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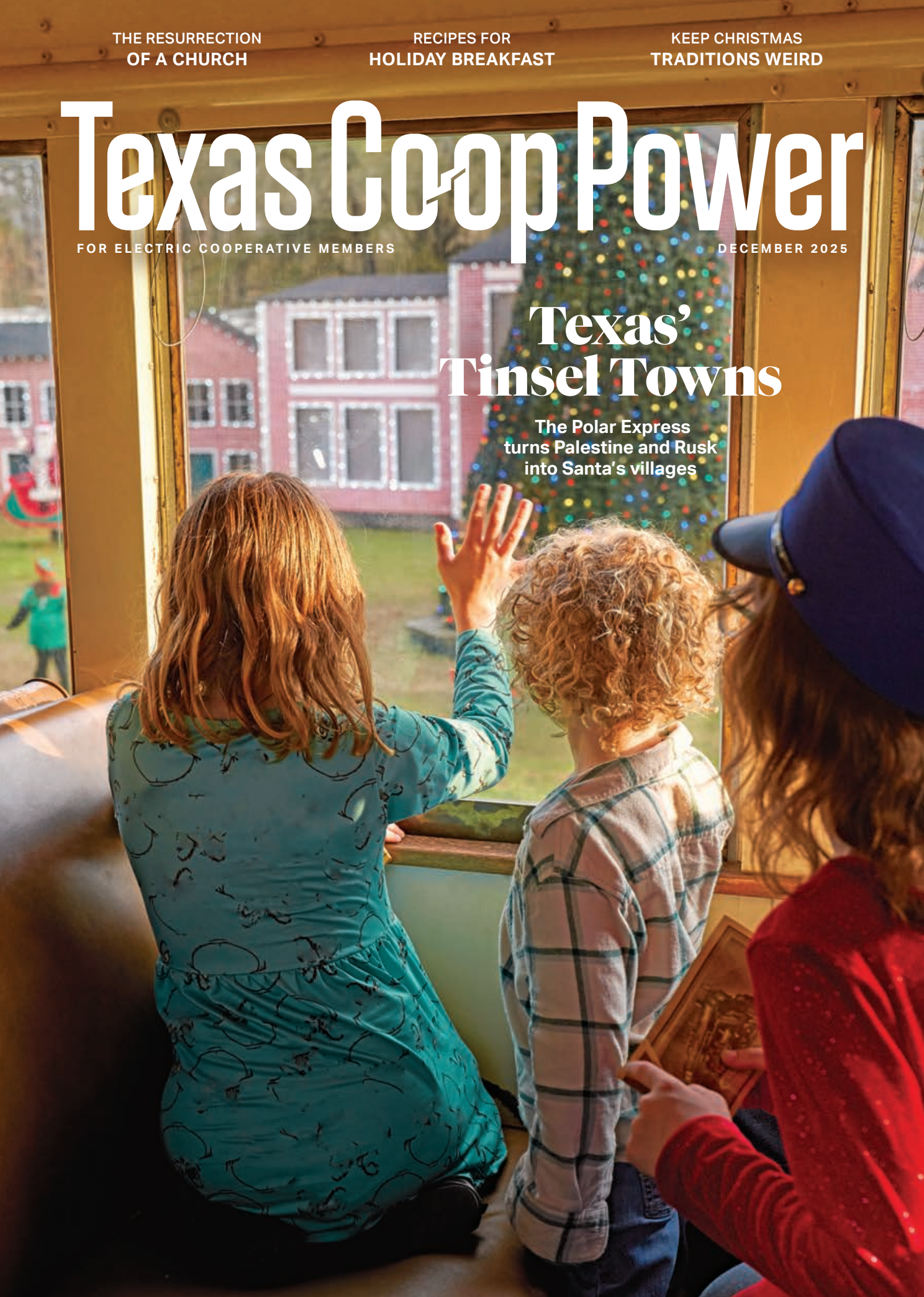
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The Polar Express
turns Palestine and Rusk
into Santa's villages





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December 2025



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Polar Express trains take riders on a magical journey from East Texas to the North Pole.

*By Jan Adamson
Photos by Dave Shafer*

The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition.

*By Eileen Mattei
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

ON THE COVER
From left, Remy and Rendon Unger and Kynlee Kampen hope to catch Santa's attention—for all the right reasons.
Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE
Friends of the Ruidosa Church carry out their rebuilding mission along the Rio Grande.
Photo by Erich Schlegel

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Live, From Austin ...



Lorne Michaels, from left, watches a sketch rehearsal featuring Madeline Kahn, Will Ferrell and Cheri Oteri.

THE LEGACY OF LORNE MICHAELS, best known as the creator and producer of the long-running TV show *Saturday Night Live*, is the focus of an exhibit at the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center in Austin.

On display are scripts, production notes, props and costumes from the iconic show that has changed pop culture since it went on the air in October 1975.

Live from New York: The Lorne Michaels Collection runs through March 20, 2026. Admission is free.



For Heaven's Sake

The Hail Mary pass unofficially turns 50 this month, though the Notre Dame football team referred to desperation plays as Hail Marys as early as 1922.

But Roger Staubach's 45-yard heave that fell into the hands of receiver Drew Pearson for the Dallas Cowboys' game-winning touchdown over the Minnesota Vikings in the 1975 NFL playoffs made the name of a Catholic prayer into a signature play.

As Staubach, left, explained, "They asked me, 'What were you thinking about when you threw the ball?' I said, 'When I closed my eyes, I said a Hail Mary.'"

TCP Contests and More

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FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Gates

RECOMMENDED READING

We think of Santa as bearing gifts. But do you know about the time he was naughty? Read *Naughty Santa* from December 2014 at TexasCoopPower.com.



ENTER ONLINE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Dear Santa,
I would like ...

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

Here are some responses to our October prompt: **The best food I've ever had at a fair is ...**

Frito pie served in a chip bag, as God intended.

ROBIN THOMPSON PERRY
VIA FACEBOOK

Fletcher's corny dog, State Fair of Texas—1953, 14 years old and new to Texas.

CAROL MERCER
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
FAIRVIEW

A burger between a split Krispy Kreme doughnut for the bun at the State Fair of Texas. Weirdly good.

KATHY WHITBY
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC
FLINT

Smoked turkey leg, Shakespearean festival, July 2021, Kalispell, Montana.

TED HENDRIX
VIA FACEBOOK

Funnel cakes drizzled with chocolate sauce, topped with fresh strawberries and lots of whipped cream.

JANICE EHLERS
GVEC
SEGUIN

Gumbo at a seafood festival in south Louisiana.

WALT HUDSON
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

Catching Up With a Friend

“We just returned after five months outside of Texas, and I’m catching up on your magazine. Interesting stories: the missile silos, goats, flour, Frisbees and grapes.”

J. BAILEY
BANDERA EC
UTOPIA



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Two Bits and a Bag of Chips

From 1956 to 1960, I worked at the G.F. Wacker variety store in Levelland [It's in the Bag, September 2025]. The Fritos chili pie was sold daily—with a Coke and candy bar, all for about 25 cents.

Genie Ballew
Lamb County EC
Levelland

A State for Horses

I moved to Texas thinking it was a state for horses but was astonished to learn there are few places to ride but the roads and private property [Mounts in the Hills, September 2025]. In Washington I helped pack families and hunters into the Cascade wilderness, where we could ride for weeks.

While I admire the Texas Equestrian Trail Riders Association for all its work, I think our state forest service should support trail riders as other states have done, for example the rails-to-trails

projects in which the state pays to convert old railroad tracks into riding trails.

Loretta Bedford
Deep East Texas EC
San Augustine

I hope the article results in increased membership in TETRA since they do such awesome and necessary work. I'm not a horse rider, but I can appreciate the importance of maintaining equestrian trails to help keep people in contact with nature.

Elena Rivera
Pedernales EC
Austin

Nature Erases

I did not know the story of the ghost town Eagle Springs [Ebb and Flow, September 2025]. The simple beauty of Martha Deering's final paragraph—"evening breeze shivers" and "whispering of voices"—took my breath away. Nature erases, and it reclaims.

Mark Troth
Bluebonnet EC
Chappell Hill



DAVE SHAEFER

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

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BY JAN ADAMSON • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

The More, the Merrier

Polar Express trains take riders on a magical journey from East Texas to the North Pole





Shhh. Listen.

It's a train whistle—low and long and lonely and romantic. It's a sound that for 150 years has permeated the Pineywoods town of Palestine.

But the whistle heard December 31, 1969, was thought to be the last. That day, Texas South-Eastern Railroad engine No. 22, a 70-ton diesel-electric locomotive, pulled into the station for the last time—the end of a century of regular freight and passenger service in Palestine.

But listen closely today along the 25-mile track between Palestine and Rusk, to the east, and you'll hear plenty of whistles and maybe even singing, laughter and bells. If you catch a glimpse into a passing train car, you'll see families in matching pajamas, dancing chefs and trays full of hot chocolate.

LEFT Santa doesn't always travel by sleigh—especially when he's in Texas.

ABOVE Remy and Rendon Unger take in the countryside on the way to the North Pole.

Ever since the Palestine-Rusk line reopened as a tourist railway called the Texas State Railroad on June 25, 1976, it has been building a corps of believers. Tens of thousands of them turn out each holiday season for the service's wildly popular Polar Express trips based on the film released in 2004 and the 1985 book by Chris Van Allsburg.

"With the popularity of the film, the Polar Express Train Ride has just grown and grown," says Amy Parady, president of the Texas State Railroad, which launched round-trip Christmas-themed excursions 20 years ago. "Many have made a tradition out of the event, so they come every year."

Like the Corley family from Magnolia.

"We meet new people and sit with different families," Kevin Corley says. "It's very interactive. We've never had a bad experience."

Long before it whisked families to the "North Pole," Palestine began its golden age after the Civil War when the International Railroad and the Houston and Great Northern Railroad opened a route between Hearne and Palestine. The transport of goods and passengers resulted in great wealth, allowing merchants and railroad executives to build massive mansions, especially in Palestine.

In 1881, when a prison was built in Rusk, the line was extended to the east. Shortly thereafter, the Palestine car shop was built to modify and repair freight cars. In 1971, not long after shipments of logging and mining equipment and passengers ceased, local banker Jack R. Stone, a member of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, and Rusk Mayor Emmett H. Whitehead led a campaign to reopen the railroad as a tourist attraction, and the Texas State Railroad was born.

A \$3 million appropriation went into refurbishing the rails, and Rusk and Palestine built support facilities such as campsites before the two depots were built. The line has been operated by private companies since 2007.

About half of the passenger cars are commuter coaches built in 1923 for other railroads; they're pulled by an assortment of vintage diesel- and steam-powered locomotives.

The railroad hosts a variety of excursions throughout the year. There's Rockin' the Rails, in which passengers attend a concert; the Rusk Turntable Run, which makes use of the 130-year-old, compressed air-powered railcar turntable in Maydelle; and Mother's Day and Father's Day trips. There are autumn- and Halloween-themed trains, dinner excursions, and trips that celebrate local beer and wine.



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Kynlee Kampen with her silver sleigh bell. The Polar Express departs from the Palestine depot.

RIGHT Engine 30, at 100 years old, comes to life in the early morning before a day's excursions.

But far and away the most popular themed ride is the Polar Express.

"We always have multiple [marriage] proposals and engagements during every season, which is always special," Parady says. "We have had grown individuals who have never seen Santa before, and just to watch the grandparents and parents see the joy in the eyes of the children creates magic every year."

The cars are festooned inside with greenery and twinkling lights, and outside, along the route to the North Pole—did you know it's in Rusk?—Christmas decorations whiz past the windows.

Passengers are encouraged to bring a copy of the book or buy one at the depot, and once aboard, they're served hot chocolate and cookies by dancing chefs who act out various scenes. On arrival at the North Pole, passengers are greeted by Santa and his elves, who bestow the first gift of Christmas: a silver sleigh bell that can only be heard by believers. The chefs lead passengers in Christmas carols on the return trip.

But the experience changes each year. Employees gather to discuss and workshop new ideas and improvements.

An adults-only railcar has club chairs. There's an open-air car with bench seats, an observation dome car, and another with tables and sofas. There's even a car that can be booked for private parties. The cars have the feel of a long-ago time because of the original fixtures retained throughout.

It all makes for a special experience.

"We have a family that started coming the first year we did the Polar Express train ride, and their son was 4 years old," Parady says. "They have never missed a year, and now their son is 22 years old."

Logistically, Polar Express season requires careful orchestration. Within a six-week time frame in November and December, there are typically 105–110 round trips with as many as five trains running a day for 60,000–70,000 passengers. Reservations open in July at texasstaterailroad.net.

"We hire typically 150 additional team members just for our Polar season," Parady says. "It is quite a feat pulling this event off with the ridership we have in such a short time frame."

Performers on the Polar Express have a reputation for the joy and professionalism they bring to the job, making it no wonder that passengers return year after year—and get into the spirit.

"About 95% of our visitors always arrive in matching pajamas," Parady says. "We have had people plan their family



On the Rails

The Texas State Railroad is a movie star, having been featured in more than 35 films, TV series, documentaries and commercials. Most recently, the train and the Palestine depot were part of the first episode of *1883*, the prequel to the *Yellowstone* series. The railroad also starred in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; *American Outlaws*; *The Great Debaters*; and *The Gambler Returns: The Luck of the Draw*.

reunions around our event. We have multigenerational attendees, meaning great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children all attending together. Families have become extremely creative with their attire, and many customize their pajamas or even make their own."

The Corley family has made the Polar Express a tradition. Kelly and Kevin Corley and their children, Piper and Carter, have been attending since 2015. "We read the book and watch the film," Kelly says. "It's such a joy to watch the kids' faces light up when they see the story play out in real life."

The Corleys prefer to take a late afternoon excursion so they can experience the sounds and smoke from the train during the daylight, and then, in the evening, they get to see the glowing Christmas lights and decorations on the return trip.

The family has dedicated a whole shelf in their home to train memorabilia. It's filled with cocoa mugs, golden train tickets and more than 20 silver bells.

"We pick out new pajamas every year," Carter says. "Me and Dad match, and Piper and Mom match."

That's an East Texas treasure worth believing in. Shhh. Just listen. ■



The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

BY EILEEN MATTEI • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition

IT'S A BREEZY, overcast 80-degree day in Marfa as a dozen or so volunteers rotate jobs in a brick-making assembly line.

Billy Joe Moore, 12, has the hardest job. He hoists small buckets of clay, sand, straw and water into a gas-powered mixer, like those used for concrete. His mother, Erin Moore, says the homeschooling, beekeeping family from Fort Davis is here to learn about adobe-making by doing it, getting into it.

It's also for a great cause: These bricks will be used in the restoration of a historic church in a remote outpost, turning a former Catholic house of worship into a community center.

"It's so neat to hear about the history of the church and the culture of the region," Erin says. "Who wouldn't want to get involved in this?"

In the ghost town of Ruidosa, 90 minutes southwest of Marfa in far West Texas, the adobe El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús (Sacred Heart of Jesus Church) is awaiting resurrection.

Completed in 1916, the church fell victim to blowing sand and rain that wore away the adobe before and after the droughts of the 1950s dried up the Rio Grande and the small agricultural community. By 1960, the church and town had been abandoned.

Native salts eroded the foundation. Huia-che branches battered the northeast tower. Attempts to restore the church, which claims the largest traditional adobe arches in Texas, faltered until the nonprofit Friends of the Ruidosa Church acquired the title to the Texas Historic Landmark from Presidio County after it was given the deed from the Diocese of El Paso in 2019.

With ownership, the Friends began work to preserve as much of the original adobe as

possible, to restore structural strength and to repair the damage done over 110 years. That meant making sun-dried adobe blocks—thousands of them, one at a time, starting in 2021.

For more than 10,000 years, adobe has been used as a building material, favored because its high thermal mass absorbs heat during the day and releases it at night.

"In recent generations, adobe-making skills have been lost, since the knowledge is rarely written down," says Joey Benton. His Marfa design and restoration company, Silla, has completed restorations of adobe buildings at Fort Davis National Historic Site and Big Bend National Park.

During the Friends' May Adobe Day, kneeling men and women scoop Billy Joe's fresh adobe mix from tilted wheelbarrows with their bare hands and tamp it into wood forms.

OPPOSITE El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús in the ghost town of Ruidosa on a September night.

BELOW From left, Terry Bishop, Martin Rivas and Claudio Nuñez load new adobe bricks onto pallets during a Friends of the Ruidosa Church workday.





"You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."



Others lift the forms off the freshly minted 10-by-18-by-3.5-inch blocks. They rinse off the forms in a large water trough and place them on black tarps, ready for the next batch.

The adobe blocks dry for a month in the sun, turned periodically like sunbathers so all

surfaces get exposed. Then the bricks are stacked and set aside. They'll eventually be used to rebuild the bell tower over the church's entrance.

"It's all about community, participating in a traditional activity," says Mike Green, a retired architect and chair of the Friends of the Ruidosa Church. "You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."

"People long for authenticity in their lives and something visible to show at the end of a day of hard work. Adobe-making gives us a deep feeling of achievement."

Hilary Raney, a Marfa resident, mud enthusiast and gardener, spent her third Adobe Day, a mostly monthly event, providing a helping hand and moral support.

"I see new faces every time," she says. "Last month a man in his 80s, whose parents got married in the church, came to Adobe Day. He was so happy to see what we were doing."

Adobe-makers come from El Paso, Houston, New Mexico and, like Steve McKeon, from Oregon. After McKeon opened a restaurant and bar in Marfa, he decided to help make bricks. "Working bubbles out of a block by hand gives you a sense of accomplishment," he says.

The Friends pays the bills for the church, power for which is provided by Rio Grande Electric Cooperative. Co-op power keeps the mortar mixer turning and the diamond saw spinning as it cuts adobe into segments.

Funds from the nonprofit's Community Day fundraiser every November in Ruidosa help pay to transport blocks to the remote site and to bring in masonry specialists to install them. Grants from the Texas Historical Commission and the Summerlee Foundation cover the costs of a historic structure report that guides its preservation.

Conversations with earthen-structure professionals, architects and archaeologists set the stage for the site work.



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A Friends of the Ruidosa Church work crew. Bishop carries a fresh brick.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT “The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques,” says retired architect Mike Green, who is leading the restoration. A view from the top of a hill looking south toward Mexico over the old church.

In 2023, Benton and his skilled crew began critical structural repairs to the church. They stabilized the foundation and installed scaffolding and support frames. They straightened a wall and saved the northeast tower from collapse by repairing adobe blocks and inserting new volunteer-made bricks as needed. In some areas the exterior was so worn that light was visible through the mortar joints.

Green praises Benton and archaeologist David Keller for their contributions to the preservation and restoration efforts.

“The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques,” Green says. “We’re on the same journey: trying to restore and save adobes of the Southwest.”

Free for the asking, the adobe recipe mixes clay, sand, silt, chopped straw and water in proportions determined by the soil used. Clay comprises 15%–30% of the mix, acting as the binder, similar to cement’s role in concrete. The majority of the mix is sand and aggregate. Straw allows the adobe to dry more evenly by letting water get out of the block. The mortar



has the same mix as the block but with finer aggregate.

This classic frontier Catholic church, with its substantial bell towers, is a time capsule for the community, says Keller, who is a Friends co-founder and preservation specialist. The church is unique in that the exterior was never plastered—rare for adobe structures, even in arid climates.

Nevertheless, while the church is being restored with historical accuracy, “the integrity of the structure and preservation guidance trumps absolute historical fidelity,” Keller says. So the exterior will be plastered to keep it from deteriorating like it did over the last 100 years. The interior, originally plastered and whitewashed, will be restored to that state.

Green hopes the bell will be restored to the entrance tower next year. In three years, he foresees the restored church telling the rich history of the area as a community center for residents of Brewster and Presidio counties as well as Ojinaga, across the Rio Grande.

Hands molding clay into architecture have built their own adobe-loving community. At the same time, they have helped restore the heart of a last-century community down a dirt road along the river.

As Green drove around the area over the years, the building often caught his eye. Eventually, his passion for architecture and history prompted him to try to save the old church. Now, the restoration work goes beyond saving the physical structure.

“The church at Ruidosa is the most peaceful place I know,” Green says. “It is so remote, so quiet, so serene. It feels like good spirits are in the air.” ■



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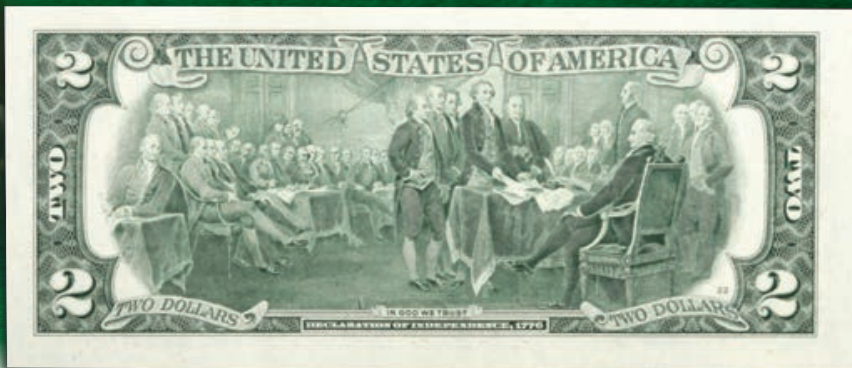
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How to Win at Love

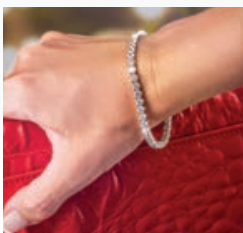
A classic tennis bracelet serves up over 10 carats of sparkle for a guaranteed win

It was the jewelry piece that made the world stop and take notice. In the middle of a long volley during the big American tennis tournament, the chic blonde athlete had to stop play because her delicate diamond bracelet had broken and she had to find it. The tennis star recovered her beloved bracelet, but the world would never be the same.

From that moment on, the tennis bracelet has been on the lips and on the wrists of women in the know. Once called eternity bracelets, these bands of diamonds were known from then on as tennis bracelets, and remain *the* hot ticket item with jewelers.

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D Flawless diamonds from another company that costs \$57,000!

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CEO

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Reflecting on Progress, Planning for the Future

AS WE CLOSE ANOTHER YEAR, I want to pause and express gratitude—for you, the members of Medina Electric Cooperative—for your continued trust and support. Our cooperative was built on the promise of people coming together to improve the quality of life in their communities, and that promise still guides everything we do today.

Each decision, whether it's about delivering reliable electricity, innovating for the future or advocating for smart energy policies that impact our local community, comes back to one simple question: How will this impact the members we serve?

This past year has been marked by meaningful progress, both in strengthening our local system and in working at the national level to influence energy policies that directly affect reliability, affordability and resilience. While the details of federal regulations can feel distant, they shape our daily operations here at home.

Over the past year, electric cooperatives across the country came together for advocacy efforts on the EPA's Power Plant Rule. As originally written, the rule would have forced a rapid shift away from always-available power generation resources, threatening the accessibility of a diverse fuel supply that keeps electricity reliable.

Renewable energy sources are an essential and growing part of our energy future, but we also know that the demand for electricity is rising rapidly, and natural gas, coal and nuclear remain essential for ensuring power is available around the clock.

As we collaborated and engaged with policymakers, we pressed for a more balanced approach to generating power—one that supports clean energy innovation while still recognizing the role of traditional resources. Our efforts are helping to shape a more workable path forward that better protects reliability and keeps costs in check for Medina EC members.

Another area of progress was on the state level with Texas House Bill 3448. This bill, had it passed, would have forced members to subsidize

telecommunications companies' access to our infrastructure, leading to higher electric bills, jeopardizing lineman safety, and hindering rural development rather than promoting a partnership with these companies that access our infrastructure for their equipment.

Thanks to member involvement and vocal participation through Voices for Cooperative Power, we successfully advocated for the bill's withdrawal. This victory demonstrates the vital role of our political action plan and your collective voice in safeguarding affordability and reliability.

Achievements like these are not just wins in Washington, or Austin—they are wins for Medina EC members like you.

In addition to advocacy efforts, we are proactively addressing our communities' needs for the future by investing in new technologies and programs that improve service for our members. Through advanced monitoring systems and AI tools that improve daily operations, we are better equipped to identify power delivery issues or challenges before they occur. With the addition of Medina EC's 24/7 system operations center, members have experienced fewer outages and less time without power.

As we look ahead to a new year, I see both challenges and opportunities on the horizon. The energy industry is undergoing significant change driven by the rising need for more electricity, new tools and technologies, and energy policies.

The path forward requires innovative thinking and member-focused solutions. I'm confident that with the dedication of Medina EC employees and the continued support of our members, we are well positioned to adapt and meet challenges head-on. Through it all, our promise to you remains steadfast: reliable power for today—and tomorrow.

Until next time,
Trey Grebe

Meet Your New Board Director and Officers

DENNIS GONZALEZ WAS RECENTLY SELECTED to join the Medina Electric Cooperative Board of Directors, representing Voting District 3. He attended his first board meeting in October, following the announcement of his appointment at the cooperative's 86th annual membership meeting October 4 in Rio Grande City.

Gonzalez, a Rio Grande City resident, is an experienced real estate development executive with over 20 years in both the private sector and public service. His experience in land development, zoning and infrastructure stems from his current work leading residential and commercial projects and his 15 years of public service as Starr County clerk and county planner. Gonzalez's commitment to leadership and regulatory frameworks is further demonstrated by his appointments to the Rio Grande City Planning and Zoning Commission and the Texas Task Force on Uniform County Subdivision Regulations.



DENNIS GONZALEZ
VOTING DISTRICT 3
BOARD MEMBER

Each October, the board elects officers following the annual election. Ken Weynand was reelected president, and Larry Huesser was reelected vice president. Mickey Holzhaus was elected to be the board secretary-treasurer. Additionally, Weynand and Huesser were selected to represent Medina EC on the boards of San Miguel Electric Cooperative and South Texas Electric Cooperative, respectively.



KEN WEYNAND
PRESIDENT



LARRY HUESSER
VICE PRESIDENT



MICKEY HOLZHAUS
SECRETARY & TREASURER

Medina EC is governed by a nine-member board, with three directors representing each voting district. Directors serve three-year terms, with one position from each district up for election annually. If you're interested in running for a board position, review the online petition process outlined on page 18.

CONTACT US
Toll-Free 1-866-632-3532
Email Info@MedinaEC.org
Web MedinaEC.org - Chat Feature Available

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Voting District 1
Larry Huesser, (830) 363-7651
Ken Weynand, (830) 426-0762
Mickey Holzhaus, (210) 422-3310

Voting District 2
Jimmie Raines, (830) 591-8437
Joe Foley, (830) 261-1304
Larry Neal, (210) 218-2367

Voting District 3
J. L. Gonzalez, (956) 286-1863
Rodolfo H. Rodriguez, (210) 846-1092
Dennis Gonzalez, (956) 218-8325

CEO
Trey Grebe, 1-866-632-3532, ext. 1046

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Option 2: Report an outage
Option 3: Pay bill, get account balance
Option 5: Speak to a representative

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Dilley 1718 W. FM 117, Dilley 78017
Hondo 237 Highway 173 N., Hondo 78861
Rio Grande City 601 N. FM 3167,
Rio Grande City 78582
Uvalde 2604 Highway 90 E., Uvalde 78801
Corporate Office 2308 18th St., Hondo 78861

VISIT US ONLINE
MedinaEC.org



This institution is an equal-opportunity provider and employer.

Información sobre todos los programas y servicios que ofrece Medina Electric Cooperative están disponibles en español al llamarnos al 1-866-632-3532 o visitando una de nuestras oficinas.

Director Nomination Process

Members who are interested in running for a position on the board of directors must first be nominated through the online petition process. Nominees will need at least 30 valid signatures from members who have service in the voting district the potential nominee wishes to represent. For example, members wishing to be nominated for Voting District 1 will need signatures from members who have electric service in that district.

The petition process will be completed online. More information, including deadlines, the link to the petitions and the required paperwork will be available in January at MedinaEC.org/Nominee.

In compliance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in reference to assurance of nondiscrimination among beneficiaries of Rural Utilities Service programs, the Medina EC bylaws pertaining to nomination and election procedures for the election of board members can be found at all Medina EC offices and at MedinaEC.org/CorpDoc. The section that primarily pertains to nomination and election procedures is Article 4—Board of Directors.



THE ROCKSPRINGS EDWARDS COUNTY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT RECEIVES A DONATED TRUCK IN OCTOBER. PRESENT FOR THE DONATION FROM BACK LEFT: ROCKSPRINGS EDWARDS COUNTY VFD VOLUNTEER JERRY GONZALES, MEDINA EC BOARD MEMBERS R.H. RODRIGUEZ, JIMMIE RAINES, KEN WEYNAND, J.L. GONZALEZ, LARRY NEAL, MICKEY HOLZHAUS AND JOE FOLEY. FROM FRONT LEFT: ROCKSPRINGS EDWARDS COUNTY VFD VOLUNTEER TIFFANY WHITWORTH AND FIRE CHIEF FIDEL MORENO, MEDINA EC CEO TREY GREBE, MEDINA EC BOARD MEMBERS LARRY HUESSER, AND DENNIS GONZALES.

Retired Truck Awarded to VFD

MEDINA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE AWARDED the Rocksprings Edwards County Volunteer Fire Department with a truck from the cooperative as part of the larger Community Empowerment Program.

According to CEO Trey Grebe, "When we look at our communities, we see partners. Medina EC is proud to invest in volunteer fire departments by donating retired fleet vehicles to put reliable resources directly into the hands of the VFDs that keep our rural service area safe."

Rocksprings Edwards County VFD serves approximately 1,200 people in Edwards County. The awarded truck—a 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 1500—will be used to help expand the reach and response of the department.

When cooperative vehicles are retired from the fleet, they are generally sold at auction. In 2015, the board of directors made the decision to donate, when possible, retired cooperative trucks to VFDs that provide service in one of the 17 counties in Medina EC's territory.

Past recipients of retired trucks offered through this program include Knippa Emergency Services, the City of Escobares VFD, San Diego VFD, Devine VFD, Sabinal VFD, Nueces Canyon VFD, Reagan Wells VFD, Christine VFD, El Cenizo VFD, Atascosa-Bexar County Line VFD, Bigfoot VFD and Charlotte VFD.

For more information about this program, visit MedinaEC.org/VehDonation.

Use Home Generators Safely

IF YOU'VE LOST POWER, a portable generator can provide electricity to keep your home warm and power appliances. However, if used improperly, a generator may present serious hazards to you and the crews trying to get the electricity back on.

Before using a generator, read the specifications and instructions and follow them closely. The generator should have more capacity than the combined wattage of the electronics you will plug into it.

Never connect a portable generator directly to home wiring, which can result in potentially deadly backfeeding. When electricity gets fed back through the electrical system and meter into power lines, it can create a deadly hazard for lineworkers.

Never use a portable generator indoors because it produces carbon monoxide. Opening a window or door or turning on a fan will not produce enough fresh air to reduce the deadly gas. Operate the generator outside in an open but protected space from which fumes can dissipate harmlessly.

Before using a generator, install at least one CO detector in your home, and be on the lookout for the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning. Symptoms include dizziness, nausea, headaches and lethargy. If you or someone else is showing these symptoms, move into fresh air and seek medical attention right away.

Make sure nothing is plugged into the generator when turning it on.

To avoid electrocution, keep the generator dry and do not use it in rainy or wet conditions. Operate it on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure. Do not touch the generator with wet hands.



DMITRY I ADOBESTOCK

Be sure to turn the generator off and let it cool down before refueling.

Remember, even a properly connected portable generator can become overloaded, resulting in overheating or generator failure. If necessary, stagger the operating times for various equipment to prevent overloads.

Run your generator for 10 minutes once a month to ensure that it works properly.

Medina EC members who are interested in a more permanent solution, like installing a standby generator on their property, can learn more about the co-op's Generac program and generator safety at MedinaEC.org/Generators.

Medina EC Congratulates Leadership Academy Graduates

THE 2025 LEADERSHIP ACADEMY is complete, and the participants officially graduated in September.

The leadership academy was formed in 2016 to meet our ongoing strategic initiatives to ensure we have a knowledgeable and strong workforce at the cooperative. The training provides leaders with tools to create strength and stability by enhancing leadership skills and expanding employee knowledge on cooperative practices. This class focused on cooperative procedures and processes like performance evaluations, HR documentation, FMLA, workers' compensation, department roles and more.

Medina EC is committed to the growth and development of employees. Motivated, informed and engaged employees are crucial to the success of the co-op.

The 2025 Leadership Academy class included: (back, left) Zachary Lyle (Corporate Office), John Rodriguez (Rio Grande City), Raegan Mazurek (Corporate Office), Johnny Rosa (Rio Grande

City), Mario Molina (Hondo), Clint Hopkins (Corporate Office), (front, left) Martin Gonzales (Dilley), Serapio Guzman (Uvalde), Jacquelyn Muennink (Corporate Office), Alexandra Stallworth (Hondo), Seb Suarez (Uvalde) and Tony Benavidez (Hondo). Not pictured: Sean Krause (Corporate Office).




Winners Announced: Member Benefits Bingo

Our Member Benefits Bingo contest encouraged members to enroll in a variety of beneficial programs for chances to win a \$100 bill credit. These programs included registering your account for SmartHub, building your home profile for consumer analytics, signing up for automatic payments, enrolling in paperless billing, and a bonus entry for members who are enrolled in all four of these programs. The deadline to enter this year's bingo was November 1 and winners were randomly selected. Congratulations to this year's winners:

- ▶ **SmartHub:** Lilia Patino
- ▶ **Home Profile:** Belinda Levek
- ▶ **Autopay:** Ronnie Hacker, Jr.
- ▶ **Paperless:** Cyntia N. Sanchez R
- ▶ **BONUS:** Scott Cameron






Merry Christmas

From Medina Electric Cooperative

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." —Luke 2:14

Our offices will be closed December 24–25 and January 1 for the holidays.



ALONZODESIGN | ISTOCK.COM

JOIN US FOR CHRISTMAS WITH THE CO-OP!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2
SSGT. WILLIE DE LEON CIVIC CENTER, PECAN ROOM
340 E MAIN ST, UVALDE, TX 78801

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3
MEDINA EC CORPORATE OFFICE
2308 18TH STREET, HONDO, TX 78861

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4
MEDINA EC DILEY OFFICE
1718 W FM 117, DILEY, TX 78017

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9
MEDINA EC RIO GRANDE CITY OFFICE
601 N FM 3167, RIO GRANDE CITY, TX 78582

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10
SANTA TERESITA COMMUNITY CENTER
15014 US HIGHWAY 59, LAREDO, TX 78040

ALL EVENTS ARE 3:30 P.M. - 6 P.M.
LEARN MORE & RSVP AT [MEDINAEC.ORG/CHRISTMASCOOP](https://medinaec.org/christmascoop)



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14-21
2026**

150 TEXAS TEENS 7 DAYS IN D.C. 0 DOLLARS

High school students*: Get ready to pack your bags! You can join 2,000 teens from across the U.S. to make new friends and share experiences in Washington, D.C., all paid for by your electric co-op.

Museums. Memorials. Monuments. Memories. Friends. History. There's something for everyone on this trip of a lifetime!

*High school sophomores or juniors whose parents/guardians are Medina EC members.



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DEADLINE TO APPLY: JANUARY 9, 2025



SEE THE VIDEO

EXPERIENCE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME!



Community Turns Out for 86th Annual Meeting

EVER SINCE MEDINA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE built an office in Rio Grande City in 2018, its adjoining garage has housed what you'd expect: bucket trucks, supplies and safety equipment, and plenty of muddy boot prints and tire tracks.

But not Saturday, October 4. That day, muddy trucks were replaced with colorful balloons, bubbles wafting through on a cool breeze, tacos, laughter, hugs, handshakes and a giant \$1,000 check—for the co-op's 86th annual meeting.

"Thank you all for being here today," said Ken Weynand, Medina EC board president. "It's nice for you to be able to come out and see the amount of money that we've invested to take care of you. I know there are many other things you could be doing on a Saturday morning, and I'm glad you chose to spend this time with us."

Medina EC rotates annual meeting locations each year to accommodate its 10,750-square-mile service territory that brings power to 17 South Texas counties. This was the co-op's first time hosting the event at one of its own offices.

"We want to try to give everybody a chance to come to the meetings," said CEO Trey Grebe.

Under the cooperative business model, the members whom Medina EC powers also own the co-op, and the annual meeting is their opportunity to come together to hear from and speak with leadership and conduct co-op business.

"Medina members have been coming to this annual meeting for 86 years," Grebe said. "This is a time to visit with other members, meet the board and local staff, hear about the organization's priorities, challenges, financial health and goals for the coming years."

With 72 members in attendance at the meeting, a quorum was not met and so official business could not be conducted. However, since Weynand, who represents voting District 1, and Joe Foley, District 2, ran unopposed, both were reelected to three-year terms on the board. In District 3, Annette Sorrells chose not to run for reelection. A selection committee, formed per the co-op's bylaws, chose Dennis Gonzalez of Rio Grande City to fill Sorrells' vacancy.

Sorrells retires after 15 years of service on the board, serving as secretary-treasurer since 2012, and said she plans to devote more of her time to family.



▲ CEO Trey Grebe welcomes members to the 86th Annual Membership Meeting.

▼ Fermin Orta and his family celebrate winning the \$1,000 grand prize.





◀ Dennis Gonzalez, the new Medina EC board member, introduces himself to members. Gonzalez was chosen to fill the vacancy in Voting District 3. Learn more about him on page 17.

CEO Trey Grebe (right) and Board President Ken Weynand (left) present retiring board member Annette Sorrells (middle) with a commemorative clock and a resolution of appreciation.



"I ran for the board because I feel like you should give back to your community. Just having the opportunity has been awesome," she said. "I have three grandchildren and another one on the way, and I try to help as much as I can with taking care of them and being there for them. And as much as I enjoyed going to the conferences and learning from the conferences, it was time for me to stay home. Time for family."

The co-op produced a year-in-review video, played at the meeting and posted to Facebook, giving updates on the past year's operations. In that video, Grebe spoke about harmful legislation that co-op members statewide worked together to defeat during this past Texas Legislative session as well as exciting news for San Miguel Electric Cooperative, which provides a portion of the electricity that Medina EC distributes.

SMEC was awarded \$1.4 billion in grants and loans to transform a coal-fired power plant into a solar generation and battery storage facility. "This transition means continued low-cost, reliable power for our region," Grebe said. "It's projected that this will save Medina approximately \$170 million in energy costs over the project's lifetime."

CFO Laurie Van Damme reported \$148.1 million in revenue from 1.6 billion in kilowatt-hour sales, \$145.6 million in expenses and \$11.9 million in margins that are reinvested into the system. "Our 2024 annual report shows we're in a strong financial position," she said.

Zachary Lyle, manager of system operations and reliability, said distribution system improvements resulted in an average of 56 fewer outage minutes in 2024, and member services workers spoke about upgrades to members' bills and SmartHub.

Jacquelyn Muennink, manager of communications, spoke about the co-op principle of Cooperation Among Cooperatives—how Medina EC lineworkers pitched in after Hurricane Beryl struck East Texas last year and how employees are planning a second trip to Guatemala, where they'll help bring power to remote communities.

The co-op sent three students on the Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., in June and donated \$94,000 to local causes, nonprofits and community organizations in 2024, and employees volunteered 1,097 hours of their time to local charities.

"Our deepest commitment is to our members and local communities," Muennink said.

Grebe said the co-op is expanding its Hondo office with a new warehouse and vehicle storage facility, part of its work to meet significant growth, from residential to large loads.

The co-op's 147 employees are a big part of that work. And it was those employees—some traveling hours across the co-op's service territory—who handed out gift bags to attendees, entertained at game booths, conducted a live line safety demonstration after the meeting, and handed out dozens of prizes, including that \$1,000 grand prize in Rio Grande City.

"We're very fortunate at Medina EC with our employees," Sorrells said. "They do an awesome job, top to bottom, and it has made our jobs easier."

It's all about powering the community that built this co-op 87 years ago.

"A lot has changed since the cooperative was founded in November 1938," Grebe said, "but the commitment to members has not."



Safety Coordinator Mario Lopez and Medina EC linemen teach members about electrical safety during a live line safety demonstration after the meeting.



Scan this QR code to watch Medina EC's year-in-review video and learn more about the happenings of the co-op in the past year!



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.

This breathtaking combination of color and craftsmanship is available as a limited availability of only 930 pieces, making it a rare and treasured addition

to your jewelry collection. Plus, when you order today, you'll receive the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant** at an impossible price of just \$59 normally ~~\$149~~!

Don't miss your chance to own this exclusive tribute to timeless elegance and meaningful symbolism.

Jewelry Specifications:

- Pendant: 2 1/2 ctw. Kyocera lab opals and DiamondAura® accents. Yellow gold-finished .925 sterling silver setting
- Chain: 18" gold-clad .925 sterling silver chain

Opal Spirit Cross Collection

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



Turn of Fortune

A family's legacy far exceeds its pilfered buried treasure

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT NEUBECKER

A LONG TIME AGO, a woman tried to sell me her home, hinting at the prospect of gold treasure long hidden and lost within.

She told me her husband had died suddenly, and his last words to her were: "There's gold coins behind the wall in the bedroom closet." She was willing to split anything found.

I didn't bite on that strange sales pitch, but it reminded me of another similar case, even more interesting, up the country a ways.

In the little Texas town of San Diego, about an hour west of Corpus Christi, there once lived a Dr. Jose García. In 1933, he was the primary doctor in town and preferred to store his wealth in the form of gold coins. He hid it in a tight crawl

space beneath a trapdoor in his kitchen.

No one knew of this treasure except García and his daughter, Gloria. He told her the coins were hers to use, for taking care of her disabled brother later in life.

When the good doctor eventually died, Gloria asked her husband, Hector López, to find the coins. After Hector's repeated determined explorations into the tight crawl space—even with a metal detector—he couldn't find the coins.

Since García had suffered from dementia late in life, Gloria and Hector began thinking the gold coins had been the invention of an imaginative mind or a mind that forgot he had moved the coins.

Years later, Gloria and Hector sold the house. Then, more than 20 years after

that, a plumbing leak sprang up underneath it.

A plumber went through that old trapdoor the doctor had created almost 100 years before. While laying in a new line through the muddy soil, the plumber saw a flicker of something shiny.

He brushed away the mud and discovered a very old gold coin. He dug deeper and found a gold mine: some 500 coins in various sizes and denominations.

He was elated, of course, but he didn't alert the homeowner. He calmly asked his assistant to get him an empty coffee can and absconded with the coins—worth about \$500,000 at the time.

But the plumber didn't handle it well. He went around paying for things with gold coins within the little community. The gossip erupted immediately, and Hector and Gloria soon got word.

They sued the plumber, saying the coins belonged to Gloria.

The new homeowner, too, sued for ownership, but after a long legal battle, a jury in Duval County decided that the coins belonged to Gloria.

Next, something even more unexpected and beautiful happened: Gloria and Hector gave the coins to the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg.

As it turned out, the coins were a small part of Gloria and Hector López's wealth. They both graduated from the University of Texas in the 1940s, and then Hector earned a law degree and amassed a \$275 million portfolio while working in the oil and gas industry.

Since they had no children, the Lópezes left their fortune to the children of Texas in the form of the Hector and Gloria López Foundation, which provides college tuition—especially for Hispanic and first-generation students, known proudly as López Scholars. ■

Holiday Breakfast

Be warned: Santa might stick around for these dishes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Making chilaquiles is a treasured tradition for my family. Chilaquiles are fried corn tortillas simmered in a creamy salsa verde and topped with eggs. Our girls love them; I love prepping everything in advance; and my husband loves a heaping plate of hearty goodness after the piles of wrapping paper.

Chilaquiles Verdes

¼ cup vegetable oil, or more as needed
12 corn tortillas, cut into 4 wedges each
2 teaspoons salt, or more to taste
4 cups salsa verde, plus more for serving
1 cup heavy cream
4 eggs
Diced red onion
Cilantro
Queso fresco, crumbled

1. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat oil until shimmering. Add about a quarter of the tortilla wedges and cook, flipping once, until lightly brown and crisp.
2. Drain the freshly fried tortilla chips on a paper towel-lined baking sheet. Sprinkle lightly with salt. Repeat this process until all tortillas are fried, adding more oil as needed.
3. Drain oil and wipe skillet. Heat 4 cups salsa verde and heavy cream in the skillet over medium-high heat until warmed through. Add chips and gently stir to coat chips in sauce. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 2 minutes.
4. In another skillet, scramble or fry eggs to your preference.
5. Divide the chilaquiles between four plates and top with eggs. Sprinkle with red onion, cilantro and queso fresco. Serve with additional salsa verde.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Christmas Eve Rice Salad.



Artichoke-Cheese Frittata

WILLIAM P. LOYD
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

I feel strongly that Christmas mornings should be laid-back, meaning coffee, family time, gifts and a delicious breakfast that was prepped in advance.

- 1 tablespoon (1/8 stick) butter, melted
- 6 green onions, diced
- 1/2 cup diced green bell pepper
- 5 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 3–4 slices bread, cubed, divided use
- 3/4 cup shredded cheese (cheddar, Monterey Jack, pepper jack or a combination works well), divided use
- 1 jar marinated artichoke hearts (12 ounces), drained and chopped into bite-size pieces, divided use
- 1 jar diced pimientos (4 ounces), drained, divided use

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 1 1/2-quart baking dish.
2. In a skillet over medium-high heat, cook butter, green onions and bell pepper, stirring occasionally until tender, about 2–3 minutes.
3. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, mustard, salt and onion powder.
4. In the prepared baking dish, layer half the bread, half the onion-pepper mixture, half the cheese, half the artichokes and half the pimientos. Pour half the egg mixture over first layer.
5. Repeat layering with the remaining bread, onion-pepper mixture, cheese,



\$500 WINNER

Cranberry Orange White Chocolate Baked Oatmeal

MELISSA TURLEY
BANDERA EC



Looking for a cozy Christmas breakfast to feed a crowd? This is it. Imagine a holiday buffet table filled with baked oatmeal, bacon, sausage, scrambled eggs and fruit. And invite me because I would drive for hours for this baked oatmeal. The oatmeal can be prepped the day before, refrigerated overnight and baked the next morning.

- 6 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup white chocolate chips
- 2 cups orange juice
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 4 eggs

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a large bowl or stand mixer, combine oats, sugar, baking powder, salt, dried cranberries and white chocolate chips.
3. In another bowl, whisk together orange juice, oil, vanilla and eggs.
4. While mixing on low, slowly add wet ingredients to dry ingredients until thoroughly mixed.
5. Pour into prepared pan and bake 35–40 minutes or until golden brown.

SERVES 10–12

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

MOM'S FAVORITES DUE DEC 10

Everything is better when it's made with love by Mom. What recipe do you remember your mother by? Send us your favorite for a shot at \$500 and a spot in our May issue.

UPCOMING: THE ART OF THE SANDWICH DUE JAN 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPES CONTINUED

artichokes, pimientos and egg mixture.

6. If making in advance, cover and refrigerate. Allow to come to room temperature before baking.

7. Bake 30–40 minutes, until eggs are set and frittata is firm.

SERVES 6

French Toast Bake
With Caramel Banana
Cream Topping

MARIAN EVONIUK
PEDERNALES EC

Brioche coated in a creamy eggy mixture, baked until golden and topped with whipped cream, bananas and caramel is the only gift I want this holiday season.

FRENCH TOAST BAKE

- 6 eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup



- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 loaf brioche, sliced and cubed

TOPPING

- 2 cups heavy cream
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 large bananas, sliced
- Caramel sauce

1. **FRENCH TOAST BAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with butter or cooking spray and set aside.

2. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, 1 cup heavy cream, maple syrup, 1 teaspoon vanilla, lemon juice, cinnamon and salt. Add brioche and stir to coat. Pour into prepared baking dish.

3. Place baking dish on center rack of oven and bake 30–40 minutes, until mixture is set, puffy and light golden brown on top. Tent loosely with foil if top is browning too quickly. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.

4. **TOPPING** In a large bowl, combine 2 cups heavy cream, powdered sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Beat at medium-high until soft peaks form. Set aside.

5. To serve, cut the bake into squares and top with a large dollop of whipped cream, banana slices and a drizzle of caramel sauce.

SERVES 4–6

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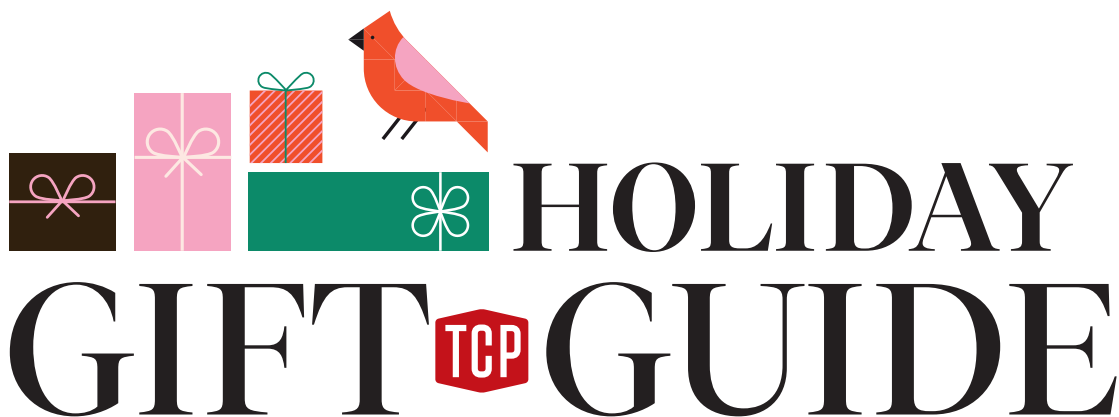
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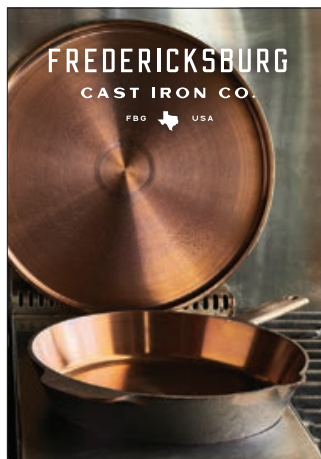
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Slabs of Strudel

The oldest bakery in Texas came from humble beginnings

BY CHET GARNER

I DIDN'T KNOW what to expect from the oldest bakery in Texas, but it certainly wasn't a giant slab of cherry strudel bigger than a roof shingle. And yet that's exactly what I found at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels—along with a line out the door, a heavenly yeasty smell that could lead a blindfolded squirrel to town and a friendly cashier who was happy to explain the unfamiliar pastries laid out before me.

Founded in 1868, the bakery was started by a man named Edouard Naegelin who emigrated from eastern France, arriving in town with a sack of flour and less than a dollar in his pocket.

For more than 155 years, it has kept the town outside San Antonio well-supplied with loaves of fresh bread, cakes and an assortment of European cookies I could barely pronounce. Pfeffernüse, anyone? But the undeniable star of the show was their homemade strudel, coming in apple, cherry and peach with buttery layers so soft you could use it as a pillow.

Inside, the décor is a delightful cross between a German Alpine lodge and grandma's kitchen circa 1952. In the name of "research," I ordered almost everything: kolache (both fruit and sausage), cinnamon rolls, danishes, lebkuchen, springerle, and each flavor of strudel.

I sat at one of the small tables outside and proceeded to make every one of my fingers sticky with icing and every thread of my shirt dusted with powdered sugar. It was a badge of honor earned in a pastry-filled battle of the bulge. In the end, the strudel won, but it was worth it.

Whether you're a hungry local, a curious traveler or an overambitious pastry juggler, Naegelin's is here to welcome you with open arms just like it has for generations. ■

ABOVE Chet's eyes are bigger than his stomach at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels.

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.

DECEMBER

7

San Antonio Cowboy Christmas, (210) 299-4499, briscoemuseum.org

Waxahachie [7, 12-14] Bethlehem Revisited, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

Port Lavaca [7, 12-14, 19-21, 26-28] Nativity Exhibit, (361) 935-8032, bit.ly/nativityexhibit

9

Lufkin The Texas Tenors: Deep in the Heart of Christmas, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

11

El Paso Los Murales de Segundo Barrio, (915) 533-0048, tomlea.com

Marshall [11, 19] Fireside Feast: Cooking Up History at Maplecroft, (903) 935-3044, visitstarrfamilyhome.com

12

Kyle [12-14] A Night in Bethlehem, (512) 268-7044, f-pc.org

Smithville [12-14, 19-22] Dinah 4 Christmas, (512) 304-0666, dinah4.com

13

Bastrop Historic Homes Tour, (512) 303-0904, bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Burnet Christmas on the Square, (512) 756-4297, burnetchamber.org

Chappell Hill Teddy Bear Parade, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

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

Waxahachie [13-14] Historic Waxahachie Christmas Tour of Homes, historicwaxahachie.com

Corsicana CelloVoci, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

Richardson Rocky Mountain High Experience: A John Denver Christmas, (972) 744-4650, eisemanncenter.com

Levelland [19-21] Christmas Cash Classic, (806) 786-8683, facebook.com/christmascashclassic

Brenham Top of the World, A Carpenters Christmas, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Fairfield Jingle All the Way, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Grapevine The Nuttier Cracker, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

Eastland New Year's Eve Casino Night, (254) 631-0437, eastlandcountymuseum.com

Palestine Dash & Splash 5K, (903) 729-3139, palestineymca.org

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1 SCOTT BOWMAN
PEDERNALES EC

"Young mini-Nubian goats enjoy breakfast in the barn."

2 AMY BOGS
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

"One of our calves got a little too excited about the new hay and wedged himself between two bales."

3 KYLE BIGGERSTAFF
LIGHTHOUSE EC

"Hayden Biggerstaff and Jude the cow dog finish pushing cattle to a new pasture at sunset in Crosby County."

4 CAROLYN GULLY
PEDERNALES EC

"My great-granddaughter, Leighton Gully, and her friend, Annabelle, take a break on the farm."



Upcoming Contests

GATES DUE DEC 10

CAUGHT NAPPING DUE JAN 10

MAKING A SPLASH DUE FEB 10



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TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Country Life photos from readers.



Our Kind of Weird

The best Christmas mornings include a one-of-a-kind family dish

BY SHANE TORNO
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KACHIK

I SUPPOSE EVERY FAMILY has a favorite dish—a meal with special significance. In my family’s case, we had a special meal that my mom, the one who did the cooking in our house, didn’t care for. I wonder if this is common.

The meal was a breakfast dish known to us as biscuits and pudding. In my youth, I believed that this was unique to my family since everyone I ever asked about it had never heard of such a thing.

However, just recently I learned that the meal is actually known in the rural south as biscuits and chocolate gravy.

To be sure, the chocolate pudding we used was stove-cooked and served hot, so calling it chocolate gravy makes sense. My online research tells me that the dish has its origins in the Great Depression, when powdered cocoa

became readily available as a baking product. There are origin stories associated with Appalachia, the Tennessee Valley, western Oklahoma and Arkansas.

I have no idea how it could have come into contact with a German family settling in Dime Box in Central Texas and then relocating to deep South Texas.

Ignorant of any of this history, I enjoyed this breakfast whenever my father could convince my mom to get up early and prepare it.

A few tips if you decide to try this yourself on a cold morning. The biscuits need to be buttermilk with a consistent texture all the way through, not the canned biscuits that produce lots of flaky individual layers. Those flaky layers make eating the pudding-covered biscuits a messy and unappealing operation. Also, the meal is best when both the biscuits and the pudding are served hot.

Grab a couple (or three) biscuits and cut them in half so you have the biscuits lying open-faced. Add a pat of butter to each biscuit half and then douse with the pudding. As the butter melts under the hot pudding, it liquefies and seeps through the pudding to create some beautiful yellow puddles.

If you have a sweet tooth, this will beat the best biscuits and gravy meal you have ever had.

As I said, my mom didn’t care for the meal, possibly because it was passed down from my father’s family. Or maybe because she didn’t like getting up early to bake on Christmas morning. To her credit, she made them well (as did her mom, my dad’s mom and my Aunt Joy).

On those special mornings when they were available, we all made big plates of it while Mom stood back and ate her biscuit with jelly like a normal human. If you listened carefully above the racket of forks on plates, you might even hear her mutter something about a bunch of weirdos. ■

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