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January 2026



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06 Tiny Dots on a Big Map

Every town in Texas has a story to tell, if you just stop and listen.

*By Carlton Stowers
Illustrations by Elly Walton*

Sites and Insights

Youth Tour sends teens to Washington, D.C., where bonds form and horizons expand.

By Claire Stevens

ON THE COVER
The signs pointing the way to local treasures are everywhere if you pay attention.

Illustration by Elly Walton

ABOVE

From left, Austin Rees, Jolie Cox and Hannah Thetford represent United Cooperative Services at the U.S. Capitol during the 2025 Youth Tour.

Photo by Samantha Bryant / TEC

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As told by Ron Russell to Anna Russell



Strongly Scottish

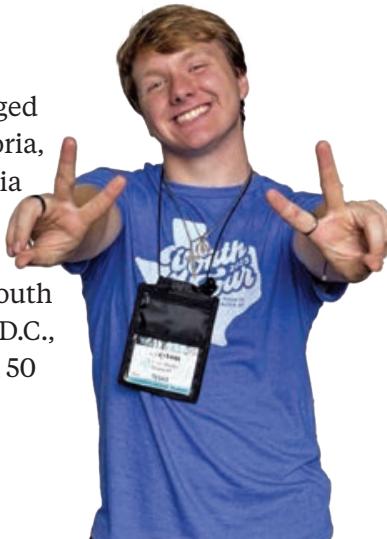
THE OBSERVATIONS ESSAY on Page 34, *Fortune Knocks*, sent us down a rabbit hole about Scots and Scottish traditions, where we learned that Highland games are a hallmark of Scottish gatherings, as are kilts, bagpipes and dancing.

One of the oldest and largest gatherings in Texas takes place every November in Salado, between Waco and Austin. The competitions tend to involve heaving heavy objects, including something called a caber, which looks very much like a power pole. Contestants hold the caber, which can be up to 22 feet long and 200 pounds, upright from the bottom and flip it forward. The goal is for it to land upright then fall forward.

For the record, electric cooperatives prefer their poles remain upright and lodged firmly in the ground.

120,085

The number of steps logged by Layton Shadle of Victoria, right, a delegate of Victoria Electric Cooperative, during his eight-day Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., last June. That's between 50 and 60 miles.



TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

The Art of the Sandwich

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Caught Napping

RECOMMENDED READING

Twenty years ago we looked into the artifacts at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin, including the scrawled words in a reporter's notebook that launched the Watergate investigation. Download the January 2006 issue at TexasCoopPower.com.



ENTER ONLINE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I would love to have dinner with ...

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 November prompt: **Changing our clocks twice a year is ...**

Something my dogs just never understand.

JULEY WELCH
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
FAIRVIEW

An opportunity for me to see the beautiful sunlight an extra hour in the spring and sleep an extra hour in the fall.

CONSUELO M. PEREZ
MEDINA EC
ZAPATA COUNTY

A great reminder to change the batteries in your fire detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.

CATHY MARTEL
SAM HOUSTON EC
LIVINGSTON

About as useless as a screen door on a submarine.

CODY HOOPER
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
FAIRVIEW

Visit our website to see more responses.



RAUL ARIAS

OCTOBER 2025 On the Dots

“Memories of traveling in the 1950s: My brothers and I took naps but wanted to be awakened to see the polka-dot house in Buna.”

LINDA BELL
CECA
COMANCHE

Good Food, Good Cause

Frito pies have been the gourmet dish of choice in countless Texas stadiums and arenas—chili and chips served on chilly nights by Rotarians, band parents and electric co-op members to raise money for countless important community projects [*It's in the Bag*, September 2025].

Ken Roselle
Wise EC
Decatur

Yodeler's Lore

My dad, born in 1925, and his siblings grew up listening to Jimmie Rodgers [*The Fast Track*, July 2025]. In the '60s, my siblings and I listened to his music on the record player. *T for Texas* comes to mind when I think about those Saturdays and the yodeling we would try to mimic.

Kathy Parker
Pedernales EC
Dripping Springs

My heart sank when the author mentions Cash, Haggard and Tubb and not one mention of Jim Reeves. Reeves was born and raised in Texas. His name carries weight as well.

Carol Racey
Deep East Texas EC
Joaquin

A Tea for Texas

As I told my husband about the interesting *History in a Box* [August 2025], he informed me that he'd visited that very museum years ago. I then immediately remembered the souvenir box that he brought me filled with teas similar to those destroyed.

The information included with the box had the story of the Robinson Half Chest, though it failed to mention the Texas connection.

Ann Fincannon
Pedernales EC
Marble Falls



COURTESY RODGERS FAMILY LEGACY

TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

Texas Co-op Power

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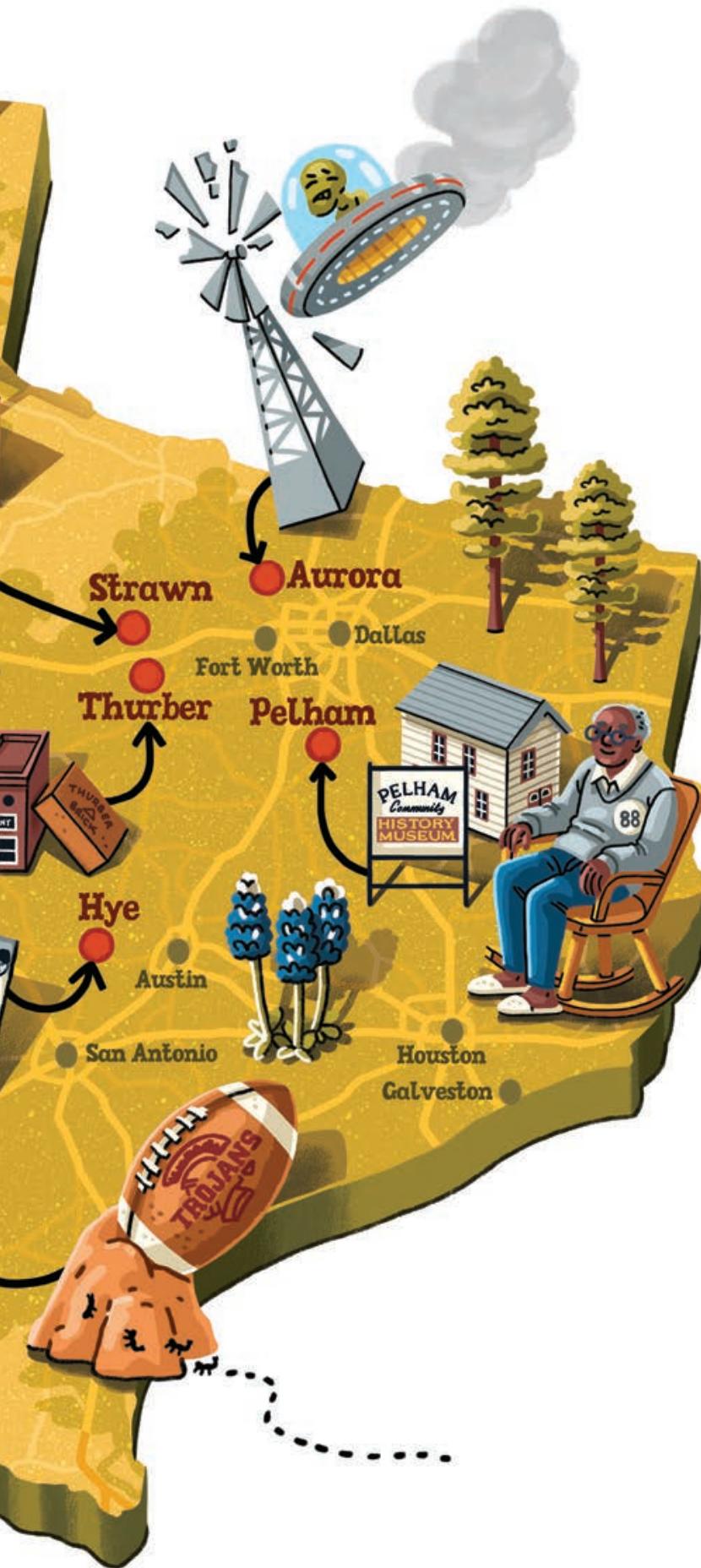


BY CARLTON STOWERS
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLY WALTON

Every town in Texas has a story to tell, if you just stop and listen

Even lifelong Texans haven't heard of many of these towns. They are hidden along isolated country roads, mostly forgotten, without stoplights, traffic jams or shopping malls. Truth be told, they have precious little reason for "being" aside from the fact that those who call them home wouldn't trade for all the big-city comforts you might offer. And they each have stories to tell—colorful, poignant and fascinating.

The following are a few of the favorite stops I've made over the years while wandering the state's back roads in search of yet another tale to tell.



Pelham
Navarro County
Population 35

A FORMER FREEDMEN COMMUNITY

WHEN I MET HIM in 2012, 88-year-old Alfred Martin, the self-appointed town historian, lived across FM 744 from what was once the school he attended as a boy. Aside from the time he spent as a flight line crew member for the legendary Tuskegee Airmen during World War II, this was Martin's home.

He could recall when the state's last remaining all-Black community boasted a grocery, dry goods store, church, post office and a population of more than 300. Pelham even had an amateur baseball team that brought home a state championship.

Asked the current ages of his neighbors, Martin smiled and began pointing in the direction of their houses and counting: "Let's see ... 88, 93, 85 ..." Pelham, he admitted, wasn't likely to make it much longer.

When the Emancipation Proclamation freed the nation's slaves following the Civil War, each Black man in town was given 200 acres to call his own. Fields were cleared and tilled, cotton and grain planted, and new lives thrived.

Now, however, the community's well-tended cemetery is the resting place of the majority of past Pelham residents. The aging memorabilia and family histories housed in the school-turned-museum keep alive the memories of better days.

Hye
Blanco County
Population 100

THE ALL-BROTHERS BASEBALL TEAM

INSIDE THE COMBINED Hye General Store and Post Office, a fading black-and-white photo hangs proudly behind the checkout counter. Nine Deike brothers, dressed in spanking new baseball uniforms, smiling for the camera.

It was snapped during the Depression doldrums when leisure time was as scarce as spending money. An endless routine of work awaited on the farms and at the cotton gin. Only on Sundays did the residents take time off to watch their baseball team play rivals from nearby rural communities.

It was called town ball, and it was generally played on makeshift diamonds carved from pastureland. The preacher would even cut his sermon short so members of his congregation wouldn't miss the first pitch.

Only Hye, 60 miles west of Austin, could field nine players from the same family. Fourteen-year-old Victor was the youngest; brother Edwin, 34, was the oldest. That's not to say they weren't occasionally joined by nonfamily members. Regularly, a lanky first baseman named Lyndon Baines Johnson would drive over from nearby Johnson City.

In 1935, a traveling salesman learned about the Deike brothers and hit on a can't-miss promotional idea. If he could find another all-family team, his Corpus Christi-based Nueces Coffee Co. would promote an exhibition game deciding the All-Brothers Baseball Championship.

Indeed, an opponent was found in Waukegan, Illinois. There, the Stanczak clan had 10 brothers on the same team.

The game would be played in Wichita, Kansas. Provided with their first uniforms and travel expenses, the Deikes made the 14-day trip to Kansas in two Model A Fords. The Stanczaks arrived by bus.

Alas, a perfect ending to the Hye brothers' story wasn't to be. Though they took an early 3-0 lead, the more talented Waukegan team eventually won 11-5. Today, it is their picture on display in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

Still, for the Texas farm boys, it was a time that would long be remembered. A special time, right up there with the day President Johnson came back for a visit to stand in front of Levi Deike's post office and swear in Lawrence O'Brien as the new U.S. postmaster general.



Thurber
Erath County
Population 48

WHEN EVEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN

IN THE LATE 1800S, Thurber was the most populous town between Fort Worth and El Paso, boasting 10,000 residents. Today, travelers hurrying along Interstate 20 see only a solitary smokestack standing watch over its history.

The only reason to stop is for the home cooking served at Andrea Bennett's red brick Smokestack Restaurant. Inside, the walls are lined with photographs from another time, back when her restaurant was the local mercantile and the townspeople were mining 3,000 tons of bituminous coal and firing 80,000 bricks daily.

Workers and their families came to live in the small frame houses provided by the Texas & Pacific Coal Co. There was a school, a 650-seat opera house, general store, fire station, churches, a weekly newspaper, library, hotel, and a human-made lake for fishing and swimming.

The Thurber baseball team, made up of miners, won the 1896 Texas amateur championship. Each summer a traveling circus came to town.

Thurber bricks were used to build the Galveston seawall and pave many of Fort Worth's early streets. Its coal kept the trains running and homes heated.

Though the exact date isn't official, Thurber died in 1936. The oil boom was the killer, its black gold replacing coal as the nation's favored fuel. The mines began closing, and workers scattered in search of new jobs. The frame houses they had called home were sold off for \$40 each to anyone willing to haul them away.

Now all that remains are the ghost stories, the nostalgic pictures on Bennett's restaurant walls and the nearby 100-year-old town doctor's house where she lives.

O'Donnell
Lynn County
Population 704

WHEN HOSS WAS JUST A COLT

IT IS TRADITION, you know, for small towns to alert passersby to the fact they were once home to somebody famous. Billboards are the favored tool. Even little Abbott had one to remind travelers that it was country music legend Willie Nelson's hometown until, hoping to regain a sense of privacy, he set fire to the sign late one boozy night.

To my dismay the Panhandle community of O'Donnell, just south of Lubbock, had not gotten around to any side-of-the-road celebration of its favorite son.

Back in the *Bonanza* heyday, *TV Guide* expressed interest in learning how this cotton crop way-stop had groomed famed actor Dan Blocker to become the good ol' boy Hoss Cartwright on the popular TV show. I hit the road.

And the townspeople were ever so obliging. Seemed almost everyone I bumped into went to school with Blocker, played football with him, fought with or dated him. Even those who didn't know him firsthand insisted they were faithful viewers of his portrayal of Hoss every Sunday.

Yet friend and farmer Wayne Carroll admitted Blocker's TV role puzzled him. "It's kind of hard to picture Dan on the *Ponderosa*," he said. "Farming and ranching never interested him. He was the guy we all went to for help with our lessons, always studying or reading a book."

His mother, Mary, agreed: "One Christmas we got him a horse and saddle, but he really wasn't interested. After a while, we sold the horse."

When her son didn't have his nose in a book, he worked weekends at his dad's Blocker Grocery & Market. On Friday

nights, he was a standout lineman and kicker for the O'Donnell Eagles. The only kid in town who could lift the rear end of a '47 Plymouth, his strength and size (already 6 feet tall and 200 pounds by age 13) earned him a scholarship to play for what was then Sul Ross State College in Alpine.

Once Blocker earned his degree, his life's goal was to become a teacher. He did teach for a time in high schools in New Mexico. But then Hollywood and the fictional *Ponderosa* beckoned.

Rest assured, Blocker never forgot his roots and came to visit regularly. At the height of his acting career, he even made an appearance at the annual O'Donnell Rodeo. "Biggest crowd we ever had," recalls boyhood pal Bobby Clark.

With the exception of cotton crops, I learned that conversation is O'Donnell's main byproduct. And the easiest way for a stranger to be assured a generous helping of the latter is to bring up the name Dan Blocker.

"There was once some talk about a billboard," Clark says, "but the more we thought about it, the more convinced we were that Dan wouldn't care much for the idea."

Aurora
Wise County
Population 1,390

LONG BEFORE ROSWELL

THE STORY WAS right there on the front page of *The Dallas Morning News* in April 1897, so it had to be true, right?

S. E. Haydon, the paper's longtime correspondent, had written of an "airship" that flew over the North Texas community of Aurora before crashing into Judge Proctor's windmill and exploding. Aluminum-like debris, Haydon wrote, was scattered everywhere, destroying the judge's water tank and ruining his prized flower garden.

Bear in mind, this report was filed a decade before the Wright brothers got their rickety plane off the ground at Kitty Hawk and predated, by half a century, that famous Roswell, New Mexico, report of the ranchland UFO crash that became the gold standard of otherworldly tales.

And the Aurora story got even better. The child-sized pilot of the craft had been killed in the crash, and kind citizens of the community saw to it that he was given a proper burial in the nearby cemetery the following day. The grave was marked by a large rock featuring a quickly sketched image of "a cigar-shaped ship with three circular windows."

Today a historical marker stands at the entrance to the cemetery, recalling the event.

Is the recounting true or false? People have been asking for over a century. Some say Haydon had a habit of telling whoppers when there was no real news to report and he just invented the spaceman's visit.

But as late as 1973, an aviation journalist named Bill Case visited the community and tracked down a 98-year-old local who recalled visiting the crash site as a child, even viewing the "torn-up body" of the spacecraft's pilot.

At the time, the makeshift headstone was still in place. Case even took a picture of it. But soon after his article was published, the marker vanished. Today, no one in Aurora is certain of the exact location of the infamous grave.

Legendary investigative reporter Jim Marrs, who spent his career researching the strange and spooky, says he was, for years, "undecided" on the matter. In time, however, he found the story compelling enough to produce a full-length documentary on the alleged crash.

"What ultimately got me off-center on the matter," he says, "was seeing the actual edition of the paper in which Haydon's story was published. It wasn't even the lead story that day. Among numerous accounts of strange sightings was one from nearby Stephenville, headlined The Great Aerial Wanderer. In all, the newspaper published 16 stories about UFO sightings that day, from as far south as Austin and north into Oklahoma."

Something, he was convinced, really did happen in Aurora.



Strawn
Palo Pinto County
Population 540

MAGIC AT MARY'S CAFE

NEITHER A FOOD CRITIC nor avowed foodie, fine dining and haute cuisine are foreign to my vocabulary. That said, it is my humble opinion that the Michelin Guide folks have missed a bet. Or maybe they just have something against chicken-fried steak.

In the tiny hamlet of Strawn, just 90 minutes southwest of Dallas, is the mother church of the popular comfort food. At Mary's Cafe every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas, the service station-turned-eatery is jam-packed. The gravel parking lot is filled with traveling biker clubs, church groups or a busload of young athletes in search of a post-game meal.

Owner Mary Tretter estimates that over 90% of her customers are from out of town, arriving from as far away as New Mexico, Colorado and Georgia. Some come wearing the Mary's Cafe T-shirts they purchased on a previous visit.

And while the menu is lengthy and varied, it is the king-sized chicken-fried steak with a bowl of cream gravy and a mound of french fries that is most often requested. Annually, Tretter orders over 48,000 pounds of cutlets that are pounded, floured and cooked into her signature dish.

But don't bother asking for the recipe. It is so heavily guarded that she requires her 30 employees to sign a non-disclosure agreement before stepping into her kitchen. All she will admit is that her chicken-fried steaks are cooked on a flat-iron griddle rather than heavily battered and actually fried.

Tretter was 14 when she started working there as a waitress and dishwasher. The place was known as the Polka Dot then and was struggling mightily. The local bank, preparing to take it over, asked Tretter if she might be interested in buying it. At the time she was neither business savvy nor much of a cook but bought the little 89-seat restaurant. That was in 1986.

She changed the name, hired a staff and went to work. In her fourth decade of ownership, seating capacity is 300—and getting a table isn't without a little wait.

And Tretter gives "hands-on" new meaning. She takes Wednesdays off to spend time with her grandkids. The rest of the week she's in the kitchen cooking or out on the floor, greeting customers and taking orders.

"Our goal," she says, "is simple: Fill the plate with good food, make it look nice and keep the customers happy. If they leave here hungry, it's their fault."

Asherton
Dimmit County
Population 722

FLEETING VICTORY

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED the scene in the movie *The Big Chill* when a reporter explains that he'd just been assigned to do a feature on a blind baton twirler. When asked where in the world such story ideas come from, he shrugs and answers, "Just good investigative reporting."

Personally, I prefer the magic of dumb luck.

To wit: I was awaiting a flight home from Houston, reading the sports section of the local paper, when a small item caught my eye. Asherton High School, it noted, had just won its first basketball game in years. The final sentence added that the same school's football team currently owned the nation's longest losing streak.

Two things immediately occurred to me. First, I had to figure out where Asherton was. Second, what publication would be interested in a story on such a historically hapless team?

The editor of *Parade* magazine bit, and I was soon off to deep South Texas. By the time I arrived, the Trojans had lost 40 football games in a row. A few years earlier, they had endured an entire season without scoring a single point.

Yet what I found was light-years from what I'd expected. A migrant worker community, it was virtually deserted since most families had not yet returned home from following the northern harvests.



The school was in disrepair, jagged cracks in its old brick walls, the 500-seat stadium in worse shape. There was little grass and a huge ant bed spread across the 50-yard line. The scoreboard was a hand-me-down, donated by neighboring Carrizo Springs. A 24-year-old teacher, Terry Harlin, who never played the game, had agreed to coach since no one else wanted the job. School officials agreed to add \$600 to his salary for the extra work.

Thus, the story was not one of laughable ineptness but, rather, a courageous quest against impossible odds.

Readers took the plight of the Trojans to heart. Envelopes bearing small donations began arriving from across the nation. A Houston sporting goods company donated shoulder pads and helmets. Inmates of a Georgia prison adopted Asherton as "their team."

And in the first game of the 1972 season, Asherton won, defeating rival Crystal City 12-6. A film crew, dispatched from a Houston TV station, was there to record the historic event.

The cheers, however, didn't last. In 1999 the Texas Education Agency ordered Asherton High to close, citing its troubled history of financial insolvency. The students bade their old school goodbye and enrolled in the nearby Carrizo Springs Independent School District.

• • •

THERE ARE ENDLESS other nifty towns, like Study Butte, home of the last one-room school in Texas; Luckenbach, where legendary owner-mayor Hondo Crouch held court; Terlingua and its annual chili cook-off; and Cisco, where Conrad Hilton bought his first hotel and Santa Claus robbed the bank.

Get out your map. ■



Youth Tour sends teens to Washington, D.C., where bonds form and horizons expand

SITES *and* INSIGHTS

BY CLAIRE STEVENS

On the drive from her home outside Kerrville to a hotel in Austin, high school junior Ella Robbins had butterflies. She was excited about her upcoming adventure, for sure.

"But I was mostly nervous," Robbins says. "I didn't know anybody, and I was really nervous about what people were going to think of me and just self-conscious."

The nerves lingered as she arrived and checked in June 15, 2025, for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C. Everyone was friendly, Robbins recalls, though some teens kept to themselves, scrolling on their phones. But the 143 strangers were all about to board the same flight to the nation's capital, where everything would change.

In D.C., Robbins marveled at the towering stained-glass windows of the National Cathedral and felt awe when she

looked out from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and saw the reflection of the Washington Monument. But what really changed her trip was the second day, when she found herself in a bus seat across from Sierra Nickel of Uvalde.

"As soon as I started talking to her, it was really great," Robbins says. She can't quite remember what they talked about in that first conversation where they clicked so easily, maybe Taylor Swift—who else?—but the two became fast friends. Robbins soon found herself getting lost in the excitement and packed schedule of the trip, frequently with Nickel at her side.

"I kind of stopped worrying about what people were thinking of me," Robbins says.

For 60 years, electric cooperatives across Texas have sent high school students to Washington for this all-expenses-paid

week of sightseeing and learning. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience in which little moments—like that one on the bus—lead to unexpected memories and friendships.

With growing confidence, Robbins, sent by Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, and her new friend, sent by Medina Electric Cooperative, explored the monuments and memorials of the National Mall, museums and Capitol Hill. At the Capitol, Robbins was able to do what she'd come here for.

In U.S. Rep. August Pfluger's office, Robbins got a peek into the day-to-day functions of a congressional office.

She wanted to ask about the process of applying for disability insurance and legislation relating to service dogs. The topic was close to her heart—her father is blind and uses a guide dog. She was concerned about his difficulty securing resources and the hostility he sometimes faces when bringing his dog into public spaces. At the Capitol, she shared her ideas with one of Pfluger's aides.

"He was actually interested in having a conversation, and that was really nice. I was informing him of some

OPPOSITE Students representing five electric cooperatives at the National Mall on their first day in Washington, D.C. Fifty-eight Texas co-ops sent teens on Youth Tour.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Texas students participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Ella Robbins from Heart of Texas EC holds up her Youth Tour challenge coin, which students were awarded for going above and beyond.



CLAIRE STEVENS | TEC



SAMANTHA BRYANT | TEC

things, and he was telling me more about the legislative side," Robbins says. "He says they try and pass lots and lots of bills, and occasionally they'll just get one or two. It's just a very difficult process. I didn't realize."

That was one learning opportunity among many. Some students sat down with and heard from survivors at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Participants had the opportunity to obtain a library card at the Library of Congress, visited George Washington's home at Mount Vernon and danced together in front of the White House.

On the last day in D.C., they toured Arlington National Cemetery, where they witnessed a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"That was one of the reasons I wanted to go, was to honor our fallen soldiers who didn't get recognized," says James Bell of Aspermont, one of four Texas students selected to lay the wreath. "My great-grandparents were buried at the Arlington cemetery, so that was awesome, to have that much of an honor to do that where they're buried."

The cemetery requires silence at the tomb, a memorial for fallen U.S. soldiers whose remains have not been identified. In a solemn ceremony, Bell and the three other students stepped in sync with one of the tomb's guards before placing a wreath of red and white flowers in front of the marble monument.

"Laying the wreath was amazing," says Bell, who was sponsored by Big Country Electric Cooperative. Watching Bell was his brother, Jack, who had gone on the tour two years before, and his uncle, a retired Army chief warrant officer, both of whom unexpectedly showed up at the ceremony. "It was a really big surprise."

By the time the teens boarded the flight home, the early nerves were nowhere to be seen. No longer strangers, they left with unexpected bonds that span the state.

"My favorite part—it sounds cliché—it's the people," says Eli Felcman, a delegate from Concho Valley Electric Cooperative. "I met lifelong friends." ■

Ready To Hit the Road?

For more information on Youth Tour and how you can apply, contact your electric cooperative.

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Policy Form #SRTCV/SRTCV RI3 or RI7, or #SRTCV90MA in MA

\$30,000 Children's Life Insurance

- Rates are based on your children's or grandchildren's present age and never increase for any reason.
- Monthly rates as low as \$2.17.
- Benefits will NEVER be reduced or canceled if premiums are paid on time.
- Give your children a financial head start right now. Your policy builds CASH VALUE for your family's needs.

Policy Form #GWL2001 or GWLA001

(Offer may vary, \$100,000 coverage not available in all states.)

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CEO

HERBERT "TREY"
GREBE III

Medina EC Promises Continued Improvement in 2026

A NEW YEAR BRINGS a renewed focus on continued improvement at Medina Electric Cooperative. We're committed to serving our members and empowering our community through reliable, affordable and safe electricity. To achieve this, we're investing in significant changes to our facilities, infrastructure and workforce; enhancing member resources; and optimizing our operations. These strategic initiatives will strengthen our infrastructure, improve service delivery and help us to better power our members for years to come.

For Medina County members who visit our Hondo area office, you've likely noticed ongoing construction. This work, which began in late 2024 and will continue through 2026, is part of a board-approved plan to build a new warehouse and remodel the office. As Medina County grows, so do our needs. The office remodel will optimize our workspace allowing us to better serve our growing membership with a larger, more efficient space.

In an effort to better serve our southern members and growth in the Laredo area, we are actively continuing our search to acquire property and eventually build a larger yard for our crew and materials.

This year, we'll continue the deployment of our state-of-the-art supervisory control and data acquisition system. This in-house solution will improve our operations by enabling faster fault detection, contribute to quicker restoration times, and provide advanced analytics to proactively identify potential issues. Additionally, by allowing remote control of circuit breakers and other equipment, we'll enhance safety for our linemen, first responders and the public as well as improve overall system reliability. This multi-year project benefits our members with a more robust and local electric system.

To match the cooperative's continued growth and efficiency, we are adding seven new positions to our team. These additional positions will help ensure we maintain reliability and better service to our members.

As part of our commitment to reliable service, we'll inspect over 20,000 poles in 2026 and replace almost 1,100 from our 2025 inspections that didn't meet our quality standards. With over 150,000 poles supporting our network, regular inspections and replacements are crucial for maintaining system integrity.

Additionally, our vegetation management program will clear the rights-of-way along nearly 500 miles of lines, mitigating risks from hazardous trees and other vegetation. This proactive approach enhances both reliability and safety.

This year will also be a year of internal change for the cooperative, as a few of our tenured employees leave to enjoy their retirement and we restructure to better serve our members and employees.

One of the biggest changes is the formation of the new Member Relations department. This new department, led by Katie Haby, will bring together communications, member services, and business development and key accounts into a single, cohesive unit. For members, this provides a unified approach to member support, community outreach, and service innovation. Whether you're calling with a question, seeing us at a community event, or discussing service for a large facility, the experience will be more seamless and member-focused. These are not new teams, just a new structure to bridge their departments.

Our team works hard to consider the focus for each year as we develop business objectives and strategies to achieve them. Some efforts are more visible—like replacing poles and clearing rights-of-way—and others happen behind the scenes—like department restructures and hiring new employees. Our plans for the future are always geared toward providing safe and reliable energy while exceeding member expectations in everything we do.

Until next time,
Trey Grebe



SHANMUGAM | iSTOCK; VECTORART | iSTOCK

Passing the Torch and Celebrating Promotions

AS MEDINA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S CEO mentioned on page 16, 2026 will mark a significant internal change as a few of our tenured employees retire. There will be internal restructuring, the creation of the new Member Relations department, and promotions that allow movement into vacant roles.

In the first couple months of the year, these five employees will be passing the torch here at Medina EC and taking their combined 176 years of experience with them. Learn more about their advice and experiences at the co-op below.

We also want to congratulate Katie Haby and Armando Castillo on their promotions that took effect January 1.

Retirees



DERLY CARRIZALES
Safety Manager
Bruni office | 43 Years

What was your proudest moment or achievement while working at Medina EC? *My proudest moment working at Medina EC was being awarded the Ray Pantel award because it involved the history of my parents and family being in the industry and allowing me to carry that tradition in a positive way.*



CINDY FEW
Member Services Representative
Dilley office | 37 Years

What wisdom or piece of advice about Medina EC, the industry, or life would you most want to pass on to the next generation of employees? *Just keep coming back to work each day, and before you know, it will be your time to retire!*

What will you miss the most when you are enjoying retirement? *Helping members and co-op family to exceed their expectations.*



PATTI TAYLOR
Chief Administrative Officer
Corporate office | 27 Years

What is the biggest change or advancement in your time at Medina EC? *Transferring of the Pearsall Power Plant assets to STEC and sole sourcing our warehousing/inventory through TEC. Oh, and technology! There was only a hand full of employees who had computers when I started. Fast forward to today where every employee has individual computers!*

Promotions



KATIE HABY
Chief Member Relations Officer
Corporate office | 12 Years

"I have loved working at Medina EC over the last 12 years, and I am grateful for the opportunity to continue that work in this new role. I truly believe that our mission of exceeding member expectations in everything we do matters, and I look forward to building on the good things happening in the business development, communications and member service representative departments."



RETIREE FROM LEFT: ACE GAUCIN, DERLY CARRIZALES, JOE FLORES, PATTI TAYLOR, CINDY FEW AND OSCAR CHAPAPOSE FOR ONE LAST PHOTO TOGETHER BEFORE RETIRING IN 2026. GAUCIN WILL RETIRE LATER IN 2026, WHILE THE REST WILL RETIRE IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY.



OSCAR CHAPA
Manager of Southern Region Operations
Bruni office | 37 Years

How do you feel you grew or changed personally during your time here?

I learned what it truly means to serve a community. Medina Electric Cooperative isn't just a power company, it belongs to the people it serves. Seeing how seriously everyone takes that responsibility changed how I think about purpose and work. I became more community-minded, more patient and more focused on the long-term impact of decisions.



JOE FLORES
Journeyman
Uvalde office | 32 Years

What wisdom or piece of advice about Medina EC, the industry, or life would you most want to pass on to the next generation of employees? *My advice to the next generation is to always stay alert and watch over each other. You are your brother's keeper. Stay alert and work safe.*

As you transition into retirement, what are you most excited to finally have the time to do? *I am excited to spend time with my grandkids and enjoy the outdoors.*



ARMANDO CASTILLO
Manager of Southern Region Operations
Laredo office | 21 Years

"I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Manager of Southern Region Operations. I am eager to make a significant contribution to our teams' success and to collaborate with other departments not only to meet but exceed our members' expectations and achieve exceptional results."

Secure Your SmartHub Account

IN RESPONSE TO INCREASING SECURITY THREATS, Medina Electric Cooperative has implemented two-factor authentication (2FA) for your SmartHub billing and payment system. This added security step is the most effective way to prevent unauthorized access to your account, even if your password is compromised by phishing attacks or other means.

2FA requires you to provide two forms of verification—your password plus a unique, time-sensitive code—before logging in. We strongly encourage all members to enroll today.

Set Up 2FA on SmartHub

Setting up two-factor authentication is a fast, easy way to protect your account information.

- 1. Log In to SmartHub:** Access your Medina EC SmartHub account either through the mobile app or the website portal.
- 2. Navigate to Security Settings:** Look for the *My Profile* or *Security Settings* section within your account dashboard.
- 3. Find the 2FA Option:** Locate and select the *Two-Factor Authentication* or *Manage Security* option.
- 4. Select Your Verification Method:** You will be prompted to choose how you want to receive your unique login code. The most common options are:
 - Text Message (SMS).** A code is sent to your registered mobile phone number.
 - Email.** A code is sent to your registered email address.

- 5. Confirm and Activate:** Follow the final on-screen prompts. You may be required to enter a test code immediately to verify the method works.

Note: Once 2FA is active, every time you log into SmartHub, you will enter your username and password, then immediately receive and enter a unique code sent to your chosen verification method. This simple step makes it significantly more difficult for cybercriminals to compromise your account.

If you have any questions about setting up 2FA or SmartHub or require assistance, please contact Medina EC at 1-866-632-3532 or Info@MedinaEC.org.

Do You Have a Medical Need for Electricity?

IF SOMEONE IN YOUR HOME depends on an electrically operated health aid, your account should be listed on Medina EC's Critical Care Registry. To be added, fill out the form at MedinaEC.org/Registry and attach a physician's directive or prescription.

Accounts on this list are notified before planned outages and are flagged as a priority for restoration during unplanned outages. It does not guarantee uninterrupted electrical service, will not prevent you from losing power during forced statewide outages and will not keep your meter from being disconnected for nonpayment. Outages are unavoidable and occur for reasons outside the cooperative's control.

Individuals who rely on life-support equipment should have an emergency plan, including a place to go in the event of an extended power outage, and should consider obtaining backup equipment, such as a generator and any necessary fuel or a battery backup system. You can learn more about the requirements to connect a generator to our system at MedinaEC.org/Generators.

Now Accepting Applications for Sharing Success Grant Program

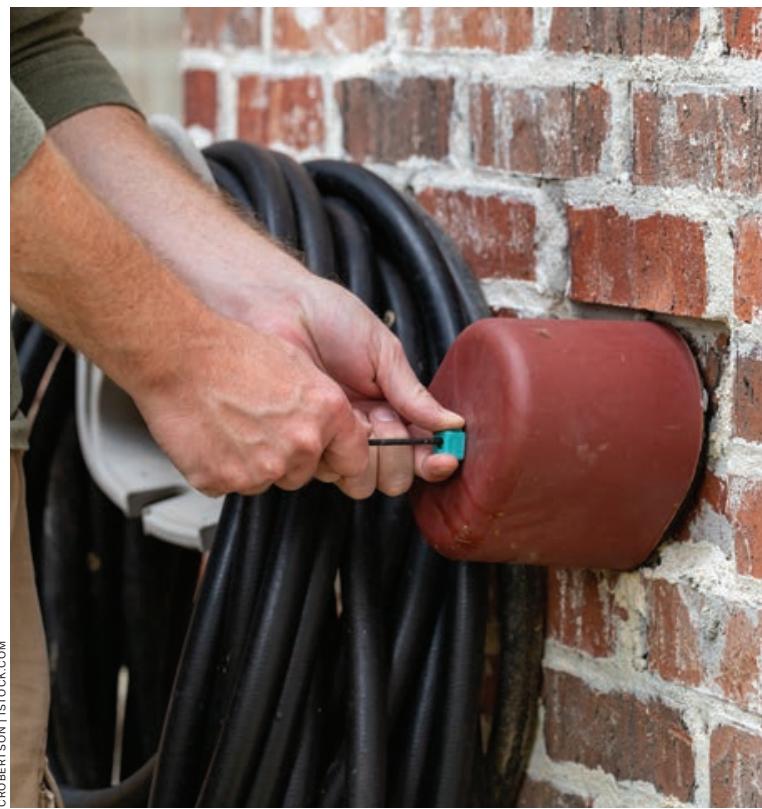
MEDINA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE IS NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS and nominations from members and non-profit organizations for the annual CoBank Sharing Success Program! This partnership allows Medina EC to invest in our community by cost-matching our charitable donations, effectively doubling the impact for local non-profits.

This program is vital to our commitment to community, having previously distributed over \$144,949 to organizations in our service area over 12 years, including \$10,000 for both Southwest Family Life Centers (Hondo) and Starr of Hope (Rio Grande City). We encourage eligible organizations to apply and help us continue strengthening the communities we serve.

Learn more and apply at MedinaEC.org/SharingSuccess.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JU | ADOBE STOCK



CROBERTSON | ISTOCK.COM

Don't Let Pipes Freeze

WHEN THE TEMPERATURE plummets, even a hardworking heating system may have trouble keeping the house warm—and a power outage can greatly exacerbate that challenge. As the house chills, it's possible that pipes can freeze.

Particularly at risk pipes are in vacation homes, guest rooms and out-buildings. If heating is available in any of those spaces and the thermostat is off, you may think you're saving money. But diving temperatures can freeze pipes or sprinkler systems, potentially causing pipe damage and flooding—and costing you thousands of dollars in repairs.

When water freezes, it expands and puts great pressure on its container—including pipes. To avoid freezing, keep the thermostat at 55 degrees or higher in vacant areas. For parts of your house without heat, like exterior walls and attics, check insulation around pipes. Any area of pipe exposed to the cold is at a greater risk of freezing.

Another way to keep your pipes—and the rest of your house—warm is to install insulation throughout your attic, walls or anywhere else you might lose heat when it's coldest. This will lower the cost of heating the areas you do live in and prevent the spring season from greeting you with a flood.

You should also insulate any outdoor pipes or faucets. There are various faucet covers on the market that make it simple to access the faucet when needed. Wrapping faucets and pipes in outdoor insulation and securing them with waterproof tape is also effective. A quick and easy solution for pipes is a split foam insulation that you cut to the appropriate length and wrap around the pipe.

It is also helpful to drip faucets indoors and out. It's recommended to drip your indoor faucets at a steady trickle when outside temperatures are expected to fall below 20 degrees for three hours or more. This proactive measure helps minimize the risk of frozen pipes.

Medina Electric Cooperative



CONTACT US

Toll-Free 1-866-632-3532

Email Info@MedinaEC.org

Web MedinaEC.org - Chat Feature Available

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Voting District 1

Mickey Holzhaus, (210) 422-3310

Larry Huesser, (830) 363-7651

Ken Weynand, (830) 426-0762

Voting District 2

Joe Foley, (830) 261-1304

Larry Neal, (210) 218-2367

Jimmie Raines, (830) 591-8437

Voting District 3

Dennis Gonzalez, (956) 218-8325

J. L. Gonzalez, (956) 286-1863

Rodolfo H. Rodriguez, (210) 846-1092

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.

Upcoming Nomination Petition Deadlines

Any members interested in running for one of the three board positions up for election in the fall can be placed on the ballot through the petition process. Petitions will be completely online. Candidates wishing to run can find the online petition* at MedinaEC.org/Nominee. The board of directors represents the interests of members and governs the cooperative.

If you have questions about the process or need assistance, please contact us at MyCoop@MedinaEC.org or call 1-866-632-3532.

Petition Details

Members who are interested in running for a position on the board of directors will need to get 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 the Voting District 1 board position will need signatures from members who have electric service in Voting District 1.

Petition Deadline

All petitions are due **March 2**.

Learn more and find the online petition* link at MedinaEC.org/Nominee.

*Nominations will be completed by online petitions only.

In compliance with the United States 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.

ELECTION TIMELINE

- **January 2**
Online Petitions Open
Find petition link and paperwork at MedinaEC.org/Nominee.
- **March 2**
Online Petitions Close
Nomination materials are due by 5 p.m.
- **April 21**
Certification Committee Meets
Certify nominees who meet the criteria and will appear on the ballot.
- **April 30**
Certified Nominee Paperwork Due
Find paperwork at MedinaEC.org/Nominee.
- **August 25**
Election Opens
- **September 25**
Election Closes
Ballots must be received by third-party election services provider by 5 p.m.
- **October 3**
87th Annual Membership Meeting
Election results announced.
- **Late October**
New Board Members Seated
At the October board meeting.

Spare Change Adds Up To Make a Difference



Operation Round Up helps families and non-profit organizations with the help of Medina Electric Cooperative members who round up their monthly bills to the next dollar.

Recent awards have supported:

Individuals and Families:

- >> Support after house fires
- >> Medical costs and related travel costs
- >> Children's therapies and service animals

Non-profit organizations:

- >> Regional food banks
- >> Transportation services for cancer clinics
- >> Children's centers

VIEW QUARTERLY DEADLINES AND APPLY ONLINE AT MEDINAEC.ORG/ORU.

Applicants must live in one of the 17 counties served by Medina EC to be eligible. Operation Round Up funds cannot be used to pay for electric bills, solar panels or anything related to the purchase of electricity.



JOHNROB | STOCK.COM

Properly Sizing Your HVAC Unit

AN IMPROPERLY SIZED heater or air conditioner can wreak havoc on your home, causing your system to “short cycle”—continuously turn on and off—or run constantly. However, a properly sized one can maintain comfort, increase energy efficiency and provide years of service.

Here are some factors to consider when choosing an HVAC system that works best for your home.

Size matters. The square footage of your home can help determine the load capacity of your HVAC unit, but it shouldn’t be the only factor considered when reviewing unit sizes. Enlist the help of a licensed professional to choose the best unit for your home.

Geographical location. The region in which your home is located will factor into how much capacity you need per square foot. A system running in a hot, humid climate will need more British thermal units than a system running in a dry, cool climate.

Home orientation. How sunlight hits your home during different times of the day impacts the load capacity required to properly heat or cool your home.

Insulation effectiveness. The better insulated your home is, the less heating or cooling power it will need to stay at the desired temperature.

Other factors that affect HVAC size requirements include ceiling height, ductwork, heat-generating appliances, home façade and occupancy. A good baseline for determining the size of the air conditioner needed is square footage of the home multiplied by 20. The result is the number of British thermal units you’ll need.

Medina Electric Cooperative—your trusted energy partner—is happy to help you determine how each of these factors affect your system’s load capacity.

Team Members Reach Important Milestones

MEDINA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CELEBRATED several special work anniversaries for employees between October and December.

Medina EC celebrates work anniversaries in five-year increments and honors each employee with an award for their years of service. For each service award, the cooperative also donates \$100 to an organization of the employee’s choosing. In 2025, Medina EC employees donated \$1,100 to various local organizations.

Please join us in celebrating these Medina EC employees!



ARIEL VALVERDE
Network Administrator
Corporate office
October | 5 years



KIM MULVANY
Accounting Assistant
Corporate office
October | 5 years



MONTE TSCHIRHART
System Operator
Corporate office
October | 10 years



MATTHEW STINSON
Communication & Control Technician
Corporate office
October | 5 years

DONATION TO
Operation Round Up



Substations Perform Powerful Role

The electrical system depends on devices behind the fence

ELECTRICAL SUBSTATIONS ARE vital to delivering power to our community's homes and businesses. The complex array of equipment serves as transit points in this system, with the ability to raise ("step up") and lower ("step down") voltage.

High voltage helps speed power across long distances on transmission lines. However, if electricity enters your home at too high a level, electronics could be damaged, as happens with lightning strikes.

That's why, as power gets closer to its final destination, substations reduce it to a safe and constant voltage level.

Several types of substations are found between power plants and homes. Each contains different equipment, including transformers, lightning arrestors, circuit breakers and insulators.

Initially, step-up substations at power plants increase electricity's voltage to various levels (between 115 and 765 kilovolts) so it can be shipped through high-voltage transmission lines. Once electricity nears its destination, transmission substations typically reduce the voltage to between 23 and 69 kV.

From there, the power moves through smaller transmission facilities to electric co-op distribution systems. Distribution substation transformers then slash the voltage even lower, typically to 12,500 volts.

At this point, the distribution lines you see running up and down rural roads and across fields bring power to you. To make that energy safe for household use, a pole-mount transformer (the round object resembling a small gray garbage can located near the top of a utility pole outside your residence) or a padmount transformer (the green boxes dotting your neighborhood) cuts the voltage once more, to between 120 and 240 V.

Remember, the voltage entering and exiting substations far exceeds anything you'll find at home. Substation fences protect you and the equipment housed within and help ensure that your co-op can continue providing you with a safe, reliable and affordable supply of power.

Medina EC Returns \$2M in Capital Credits

Members saw credit on their December bill

CAPITAL CREDITS are an important part of the cooperative difference.

As a not-for-profit cooperative, Medina Electric Cooperative allocates any margins at the end of the year to members and retires them as the financial position of the cooperative allows. At their November meeting, the board reviewed the cooperative's financials to determine what money needs to be reinvested in the system and made a decision to approve the retirement of \$2.002 million in capital credits.

Current members who had service prior to 2025 were issued a credit on December bills. If you look at the back of your December bill where charges are broken down, you will see a line item that shows your capital credits return. Members who connected service with the cooperative within the last year may not have a bill credit, but they can look forward to one in future years.

For former members who are due a return more than \$5, credits are provided by check and mailed to the last known address. That is one reason it is important to keep your mailing address updated with the cooperative.

More than \$44 million in capital credits have been returned to members since Medina EC was formed in 1938.

To learn more about capital credits and how they are allocated to members' accounts and eventually retired, visit MedinaEC.org/CapitalCredits.

Sometimes, capital credits checks remain uncashed and unclaimed. To check if you or anyone you know has unclaimed capital credits, search by last name at MedinaEC.org/CapitalCredits.

There really is a difference in the cooperative business model: You get reliable, affordable electricity—and money back in the form of capital credits.

\$50,000 in Scholarships

Medina Electric Cooperative is offering 10 scholarships for adults pursuing higher education and 15 scholarships for high school graduating seniors. Each scholarship is worth \$2,000!

Eligible applicants will be entered in a drawing, and scholarship winners will be selected at random during the March board meeting.

For more information and to apply, visit MedinaEC.org/Scholarships or contact us at 1-866-632-3532 or Scholarship@MedinaEC.org.

MedinaEC.org/Scholarships

Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. March 6.*

*Technical support will not be available outside of normal business hours. Encountering technical issues while submitting the application on the last day will not be grounds for an extension.

CAROLINA K SMITH MD | ADOBE STOCK

Would your teen enjoy a **FREE** trip to Washington, D.C., in June 2026? The Government-in-Action Youth Tour may be for them. Last chance to **APPLY NOW!**



HOW COULD WE HELP YOUR COMMUNITY?

\$10,000 in grants are available to nonprofit organizations in any of Medina EC's 17 counties.

Deadline to apply: April 1



Scan the QR code to apply and learn more.

View project and organization eligibility information and apply online at MedinaEC.org/Grant.

HELLO-PIXEL | FREEPIK.COM

Deadline to apply is January 9.

Scan here to apply and learn more!

BONUS: Winners will also receive a **\$2,000 college scholarship!**





*Jewelry that says
more than words
ever could*

A.

C.

B.

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—E. B., Stone Mountain, GA



*"Gift of
the Year"*
★★★★★
Client Rating of
4.9 Stars!

When Two Hearts Join

Discover the enchanting allure of our Two Heart Necklace, where love's symphony unfolds in timeless elegance. Inspired by that moment, when it all clicks and you realize you have found the one.... and where two become one, this exquisite piece captures the essence of two hearts entwined in a dance of destiny. Crafted with precision and passion and encased in 14k gold, it embodies the essence of your enduring love, echoing the sentiments of Shakespeare's sonnets and the romances of Jane Austen. Our client's favorite, it is now priced at its lowest ever even as gold reaches a record high, awarding it a stellar 4.9-star rating in reviews making it the Gift of the Year. Embrace the magic of shared dreams and whispered promises with the Two Heart Necklace, a treasure to cherish for generations to come.

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Falling in love costs nothing but the value is priceless. Showing your love with this two hearts set costs next to nothing and the feeling you will get when wearing it or giving it to your love will certainly be priceless.

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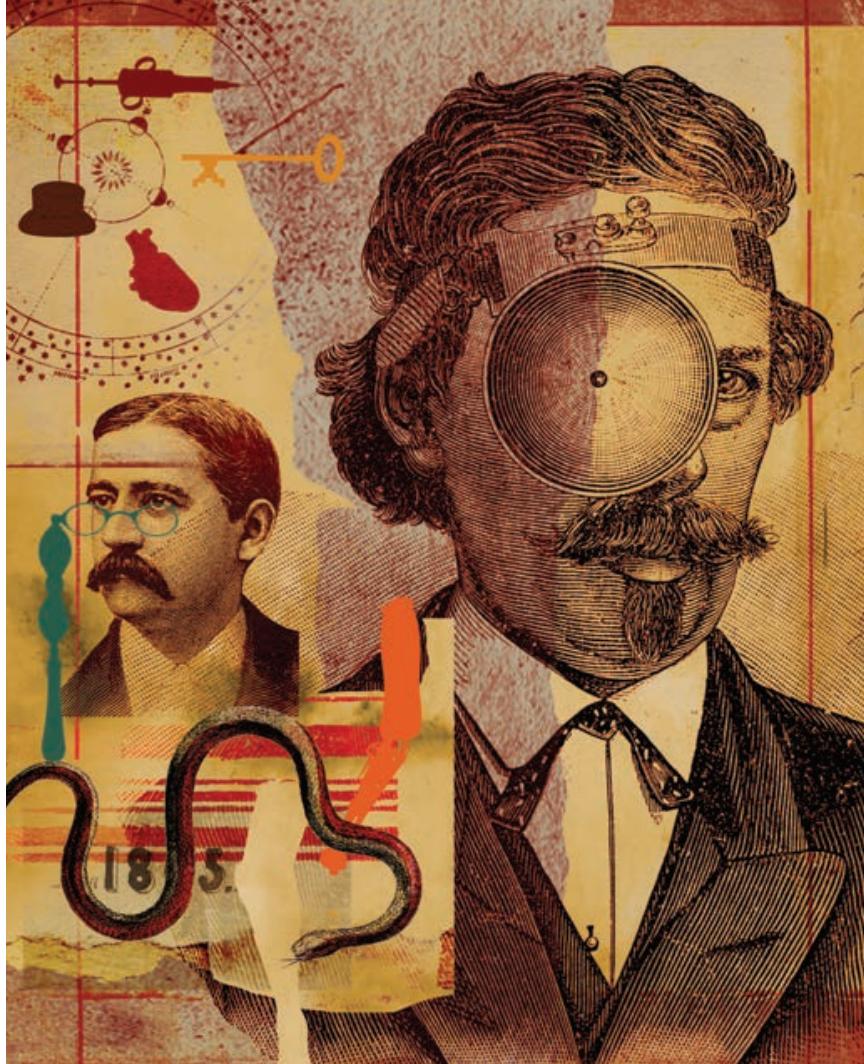
A. Bracelet (13 3/8 ctw)	\$299	\$39* + S&P	Save \$260
B. Necklace (2 1/8 ctw)	\$199	\$39* + S&P	Save \$160
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Necklace, Bracelet & Earrings	\$727	\$79* + S&P	Save \$648

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Doctoring Reality

Frontier physicians relied on confidence more than credentials

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

BECOMING A DOCTOR was a lot simpler in frontier times, when you didn't have to go to school for a long time or even know much about medicine. You could just call yourself a doctor. And if your first consideration was to cause no harm and you were blessed with at least a modicum of common sense, other people would call you a doctor too.

"Dr." John F. Webber is a case in point. Born in Vermont and a veteran of the War of 1812, Webber settled in Stephen F. Austin's colony, in what was then Mexico, by 1824.

Along with Texas chronicler Noah Smithwick and two other men, Webber took part in a tobacco-smuggling operation farther south in Mexico. Webber wasn't a trained doctor, but he played

one to avoid answering a bunch of annoying questions about the nature of his visit. Posing as a doctor was easier than explaining 1,000 pounds of leaf tobacco to the authorities.

In one town Webber advertised his services as a physician. Smithwick was fairly fluent in Spanish, so he accompanied the "doctor" as he tended to patients. "With an air of importance that would have done credit to a professional, Webber noted the symptoms, shaking his head, knitting his brows, and otherwise impressing the patient with the seriousness of his condition," Smithwick later wrote.

Smithwick and Webber had a sampling of medicines, mostly quinine, calomel and tartar emetic, a poisonous compound that some brave souls took to induce

vomiting; it made Webber's patients feel different, if not better. "The doctor's fame went abroad, and he soon had a large practice, same as imposters of the present day," Smithwick wrote.

Smithwick also knew the inventor Gail Borden Jr. before Borden patented the process for making condensed milk and became known as Dairyman to the World. They knew each other first in San Felipe and later in Burnet County, where Smithwick operated a mill.

Borden was looking for gold on Sandy Creek and also advertising himself as a doctor when he stayed a few days with Smithwick and described to his host how he practiced medicine. "It is no use to be a doctor unless you put on the airs of one," he said. "Nine times out of 10 sickness is caused by overeating, or eating unwholesome food, but a patient gets angry if you tell him so; you must humor him."

Borden humored his patients by administering tiny bits of calomel with enough starch to turn it into a pellet. He glazed the pellets with sugar to make the medicine taste more like a doughnut. Borden said most people who abstained from "hurtful articles of food" felt better as a result.

Unlike Borden or Webber, Dr. Johnson Calhoun Hunter, a native of South Carolina and one of the Old Three Hundred colonists, received a diploma in medicine around 1805, when he was just 18. He was in Texas, in what is now Harris County, by the early 1820s with his wife and the first five of their eventual 11 children. He did a lot more than doctoring when he got here.

Historian Mike Cox wrote that Hunter "could deliver a baby, ride a plow, go hungry, trade with the Indians, run a traverse, pilot a scow, adjudicate a case ... cut a bull, teach a school ... and deliver mail."

They don't make general practitioners like that anymore. ■

Oodles of Noodles

Heaps of flavor that will keep your forks twirling

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

My friends are always nervous about inviting me to a meal because I cook for a living, but that's exactly why you should invite me. I will never turn down being cooked for. I was recently invited to dinner and served this deliciousness. I immediately asked for the recipe, because I had to share with y'all.

Ginger Pork Noodles

1 package rice noodles (14 ounces)

½ cup soy sauce

¼ cup light brown sugar

¼ cup rice vinegar

1 tablespoon chili garlic sauce

1 tablespoon minced ginger

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 pounds lean ground pork

2 tablespoons water

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1 cup shredded carrots

**1 cucumber, halved lengthwise
and thinly sliced**

Sesame seeds, for garnish

Fresh cilantro, for garnish

Lime wedges, for garnish

1. Cook noodles according to package directions and set aside.

2. In a bowl, whisk together soy sauce, brown sugar, rice vinegar, chili garlic sauce and ginger. Set aside.

3. Heat oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Cook garlic and pork, breaking up with a spoon, until fully cooked, about 7 minutes.

4. Reduce heat to low and stir in prepared sauce. Simmer 3 minutes.

5. While the pork simmers, whisk together water and cornstarch in a small bowl until well blended. Stir into pork and continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, until sauce thickens.

6. Stir in cooked noodles. Serve warm, topped with carrots and cucumbers. Garnish with sesame seeds, cilantro and lime wedges.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Sopa de Fideo con Garbanzos.





Garlic Spaghetti

JANET EAKINS
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

We all need a go-to recipe in our back pocket for when the to-do list is never-ending, the kids are starving and you must get dinner on the table. This garlic spaghetti is quick and easy, but it packs a punch in the flavor department. Some nights, a bowl of pasta like this is just what we need.

8 ounces uncooked spaghetti
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons minced garlic
2 tablespoons minced parsley
1 tablespoon lemon zest
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese

1. Cook spaghetti according to package directions, reserving 1/2 cup of pasta water when draining.
2. In the same pot, heat oil over medium-high. Add garlic and cook 30 seconds.
3. Stir in pasta water, parsley, lemon zest and spaghetti and toss to coat. Season with salt, pepper and red pepper flakes. Stir in feta.

SERVES 4

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

\$500 WINNER

Slow Cooker Chicken Lo Mein

JENNY ZACHMAN-
REICHARDT
HAMILTON COUNTY EC



Pull out those slow cookers, and get to tossing this lo mein together! I loved-loved this recipe and plan to make it on repeat. And don't let me find you skimping on the baby bok choy—it's the star of this dish.



1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
2/3 cup low-sodium chicken broth
3 tablespoons oyster sauce
2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
3 teaspoons hoisin sauce
2 teaspoons honey
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 tablespoon minced ginger
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 package lo mein noodles (8 ounces)
2 tablespoons cornstarch
3 tablespoons cold water
2 cups sliced baby bok choy, washed
1 red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
1/2 cup matchstick carrots
Sesame seeds, for garnish

1. Lightly coat a 4- to 5-quart slow cooker with cooking spray. Add chicken and season with salt and pepper.
2. In a bowl, whisk together chicken broth, oyster sauce, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, honey, garlic, ginger and red pepper flakes. Pour over chicken and stir to coat evenly.
3. Cook on high 1 1/2–2 hours or on low 3–4 hours. Meanwhile, cook noodles according to package directions and set aside.
4. Remove chicken from slow cooker and shred or dice. In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and water, and stir into remaining sauce in slow cooker.
5. Return chicken to slow cooker and add baby bok choy, bell pepper and carrots. Stir to combine. Cover and cook on high an additional 20–30 minutes or until sauce thickens.
6. Stir in noodles. Serve warm, garnished with sesame seeds.

SERVES 6

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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UPCOMING: DON'T SKIMP ON SHRIMP DUE FEB 10



ENTER
ONLINE



Mom's Best Hamburger Noodle Casserole

JULIE PIERANTONI
PEDERNALES EC

Casseroles are all about comfort and nourishment, and no one understands this better than Mom. This dish is all comfort. Hearty, filling and a snap to whip up, it's delicious—Mom knows best!

**12 ounces uncooked egg noodles
1½ pounds ground beef
½ cup chopped white onion
1 can corn (12 ounces), drained
1 can cream of chicken soup (10.5 ounces)
1 can cream of mushroom soup (10.5 ounces)
1 cup sour cream
¾ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
½ teaspoon meat tenderizer
1 cup fresh breadcrumbs
3 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, melted**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. Cook noodles according to package directions, drain and allow to cool.
3. In a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, add ground beef and break up with a spoon. Add onion and cook until onion is tender and ground beef is fully cooked. Drain grease.
4. Stir in corn, soups, sour cream, salt, pepper, tenderizer and cooked egg noodles. Pour into prepared baking dish.
5. In a bowl, mix together breadcrumbs and melted butter. Sprinkle over top of casserole.
6. Bake 30 minutes or until breadcrumbs are slightly crispy.

Noodle Knowledge

Store unopened noodles in a cool, dry area, away from appliances that generate heat, to prevent exposure to excess moisture.

Store opened noodles in an airtight container.

Store cooked noodles in an airtight container in the fridge and eat within three days.

—Vianney Rodriguez

pepper, tenderizer and cooked egg noodles. Pour into prepared baking dish.

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. Cook noodles according to package directions, drain and allow to cool.
3. In a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, add ground beef and break up with a spoon. Add onion and cook until onion is tender and ground beef is fully cooked. Drain grease.
4. Stir in corn, soups, sour cream, salt, pepper, tenderizer and cooked egg noodles. Pour into prepared baking dish.
5. In a bowl, mix together breadcrumbs and melted butter. Sprinkle over top of casserole.
6. Bake 30 minutes or until breadcrumbs are slightly crispy.

SERVES 8

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On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

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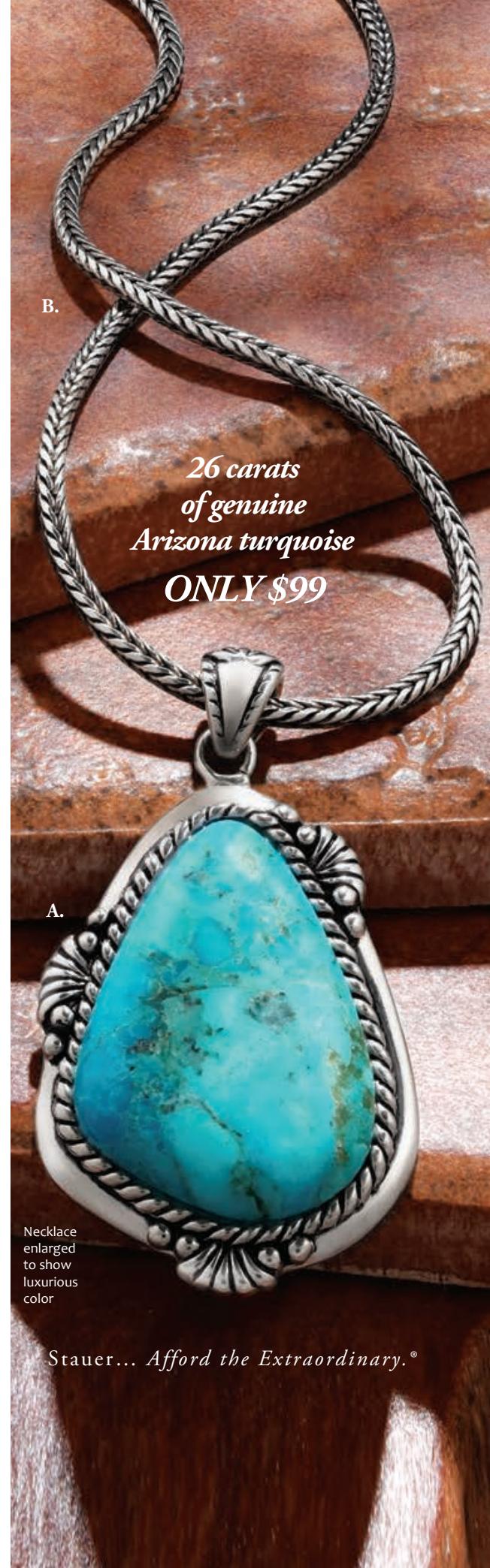
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Tip of the Hat to Paris

France's Eiffel Tower is taller and older, sure, but it's rather bare

BY CHET GARNER

NOT EVERYTHING IS BIGGER in Texas. Case in point: our Eiffel Tower in our Paris. But that didn't stop me from breaking out my beret and heading to the Northeast Texas "City of Love" to see our rendition of France's most famous landmark.

The French built theirs of iron in 1889 for the world's fair. Texans—never ones to sit quietly while another Paris hogs the spotlight—answered in 1993 with a scaled-down steel replica that has way more Texas swagger.

I rolled into town craving a crêpe and a glass of wine, but those had to wait. First stop was my *petit* pilgrimage to the petite tower. I found it standing proudly on the south side of town, wedged between the civic center and the impressive Red River Valley Veterans Memorial.

I wasn't alone. Dozens of folks were lined up for their chance at the ultimate French-Texan selfie.

Of course, the first thing anyone notices is the bright red cowboy hat perched on top. It wasn't there originally. Locals say that after rival Paris, Tennessee, built a tower a smidge taller, Texans did what Texans do—we added a hat and claimed victory.

With the topper, our tower clocks in at 65 feet, proudly earning the title of second-tallest Eiffel Tower in a city named Paris. (The French original stands about 16 times that height at more than 1,000 feet, so first place wasn't exactly in reach.)

Up close, it looks a bit like a radio antenna's artsy cousin who studied abroad, but the vibe is pure Parisian picnic. Families sprawled in the grass, kids craned their necks to the top, and couples kissed beneath its steel beams as if the Seine were flowing nearby.

So if you find yourself in Northeast Texas, make the detour. And remember—when in Paris (Texas), the dress code is cowboy casual. ■

ABOVE Chet lands in Paris—no passport required.

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.

JANUARY

8

Dallas [8–11] *Hadestown: Teen Edition*, (214) 526-4076, juniorplayers.org

10

Amarillo Serenading the High Plains, (806) 376-8782, amarillosymphony.org

Corsicana Mimosas at the Market, (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

Palestine [10–11, 17–18, 24–25, 31–Feb. 1] *Faire of Champions*, contact@faireofchampions.com, faireofchampions.com

15

Lufkin T.G. Sheppard, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

16

Galveston [16–17] *Yaga's Chili Quest, Beers & Cheers*; (409) 770-0999; yagachiliquest.com

Lubbock [16–18] *Water for Elephants*, (806) 792-8339, americantheatreguild.com

17

Brenham Uptown Swirl, (979) 337-7239, downtownbrenham.com

El Paso Veterans Create, (915) 533-0048, tomlea.com

Fredericksburg Book Festival, (830) 997-6513, fredericksburgbookfestival.org

Gonzales Come and Take It Makers Market, (830) 888-6800, bit.ly/makersmarket26

Plano [17–18] *Dallas Area Train Show*, (214) 906-8092, dfwtrainshows.com

18

Fredericksburg Texas
Guitar Quartet, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

19

Elgin Martin Luther King Jr. Walk, (512) 281-5724, elgintexas.gov

22

El Paso Tom Lea's *Twelve Travelers Through the Pass of the North* Exhibit Opening, (915) 533-0048, tomlea.com

Fort Worth Mah Jongg Tournament, (817) 335-3525, thewomansclubfw.com

Paris [22-24] Tower City Comedy Festival, (903) 785-5233, towercitycomedyfestival.com

24

Jefferson Queen Mab Ball, (903) 240-6809, mardigrasupriver.com

29

Brenham [29-Feb. 1, 5-8, 12-15] Ken Ludwig's *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

FEBRUARY

4

Laredo [4-7] Birding Festival, (956) 964-4102, laredobirdingfestival.org

6

Lufkin The Jazz Legacy Project Presents the Life & Music of Billie Holiday, (936) 633-5454, angelinarts.org

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CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



**1 ALAN ABAIR
COSERV**

A western diamondback rattlesnake.

**2 JOSHUA TREVINO
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES**

A Sunda Island pit viper.

**3 CHARLES BAXTER
COSERV**

"An eastern racer under a crape myrtle tree in Argyle."

**4 SHARON CARTER
PEDERNALES EC**

"I saw this beauty resting in the woods next to my Wimberley home."



Upcoming Contests



**ENTER
ONLINE**

CAUGHT NAPPING DUE JAN 10

MAKING A SPLASH DUE FEB 10

SEASONED SNAPS DUE MAR 10

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Snakes Alive! photos from readers.



Fortune Knocks

Scottish tradition holds that good luck comes through the front door on New Year's

AS TOLD BY RON RUSSELL
TO ANNA RUSSELL
ILLUSTRATION BY TARA JACOBY

IN THE SUMMER of 1954, when my family's neighbor Brad Proctor asked me to help with farm work, I did not know it would lead to me becoming a first footer.

I pedaled my bike 1½ miles to help Brad put up hay. From then on, year-round, every afternoon, I milked cows and mucked stalls.

His mother-in-law, Mrs. Harris, lived with them. And whenever I ventured into the kitchen for a drink, Mrs. Harris told me tales of her youth in Scotland. Eventually, they decided to move Mrs. Harris to a nearby, almost secluded, house.

A few days before the end of the year, I stopped for another visit with Mrs. Harris. She clasped my hand. "I want you to be my first footer," she said.

Well, I knew a lot about farm life, farm animals and an abundance of chores.

However, I had no idea how to be a first footer. I did not want to insult Mrs. Harris. I squirmed before I asked, "Please, what is a first footer?"

"My great-great-grandparents passed the Scottish tradition through the family to me," she said, explaining that a tall, dark-haired man must be the first to set foot in a house in the new year. "Because you are a dark-haired man, when ..."

I interrupted her. "But I'm only 14 years old. That leaves me out."

Mrs. Harris raised her hand to stop me. "The worst is for a woman to be my first visitor. Oh, Lordy, that'd guarantee bad luck all year." She looked me up and down as she nodded her head. "Now, if you had red or blond hair, fear would shiver me with alarm at the sight of you on New Year's Day."

She chuckled. "However you do qualify. You're the size of a man, and you have dark hair, so when your foot hits my threshold, you will bring me good fortune for the coming year."

She winked. "Best you bring a gift, say bread, salt or coal. OK?"

When I got home, Mom listened to Mrs. Harris' proposal to me. Then she said, "We have Scottish blood, too. Remember the cabbage, carrot and onion soup that we eat at noon each New Year's Day? It's also a custom that my Scottish ancestors practiced."

"Why cabbage? I hate cabbage."

"Cabbage represents abundance to some people." Mom elbowed me aside to remove bread from the oven.

I did not want to take Mrs. Harris a lump of coal or a piece of firewood. And my Grandpa Ed would not like me taking his whiskey bottle. Ah, the perfect gift was on the kitchen counter.

Allowing that Mrs. Harris would be awake at 9 o'clock on New Year's morning, I knocked on the door. Her wide grin almost stretched to the door sills.

She waved me in. I handed her a loaf of Mom's fresh-baked bread.

I am a first footer! ■

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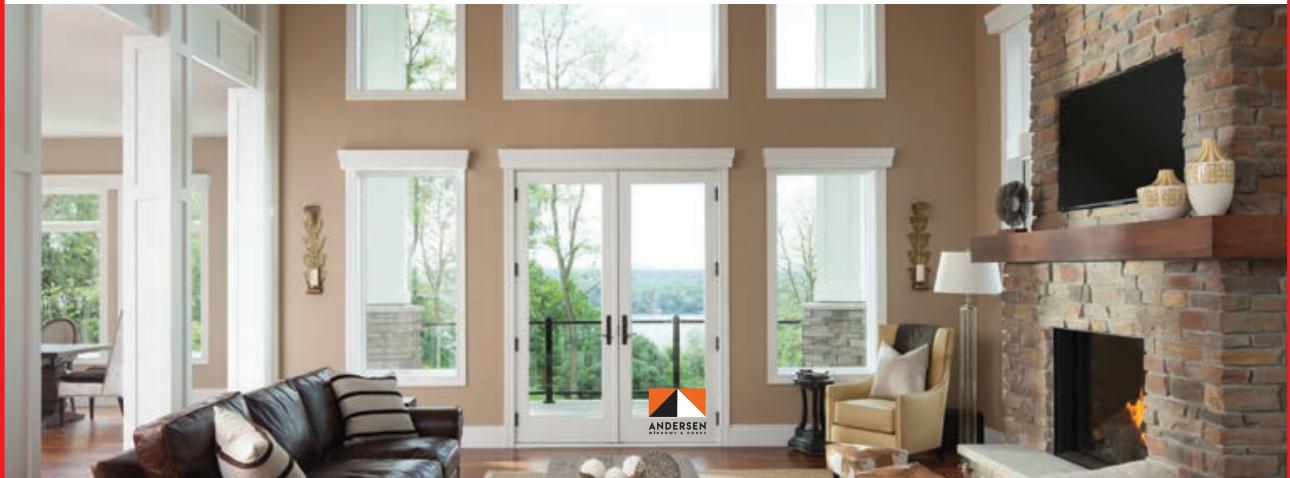
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MINIMUM PURCHASE OF 4 – INTEREST ACCRUES DURING PROMOTIONAL PERIOD BUT IS WAIVED IF PAID IN FULL WITHIN 12 MONTHS



TESTED, TRUSTED, AND TOTALLY PROVEN.²

Offer Ends 2/28/2026

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¹DETAILS OF OFFER: Offer expires 2/28/2026. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Buy one (1) window or entry/patio door, get one (1) window or entry/patio door 40% off, and 12 months no money down, no monthly payments, no interest when you purchase four (4) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 1/1/2026 and 2/28/2026. 40% off windows and entry/patio doors are less than or equal to lowest cost window or entry/patio door in the order. Additional \$45 off each window or entry/patio door, minimum purchase of four (4) required, taken after initial discount(s), when you purchase by 2/28/2026. Subject to credit approval. 12-month Promo Period: while no payments are due, interest accrues but is waived if the loan is paid in full before the Promo Period expires. Any unpaid balance owed after the Promo Period, plus accrued interest, will be paid in installments based on the terms disclosed in the customer's loan agreement. Financing is provided by various financial institutions without regard to age, race, color, religion, national origin, gender, or familial status. Savings comparison based on purchase of a single unit at list price. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. License numbers available at renewalbyandersen.com/license. Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. ²Based on testing of 10 double-hung units per ASTM E2068 20 years after installation. It is the only warranty among top selling window companies that meets all of the following requirements: easy to understand terms, unrestricted transferability, installation coverage, labor coverage, geographically unrestricted, coverage for exterior glass, insect screens and hardware, and no maintenance requirement. Visit renewalbyandersen.com/nationsbest for details. *Review aggregator survey of 5-star reviews among leading national full-service window replacement companies. January 2024 Reputation.com. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are trademarks of Andersen Corporation. © 2026 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. RBA14201