purpose in preserving one of the rarest breeds: the American cream draft horse—the only breed of draft horse that originated in the U.S.

The Livestock Conservancy tracks rare breeds of horses, cattle, chickens, pigs and other kinds of livestock. The organization lists the American cream draft horse as critically endangered, a label reserved for livestock breeds with fewer than 200 annual registrations in the U.S. and an estimated global population of fewer than 500.

Murray, who lives in Boyd, north of Fort Worth, is a member of the American Cream Draft Horse Association board. She says that the association's registry lists fewer than 400 horses. For comparison, the American Quarter Horse Association's 2024 annual report counts 2.7 million of the most popular equine breed in the U.S. among the more than 7 million total horses.

As their name implies, American cream draft horses are cream colored, but they actually come in two shades. Darker American creams have brown eyes, and lighter-colored horses have amber eyes and pink skin.

Draft horses are large, heavy breeds originally developed for driving and pulling, farm work, and industry. American creams are typically a bit smaller than other draft horse breeds.

"They're a handy size to hitch up for farm work," Murray says.

Like Clydesdales, Belgians and other draft breeds, American creams are versatile and gentle horses. They're used for farming, logging, pulling carriages or funeral caissons, the equine sport of driving, and riding.

Their sturdy build makes them ideal for mounted police units. One of the Murrays' horses works with the Austin Police Department, where he'll serve for 10–20 years. Then he will return to the Murrays or go home with his handler.

The Murrays own Workhorse Ranch in Boyd, where they breed and raise American creams. They have more than a dozen, and two or three are born each spring.

Members of Wise Electric Cooperative, the Murrays have always had horses. One day when Anne saw an ad for an American cream for sale, she decided to buy it before someone else did.

That mare, Dolly, was 5 years old when Anne bought her in 2009. Dolly, whom Murray affectionately refers to as Old Granny, in reference to the breed's foundation horse, is still with the Murrays and doing well.

The original Old Granny was owned by an Iowa farmer in the early 1900s. Other farmers who admired her beautiful cream coat bred their stallions to her, hoping the foals would look like her. Some of the resulting foals did.

Breeding records weren't carefully kept in those days, and national or international registries didn't yet exist for most breeds. Remarkably, a veterinarian who had seen some of the horses declared that he thought they were a separate, distinct draft breed.

However, just as the American cream breed was being established, in 1944, the demand for all draft horses plummeted as more and more farmers began using tractors and other machinery instead of horses. The breed fell close to extinction.

But a handful of American cream breeders kept that from happening. As more people saw the horses at shows and fairs, the demand for them grew.

Along with raising American creams, the Murrays have been driving horses since 1986, when they participated in the Texas sesquicentennial wagon train.

These days, the Murrays provide horse-drawn carriages and wagons for weddings, parties, corporate events, funerals and parades in North Texas.

Being around horses "is more fun for me than being anywhere else," Anne says. "They're calming. With them I can escape from the hassles of real life." ■



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Boots Across Texas

The best jazz musician, arranger and bandleader you've never heard of

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY KIRSTEN ULVE

MOST DISCUSSIONS OF the Temple jazz scene in the early 20th century—if indeed there are such discussions or there was a jazz scene to discuss—begin and end with Scott Joplin.

Joplin, a Texan and the acknowledged king of ragtime music, was in Temple for at least a short while in 1896 as a member of the Texas Medley Quartet and published three of his very early compositions while in the Central Texas city.

But the discussion ought to include Clifford “Boots” Douglas, who was born in Temple 12 years later. Douglas took up the drums when he was 15 and would go on to become the best jazz musician and arranger you’ve never heard of.

In 1926 he took his talents to San Antonio, where his first gig was with Millard

McNeal’s Southern Melody Boys. He formed his own band, Boots and His Buddies, soon after.

“Although born the same year as fellow San Antonio bandleader Don Albert, we know far, far less about Boots Douglas and his band than we do Albert. That’s because Boots made the mistake of being born in Temple, Texas, instead of New Orleans,” wrote a blogger for Wired for Sound. “The fact that Boots’ early Bluebird sessions were sometimes as good or better than Albert’s Vocalion session from the same time frame was of no apparent concern to jazz historians.”

The band was usually billed as Boots and His 13 Buddies, though sometimes circumstances reduced him to 11 Buddies. The name very likely came from

a popular comic strip of the day called *Boots and Her Buddies*.

Boots’ band was what’s known as a territory band—dance bands, usually consisting of a dozen or so musicians, that crisscrossed specific regions of the U.S. from the 1920s through the 1960s, performing popular songs of the day. They played one-nighters six or seven nights a week, at venues like meeting and dance halls and hotel ballrooms.

Jazz historians have called these bands the cover bands of their day and credit them with bringing popular music to places that national booking agents ignored.

In this era, San Antonio was a regular stop for the major record labels’ field trips to record regional artists and genres. Boots and His Buddies recorded 42 sides for the RCA Victor/Bluebird Records label in San Antonio between 1935 and 1938.

Texas writer and jazz scholar Dave Oliphant, who is responsible for much of what little we know about Douglas, notes that Boots and His Buddies was unlike other jazz groups or individual artists from Texas because they “never left the state for fame in Kansas City, New York, Chicago or Los Angeles.”

But the band did occasionally play outside the state. A Paris, Texas, newspaper from July 1937 noted, “The Douglas band comes to Paris from engagements at the Kit Kat Klub, St. Louis; the Grand Terrace Café, Chicago; and from recent fill-in spots in Dallas’s Chez Maurice.”

Boots and His Buddies continued to tour, almost exclusively in Texas, through the 1940s before Douglas called it quits and moved to Los Angeles in 1950.

He continued to play part time in California, until he didn’t. The Handbook of Texas notes that Social Security death records list a Clifford Douglas, who was born September 7, 1906, in Texas and died October 27, 2000, in Los Angeles. ■

Cheesecake

Massively delicious delights that are well worth the effort

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

This is everything I want in a cheesecake. I want a buttery crust, a thick filling and a pop of tartness from citrus. I topped mine with freshly whipped cream, but lemon curd, fresh berries, a jam or candied lemon would all be delicious too. Please note: Cheesecakes take a lot of time. Allow yourself a day and a half from start to serving.

Lemon Cheesecake

CRUST

- 2 cups shortbread cookie crumbs**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted**

FILLING

- 4 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened**
- 1 cup sugar**
- ½ cup heavy cream**
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest**
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice**
- 2 tablespoons flour**
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
- 1 teaspoon lemon extract**
- 8–10 drops yellow food color**
- 5 eggs, room temperature**
- 1 cup whipped cream, for topping**
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced, seeds removed, for garnish**

- 1. CRUST** Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat a 10-inch springform pan with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a medium bowl, combine cookie crumbs, sugar and butter. Press into bottom of prepared pan. Bake 10 minutes, then allow to cool.
- 3. FILLING** In a bowl, beat cream cheese and sugar on medium speed until smooth. Reduce speed to low and beat in heavy cream, lemon zest and juice, flour, and vanilla and lemon extracts. Add food color, starting with 8 drops, but adding up to 2 more to achieve desired color. Add eggs and beat on low until just combined.
- 4.** Place springform pan on a baking sheet. Carefully pour filling over crust. Bake 60–70 minutes or until center is almost set.
- 5.** Remove from oven and allow to cool completely. Refrigerate overnight.
- 6.** Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
- 7.** Top with whipped cream and lemon slices.

SERVES 12

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mexican Chocolate Cheesecake.





Cinnamon Roll Cheesecake

MARIJA DIMITROVSKA
NUECES EC

This one is for my cinnamon roll lovers. All the flavors of the delicious pastry baked into a cheesecake is simply genius. I'll be whipping this one up regularly.

CRUST

1½ cups graham cracker crumbs
¼ cup brown sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, melted

CINNAMON SWIRL

1 cup brown sugar
⅓ cup flour
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
⅓ cup (½ stick) butter, melted

FILLING

4 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1 cup brown sugar
¼ cup sugar
½ cup sour cream
4 eggs, room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon salt
Cream cheese frosting (optional)

1. CRUST Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a medium bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, brown sugar and cinnamon. Stir to combine. Stir in melted butter. Press mixture into bottom of a 9-inch springform pan.

\$500 WINNER

Lime Cheesecake With Caramelized Mangoes

ROSE M. DAILEY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC



Dailey developed this recipe when she had a surplus of mangoes, and it is a delight. I had never caramelized mangoes before—what a pop of flavor!



CRUST

1¼ cups graham cracker crumbs
2 tablespoons sugar
4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, melted

FILLING

3 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
1 cup sour cream
1 can sweetened condensed milk (14 ounces)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 eggs
2 tablespoons lime zest
¼ cup lime juice

CARAMELIZED MANGOES

⅓ cup sugar
¼ cup water
1 tablespoon (½ stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
5 cups chopped mango

- 1. CRUST** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a medium bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs, sugar and melted butter. Press crumb mixture evenly over bottom and up the side of prepared pan. Bake 5–6 minutes, then allow to cool.
- 3. FILLING** Reduce oven to 325 degrees. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese and sour cream on medium speed until fluffy. Gradually add sweetened condensed milk, beating until smooth. Add vanilla and eggs, and beat on low until combined, scraping down sides of bowl. Add lime zest and juice, and beat on low until combined. Pour into prepared pan.
- 4.** Bake 1 hour. Remove from oven and place pan on a cooling rack for an additional hour. Refrigerate at least 6 hours, until firm.
- 5.** Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
- 6. CARAMELIZED MANGOES** Combine sugar and water in a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Cook until sugar dissolves. Continue cooking 3 minutes or until golden; do not stir. Add butter to pan and stir to combine.
- 7.** Reduce heat to medium. Add mango to pan, gently stirring to coat. Cook 10 minutes or until mango is lightly browned, stirring frequently. Allow to cool and serve cheesecake topped with mangoes.

SERVES 12

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

DON'T SKIMP ON SHRIMP DUE FEB 10

No state produces more shrimp than Texas—2 million pounds a year. How do you like yours? Our favorite shrimp recipe will win \$500 and appear in the July issue.

UPCOMING: AFTER-SCHOOL SNACKS DUE MAR 10



ENTER ONLINE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPES CONTINUED

2. Bake 10 minutes. Allow to cool. Once cool enough to handle, wrap the bottom of the pan with a few layers of foil.
3. **CINNAMON SWIRL** In another bowl, stir together brown sugar, flour and cinnamon. Stir in melted butter. The mixture will be thick and gooey. Set aside.
4. **FILLING** Beat cream cheese on medium speed 2–3 minutes, until smooth. Add brown sugar and sugar, and continue beating an additional 2 minutes, scraping down sides as needed. Add sour cream and beat until incorporated.
5. Add eggs one at a time and beat on low until combined, scraping down sides of bowl. Gently stir in vanilla and salt.
6. Pour $\frac{1}{3}$ of filling over cooled crust. Gently spread $\frac{1}{3}$ of prepared cinnamon swirl over filling. Repeat this process until you have poured all the filling and top off with the last of the swirl.

7. Place springform pan in a large roasting pan. Add hot water to roasting pan halfway up side of springform pan to form a water bath. Carefully place in oven and bake 60–70 minutes. At this point, the cheesecake will be slightly jiggly to the touch, but the edges will be set. Turn off oven and allow cheesecake to cool in the oven 30 minutes. Then remove roasting pan from oven.
8. Allow to cool completely before removing cheesecake from water bath. Refrigerate at least 4 hours or overnight. When ready to serve, run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
9. Top with cream cheese frosting, if desired.

SERVES 12

Chocolate Amaretto Cheesecake With Raspberries

GLENDA PEIRSOL
PEDERNALES EC

Chocolate + Amaretto + Raspberries? Sign me up! This cheesecake can be enjoyed all year. It's perfect for date night, Valentine's Day, entertaining or a girls' night in.

CHEESECAKE

- 1½ cups crushed chocolate cookies or chocolate graham crackers
- 3 packages cream cheese (8 ounces each), softened
- 1½ cups sugar
- 1 cup cottage cheese
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup plus 3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 2 tablespoons flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup amaretto, or 2 teaspoons almond extract
- 2 tablespoons vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- 4 eggs, room temperature
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup semisweet chocolate chips

FROSTING

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
- $\frac{3}{8}$ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3 cups powdered sugar
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



$\frac{1}{2}$ cup raspberry jam
1 pint raspberries

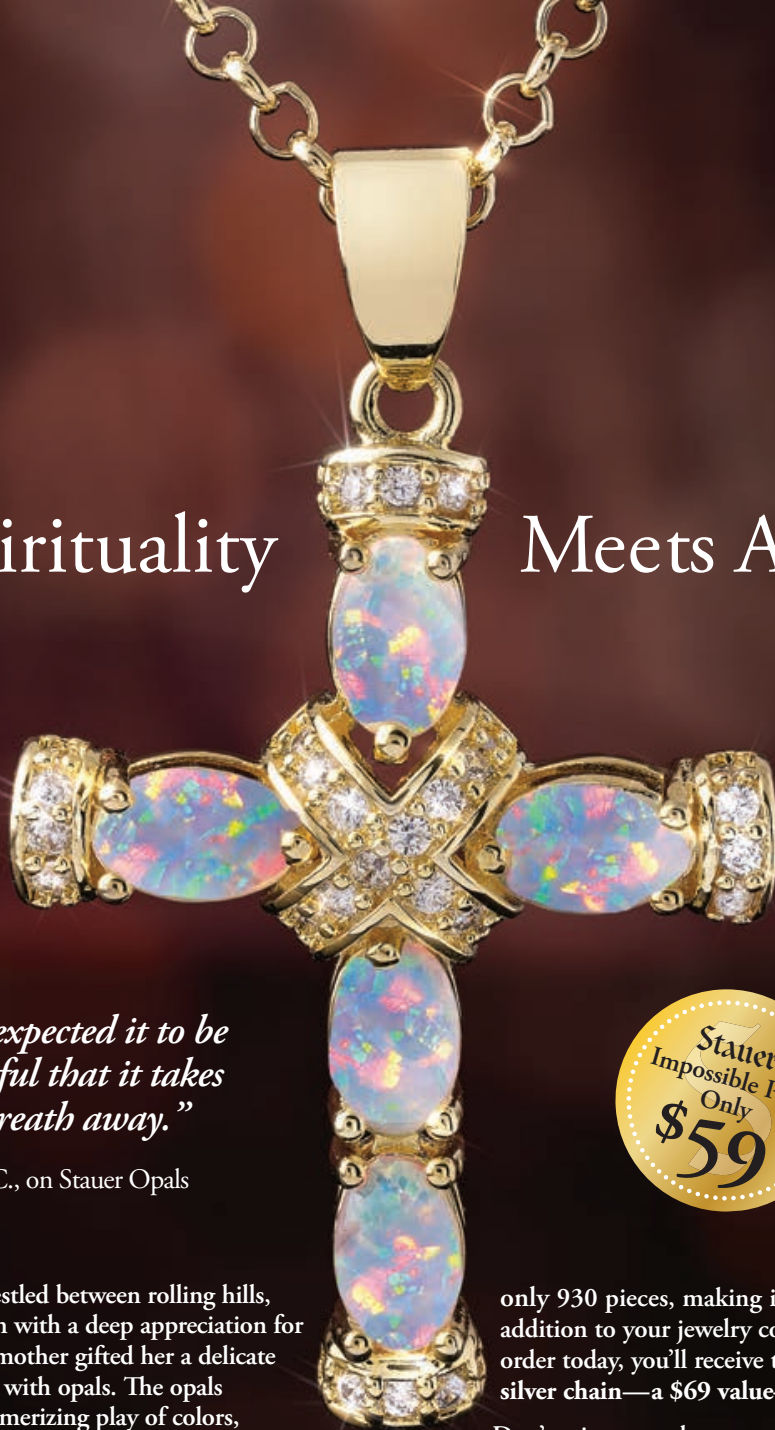
1. **CHEESECAKE** Preheat oven to 315 degrees. Coat bottom and sides of a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. Sprinkle crushed cookie crumbs on bottom of pan.
2. Beat cream cheese on medium speed until smooth. Add sugar, cottage cheese, cocoa powder, flour, amaretto or almond extract, vanilla, and salt. Beat on low until smooth. Add eggs and beat on low until combined. Stir in chocolate chips.
3. Slowly pour mixture over crumbs in prepared pan. Bake on middle rack 75 minutes. Remove from oven, allow to cool on a rack and refrigerate overnight.
4. **FROSTING** In a large bowl, stir together melted butter and cocoa powder until evenly mixed. Add in powdered sugar and milk. Beat on low until smooth and easily spread. Stir in vanilla.
5. Run a knife around edge of cheesecake to separate from springform pan, then remove side wall. Gently run a knife between bottom crust and base of pan to separate cheesecake. Place on a cake stand or serving platter.
6. Spread raspberry jam on top, leaving about a 1-inch border around the edge. Pipe frosting to make a border around the top and bottom of cheesecake. Top with raspberries.

SERVES 12

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY
190TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION!
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AND
ECHOES OF INDEPENDENCE: A LANTERN TOUR
FEBRUARY 27TH
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Spirituality Meets Artistry



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

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals



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

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

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Honky-Tonk Heaven

The humble dance hall in Helotes where legends broke in their boots

BY CHET GARNER

IF TEXAS DANCE HALLS had a Mount Rushmore, this iconic honky-tonk would be chiseled in. From the outside, it looks like the kind of roadside stop where you'd grab a cold Coke and a bag of pork rinds. But step inside, and you'll quickly realize you've entered a shrine to Texas country music that's been making boots scoot since 1942.

John T. Floore's Country Store—known to most simply as “Floore’s”—sits near the north end of the Helotes historic district just outside San Antonio. It isn't so much a “store” as a dance hall that's hosted everyone from Hank Williams to Kacey Musgraves. In fact, the legend of “Shotgun Willie” Nelson was born on this stage, where he carved out his new persona and found a lifelong following.

The walls are lined with photos that make up a who's who of country music spanning nine decades, while the boots hanging from the rafters whisper the stories of generations of Texans who've danced the night away.

When I visited, the street was filled with pickup trucks as the smell of brisket drifted on the Hill Country breeze. Inside, I ordered a plate of tamales (a Floore's specialty) and an ice-cold longneck, served just the way Texas law requires.

By the time the band struck its first chord, the dance floor was packed with folks two-stepping like they'd been practicing for years. I tried to keep up but mostly looked like a confused armadillo on roller skates.

What makes Floore's special isn't just the music or the food—it's the feeling that you're standing in the middle of Texas history that's still alive and kicking. It's a place where past and present two-step together under the same neon lights. ■

ABOVE Chet grabs a prime parking spot at John T. Floore's Country Store.

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



Know Before You Go

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

FEBRUARY

6

Grand Prairie [6–8, 13–15, 21–22] Lunar New Year, (972) 975-5100, asiatimesquare.com

7

North Zulch Volunteer Fire Department Chili Cook-Off, (979) 488-9214, northzulchvfd.org

Palestine Mardi Gras Parade, 1-800-659-3484, visitpalestine.com

10

Fort Worth [10–15] Six, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

13

Boerne [13–14] Chocolate Walk, (830) 248-1635, ci.boerne.tx.us

14

Chappell Hill Wine & Chocolate Stroll, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

Grapevine Sweetheart Wine Train, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Valentine Valentine's in Valentine, valentineinvalentinex.com

15

Fredericksburg Lindsay and Jason, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

16

Brenham [16–21] Fortnightly Club Used Book Sale, (979) 525-7414, facebook.com/thefortnightlyclub

20

Brenham [20-21] Friendship Quilt Guild Quilt Show, (979) 525-1128, friendshipquiltguild.com

21

Spicewood Stars, Spurs & Illusions: The Art of Texas Magic, (512) 264-2820, spicewoodarts.org

24

Gonzales 100th Anniversary Organ Concert, (830) 672-3521, gonzalesprestexas.com

27

La Grange [27-28] Colorado Valley Quilt Guild Quilt Show, coloradovalleyyqg.com

Washington [27-28] Texas Independence Day Celebration, (936) 878-2214, wheretexasbecametexas.org

28

Boerne 1940s Night at the USO Gala, (512) 693-8382, vfw688.org

Conroe Arbor Day, (936) 539-7824, mcmga.com

MARCH

1

Corsicana Living History Event, (903) 875-7438, pearcemuseum.com

5

Corsicana Divas of Soul, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

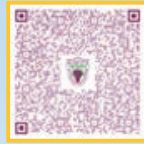
6

Spicewood Blue Water Highway, (512) 264-2820, spicewoodarts.org

TCP *Submit Your Event*

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

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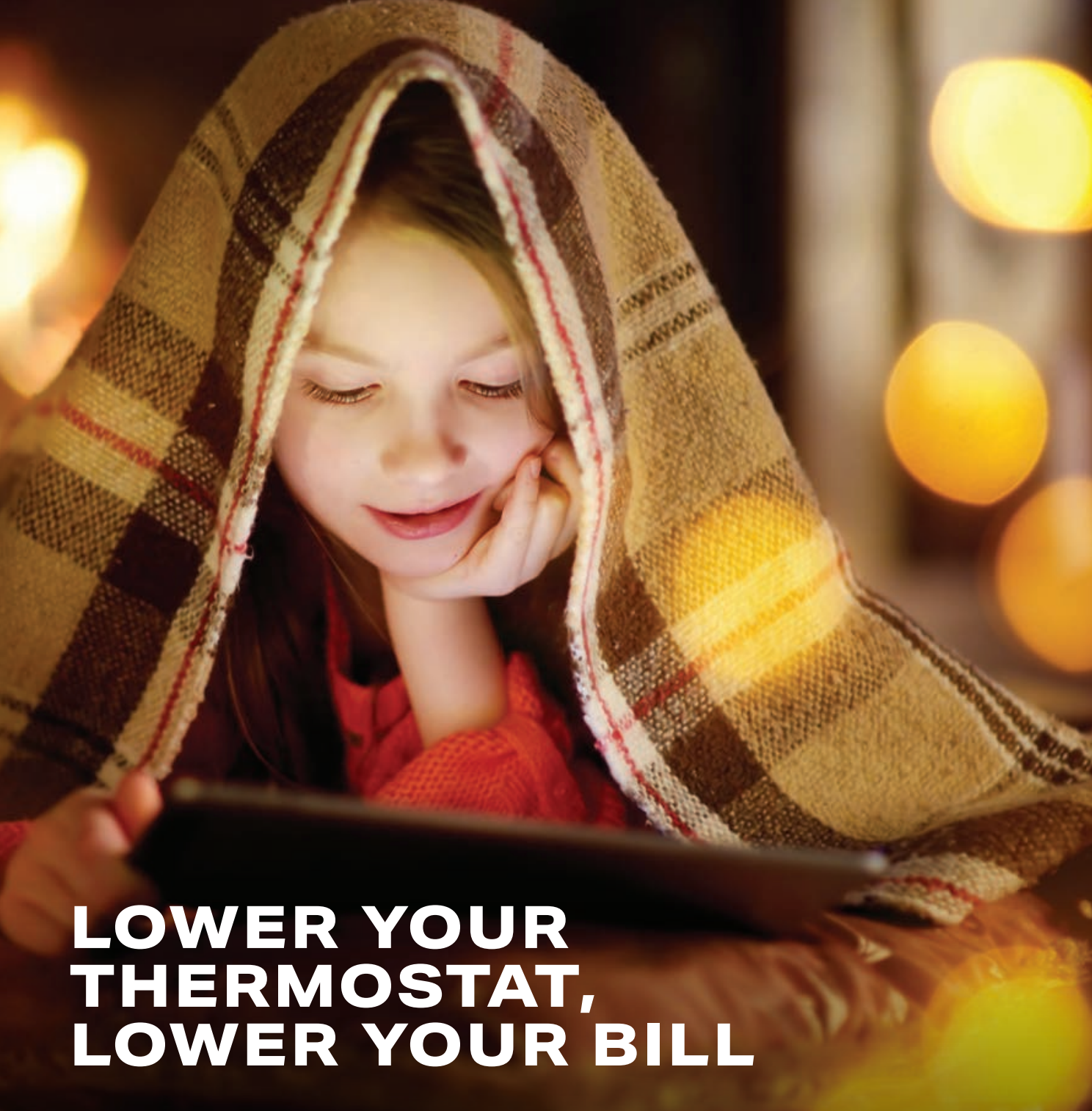


Hit the Road

Event Calendar

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From the Oil Fields

It's dangerous work. Those who choose this profession are bold, risking their own safety to fuel the world. Their tireless pursuit energizes homes and businesses, keeps trucks delivering goods across the country, and provides a wide variety of products. This month we salute those in search of black gold.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

1 JAMIE VAZQUEZ
PEDERNALES EC

"The sunset on a few jack-up rigs waiting for work in Galveston."

2 MIKE PALMER
FORT BELKNAP EC

"My grandfather Tobe Palmer, center, far back, pulling an oil well near Electra around 1918."

3 GARY BAKER
MIDSOUTH EC

"Looking for Texas tea in the moonlight."

4 DAFFANA GRAY
PEDERNALES EC

"My youngest brother, Eric Gray, operations supervisor for a major oil and gas operations company."



4



2



3

Upcoming Contests

DUE FEB 10 Making a Splash

DUE MAR 10 Seasoned Snaps

DUE APR 10 Underwater Life



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more From the Oil Fields photos from readers.



What Love Looks Like

In sickness and in health—
in a tiny Hill Country cabin

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS
ILLUSTRATION BY PETE LLOYD

FOR MANY OF THEIR nearly seven decades together, Cicero and Olla Rust lived in a comfortable home on their Blanco County ranch.

But when Olla became sick in her last years, caring for both her and a large house became too much. So Cicero sold the house and moved a one-room cabin onto their land.

“That’s one good woman!” Cicero exclaimed after I arrived for an afternoon visit. In bed lay his wife, a mere shadow of the strong woman she’d once been. A woman who had chopped cedar, corralled cattle and worked their land as good as any ranch hand.

Now she lay on her side, knees drawn, arms across her stomach, her head on a pillow. A cotton sheet lay tousled to one side.

Cicero and Olla met in 1935 in the Hill Country. Her father forbade the romance, but a year later, Olla told Cicero that she wanted to get married.

Secretly, they agreed to meet in Johnson City on a stormy night in May 1936. But Olla’s father kept her after dark doing chores. By the time the couple finally arrived at the judge’s home, it was 11:30 p.m. So Cicero had to “run the JP out of bed” to perform the ceremony.

During their first nine years together, the couple lived in a run-down, one-room sharecropper’s cabin. To make money, they chopped cedar and sold three stacked cords for \$5. Determined to do better, they saved their money, bought two milk cows and sold cream.

“That Depression learned me a lot,” said Cicero, 90, dressed in his trademark denim overalls, his white hair bare of the usual gimme cap. “It learned me that you can live without some things.”

In 1947, the Rusts bought 160 acres in Blanco County. Two years later, they purchased 117 more. In 1950, Olla bore their only child, C.A. Rust III.

While we visited, I glanced now and then at Olla, 91, who lay staring at the wall. Three times a week, a home health care worker bathed and fed her. A physical therapist came, too. But it’s Cicero—her devoted partner in life—who tended to all her needs.

For a while, Olla lived in a nursing home. But when staff used restraints to keep her in bed, Cicero brought his wife back home to the one-room cabin. He learned the correct way to lift her, bathe her, what to feed her and when.

“I can take care of her myself,” Cicero said. “And I still ranch, too.”

As I drove away, my eyes teared up as I thought about Olla and Cicero—about the vastness and strength of a love that endures and refuses to give up. That tenderly cares and nurtures, even when the caring can’t be returned. That selflessly trades the luxuries of a spacious home for a simple cabin.

Now *that’s* true love straight from the heart. ■

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