

THE DAZZLING PECAN TREE
NEAR FORT WORTH

THE MIGHTY HONEYBEE
IS BUSY AS EVER

REMEMBER THE
GREAT Y2K SCARE?

Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2024

Cookie Season

Co-op Country kitchens
share their recipes





MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER
MARK STUBBS

A small amount of change can change lives

THE HOLIDAY SEASON is finally here. Some consider it the most wonderful season because it's associated with family traditions and gathering with friends and loved ones over Christmas.

It's a time of giving and spreading joy, which reminds me of the many good things we have right here in our community and why it's so important to spread the good as far as we can—especially to the most vulnerable. I'm also reminded of how generous our community is and the big impact we can have when we work together.

As a member of Farmers Electric Cooperative, you help us spread the good throughout the year. Through our Operation Round Up program, your donations help local families and individuals in need.

When you round up your monthly bill and donate the spare change to this fund, you're making a big difference in someone's life. You're helping to meet immediate, critical needs, and just as importantly, you're letting someone know their community cares for them.

Community involvement is part of what defines who we are as an organization. Not only do we serve this area, but we live here as well, we are your neighbors. When we first brought electricity to

Northeast Texas, the quality of life improved. But we didn't stop there. Through the years, this co-op has remained steadfast in its commitment to serve the community that sustains it. It's why we created Operation Round Up.

To date, with your help, we've given over \$4 million to organizations that help families in need. Across the country, more than 350 electric co-ops participate in Operation Round Up, and together, we've raised millions for our communities.

Over the years, Farmers EC has supported many organizations like Meals on Wheels of Rockwall County and Hunt County Kids. We have enabled families in need to keep the lights on, and much more through our Operation Round Up program.

Operation Round Up is a testament to the fact that small donations from members over time, can collectively make a big impact—not just during the holidays but all year long.

TAKE CHARGE. LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND INITIATIVES IN THE COOPERATIVE HUB AT: FarmersElectric.coop



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5 POINT PHILOSOPHY: Community Involvement

Operation Round Up

Operation Round Up was approved by the membership in 2006 to become a way for outreach into the communities we serve. Each month, a member's electric bill is rounded up to the next whole dollar amount. On average, most members contribute about 50 cents per month. But through the strength of the entire cooperative, that change adds up to provide meaningful help to others.

This voluntary program gives members the ability to help those in need through the support of social, charitable, and civic programs in our service area.

Yearly giving for a member:
12 cents – \$11.88 annually
Average per member: \$6 annually

GIVING BACK TO OUR COMMUNITIES IS A FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF ALL COOPERATIVES. LEARN MORE AT: FarmersElectric.coop



Safeguard your home this winter



AS THE TEMPERATURES DROP and the days grow shorter, there's a natural inclination to create a warm and cozy haven at home. Unfortunately, as use of heating equipment, candles and electrical items increases, the number of home fires tends to grow during winter months.

Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working

If your detectors are battery-operated, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.

Inspect electrical cords

We depend on more cords during winter, whether for holiday lighting or decorations. Before using any corded items, double-check to make sure cords aren't frayed or cracked. If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least 3 feet away from flammable items and never use them with extension cords or power strips. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and overheat protection. Be aware that space heaters can take a toll on your energy bill. Use them efficiently, to heat smaller spaces only, and safely.

Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips

When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet, look for power strips that include surge protection.

Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency

There's nothing better than a warm fire on a chilly night, but it's important to maintain your fireplace for safety.

As wood burns, a sticky substance called creosote builds up in the chimney. When creosote buildup becomes too thick, a chimney fire can ignite. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning also improves airflow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.

Practice safety in the kitchen

As we spend more time cooking and baking during the holiday season, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items like dish towels.

Be careful with holiday decorations

Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant. Keep lit candles away from decorations and other things that can burn. Replace strings of lights that have loose bulb connections, and make sure you use lights designed for indoor and outdoor use. Use clips, not nails, to hang lights so the cords don't get damaged. And before going to bed, make sure to extinguish candles and turn off holiday lights.

Farmers Electric Cooperative wants you and your family to stay safe during winter.



TAKE CHARGE. FIND MORE HELPFUL SAFETY TIPS IN OUR FREE FARMERS EC HOME SAFETY TIPS PDF IN THE SERVICE HUB AT: FarmersElectric.coop



Is your holiday lighting naughty or nice

WE ALL WANT TO BE ON SANTA'S NICE LIST, but if it's been a while since you replaced your holiday lights, you could be on the naughty list for wasting electricity. Don't worry, you don't need to nix your holiday light show—at least not entirely. There are a lot of easy steps you can take to make your festive displays more energy efficient.

If you haven't strung your twinkling lights, be sure to use LED strands. LEDs consume far less energy than incandescent lights, and they can last 40 holiday seasons. LED lights come in various colors, including a warm white for that old-time holiday glow. They're also safer because they're made with epoxy lenses, not glass, making them more resistant to breaking—and they're cool to the touch, so no burnt fingers.

The energy savings can really add up: Using an LED bulb over the holidays will cost you an estimated 45 cents compared to \$5 for mini-incandescent string lights and \$75 for large incandescent string lights.

You can also save energy with a programmable light timer. Most models cost between \$10 to \$25 and can be purchased through online retailers like Amazon or at big-box stores like Lowe's or Walmart. With a light timer, you can easily program when you want your holiday lights to turn on and off, which will save you time, money and energy.

Turn off ambient lights. Chances are, you don't need to have your illuminated Christmas tree shining brightly and your house lights on. Adjust your indoor lighting to account for your décor, especially when you have glowing decorations.

There are many ways to decorate that require no electricity at all. Reflective decorations like tinsel and mirrors can glimmer just as brightly as light bulbs. The holidays are also a great time to get crafty with your family and make homemade decorations like paper chains and popcorn strings.



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ODDS & ENDS

Holiday Hours

Farmers EC office will be closed for the following holidays. Crews will be on standby in case of outages:

**Dec. 24-25 for Christmas
Jan. 1 for New Year's Day**

Safety Tip

Every year, U.S. fire departments respond to an estimated 51,000 home electrical fires, which cause nearly 500 deaths, 1,400 injuries and \$1.3 billion in property loss. Thirty-nine percent of home electrical fires involve outlets, receptacles, and other electrical wiring.

To ensure safety, use about 80 percent of the available current for each electrical outlet. These are common warning signs of an overloaded circuit:

- Dimming, flickering or blinking lights.
- Discolored or warm outlet covers.
- A burning smell coming from outlets or switches.
- Buzzing, sizzling outlets.
- Small electric shocks from switches or outlets.
- Breakers frequently tripping.

If you observe any of these signs, contact an electrician immediately to have the potential problem assessed.

Power Tip

Smaller appliances like slow cookers, air fryers and Instant Pots consume far less energy than using the stovetop or oven.

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December 2024



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An old pecan tree's dazzling annual metamorphosis becomes a community tradition.

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Photos by R.J. Hinkle

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Texans help each other help the mighty honeybee help the rest of us.

By Claire Stevens
Photos by Eric W. Pohl

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

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Busy bees at Two Hives Honey in Manor.
Photo by Eric W. Pohl

Y2...What?



THE WORLD SEEMINGLY teetered on turmoil 25 years ago this month at the hands of Y2K, a supposed computer glitch that threatened to stymie systems as the calendar turned from 1999 to 2000. It was quite a big deal—though for TCP's editors and writers, not so much:

Samantha Bryant: *I was at my grandmother's house in Poolville, listening to the news on TV while my siblings and I did a Y2K-proof activity—a puzzle.*

Chris Burrows: *I was making sure our family computer kept ticking (by playing video games all night).*

Alex Dal Santo: *We were with neighbors, watching Space Jam. None of the adults seemed very concerned.*

Claire Stevens: *That was before my time, but my parents didn't even see midnight. I'm told they "went to bed hoping the world and digital appliances would live to see the next day."*

Tom Widlowski: *I was one of the 260,000 revelers packing Congress Avenue in Austin.*

Read *Black-Eyed Peace* on Page 25 to learn more about the experiences of Texans during Y2K.



TCP Contests and More

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TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST
The Whole Enchilada

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
Characters

RECOMMENDED READING

Download our issue from December 2004 and enjoy our look at holiday lights. Find it at texascooppower.com/magazine-archives.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My favorite holiday lights are ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our October prompt: **My favorite hand-me-down is ...**

Old recipes. You get to learn, by trial and error, how much a pinch and a dash actually is.

TABITHA FOUNTAIN
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC
SAN AUGUSTINE

My name. My dad named me after his sister. We both were Yvette Françoise "Sissy" Sherman.

YVETTE COOPER
BANDERA EC
BANDERA

A small screwdriver my dad gave me when I was about 6. I'm 75 and carry it on my key chain every day.

GARY ELLIOTT
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

75 Candles

Three Texans with storied careers in their chosen fields turn 75 this month.

- Hall of Fame golfer **Tom Kite** was born December 9, 1949, in McKinney.
- ZZ Top guitarist **Billy Gibbons** was born December 16 in Houston.
- Academy Award-winning actress **Sissy Spacek** was born December 25 in Quitman.

OCTOBER 2024 There's No Party Like La Pitada

“I extend my gratitude for including such a small town like ours in your amazing magazine—and also the tradition we hold sacred, celebrating our Dallas Cowboys!”

SANTA GARCIA
MAGIC VALLEY EC
BROWNSVILLE



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Hauling Grass

Hadn't seen lawn mower racing in years—since I left the hills of Kentucky [*Grassroots Movement*, October 2024].

Mark Wright
Via Facebook

Come Together

Thanks for the old Beatles memory [*Invading Dallas*, September 2024]. I saw them the night before in Kansas City. I was a sixth grader in Topeka, Kansas.

Larry Chabira
Pedernales EC
San Leanna

The Cactus Experience

I have looked for a book—*Guns smoke in the Redlands*, about feuds in San Augustine. Felton Cochran said he had the book in his hand, and two days later I had it in my hand [*Texas Book Man*, July 2024].

Buddy Hancock
Deep East Texas EC
Center



JULIA ROBINSON

I ventured into Cactus Book Shop about 22 years ago. Felton Cochran was so pleasant and welcoming, and I picked out several books totaling well over \$100. Back then, he didn't take credit cards.

I asked him to hold my books until I could come back in a few days with a check, as I was a 100-mile round trip from San Angelo. He insisted I take them with me and mail him a check later. He didn't ask for ID, phone number or anything.

Susan Wellborn
Concho Valley EC
Robert Lee

Saltshaker Logic

I especially enjoyed the last two sentences: “Oh well, even the imperfect ones have purpose. I grabbed the saltshaker.” We humans are imperfect and sometimes say or do something that rubs another person the wrong way [*Culling Time*, July 2024].

Instead of getting upset at someone, grab the imaginary saltshaker. Take what the other person said or did with a grain of salt.

Ted Pasche
CoServ
Argyle

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letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 81, Number 6 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 76 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power's* website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS Subscription price is \$4.44 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

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An old pecan tree's dazzling
annual metamorphosis becomes
a community tradition

Field of Beams

BY PETE ALFANO • PHOTOS BY R.J. HINKLE

A family gathering on Thanksgiving culminates in the pasture of a 10-acre ranch where a pair of old geldings, Zephyr and Max, graze during the day. In the middle of this equine playground is a pecan tree, standing like a sentry, having taken root about 30 years after Texas became a state.

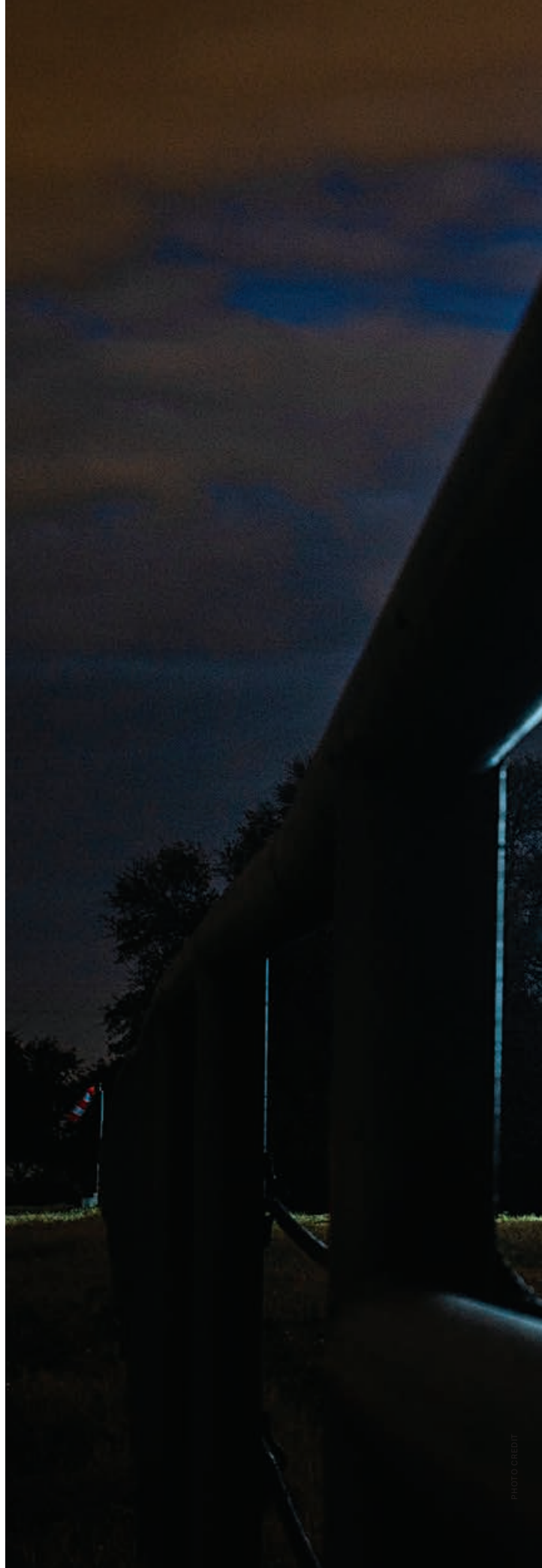
But for the past 17 years, the tree has been more than just a vestige of the past; it is the town of Bartonville's symbolic tribute to the holidays.

Without fanfare Barbara Nunneley first lit the nearly 50-foot-tall tree in 2007, when about 60,000 bright LEDs illuminated the darkness and could be seen from 3 miles away. The bright lights attract visitors who admire and photograph it or quietly take in the glow, reflecting on another year coming to an end.

"It's mesmerizing, almost a spiritual thing," says Jaclyn Carrington, mayor of Bartonville, 30 miles northwest of Fort Worth. "It is so black out because there are no streetlights, so all you see is this gigantic, beautiful bright tree. The first time I saw it, I thought, 'Wow, this is magnificent.'"

This month is the 18th renewal of a tradition Nunneley, a retired lawyer, initiated to honor her father, Earl, a larger-than-life personality, she says, who was battling prostate cancer during the early 2000s. She plays host to siblings and their families on Thanksgiving and wanted her father to be there to witness a tree-lighting ceremony that has become as anticipated in Bartonville as the annual tree-lighting event at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

"It's mesmerizing, almost a spiritual thing," Bartonville Mayor Jaclyn Carrington says of the centuries-old lighted pecan tree on Barbara Nunneley's ranch.





“
No one could have predicted that an old and revered pecan tree would become the centerpiece of the holiday season in Bartonville. It has had a life of its own and now, ‘a light of its own.’
”



Her dad, however, was too ill to make the 70-mile trip from Nocona on Thanksgiving in 2007, but with her family gathered around the tree in the pasture after dinner, Nunneley flipped the switch that brought the pecan tree to life.

“There was dead silence for a couple of minutes,” she says. “Then tears.” Her father died the next day, but Nunneley has faith that he has seen the tree from a far loftier perch.

Bill Rathburn, owner of the Christmas Light Co., first suggested lighting the 150-year-old tree in 2005. His crew was there to string lights across the roofline of Nunneley’s sprawling ranch house when he sized up the gangly mass of limbs and branches after the tree had shed its leaves and

dropped its pecans. He pondered what a different kind of Christmas tree it could be.

But Nunneley and her partner, Jan Deatherage, decided against the challenging and costly job of lighting the tree. With her father’s illness progressing, however, and his love for anything over-the-top, Nunneley gave the go-ahead two years later.

Stringing lights on the tree is labor intensive. Rathburn’s crew uses cherry pickers to reach the top, and the project takes a couple of days each year to set up and then take down in early January. Nunneley says a new circuit board had to be installed to handle the power output and that a timer now turns the lights on at dusk and off at midnight.

The tree has had various light colors over the years, but white appears to have the most dramatic impact. CoServ, an electric cooperative based in Denton, provides the electricity for the property and the tree.

Pecan trees are resilient, and this one has obviously survived numerous winters of freezing temperatures and ice storms as well as tornado seasons and Texas’ broiling summer heat. During severe drought, Nunneley runs garden hoses out to the tree from the house to ensure it stays healthy.

Carrington says the famous tree has had a modest economic impact during the holidays as people from the region make the pilgrimage to Bartonville. They eat dinner in the town of about 1,800 and then park along the side of the road fronting the pasture to admire the tree from behind the low fence.

“They make an evening out of it,” Carrington says. “It’s a huge event every year.”

One evening the week before Christmas last year, local Kim Corser stepped out of her car and walked up to the fence to just marvel at the tree. “I was out running errands and realized I hadn’t come to see the tree yet,” she says. “I usually come with my kids, but we’ll come back.”

Some visitors have tried to scale the fence to get even closer to the tree despite a sign that warns against trespassing. “Some high school boys tried to climb it,” Nunneley says. “People sneak in because they think it is on a vacant lot. Parking can be an issue because we’ve had people pulling into our driveway.”

She says a neighbor who works for the Federal Aviation Administration has informed pilots about the tree, which can be seen from planes as they come and go from nearby Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

The pecan tree is not just a tourist attraction but a source of inspiration. Deatherage displayed a coffee-table book about the tree compiled by Flower Mound photographer Meredith Butterfield. “It has entries by different photographers with stories of what the tree means to them,” she says. It’s a limited-edition book: The only copy belongs to Nunneley and Deatherage.

One holiday season early on, Nunneley heard a knock on

the front door and found a sheet of legal paper under the doormat. It was left by a young man who wanted to propose to his girlfriend under the tree because she had admired it the year before. But there was no name, phone number or other contact information.

“Several days later, I was walking in the pasture collecting the horses and saw yet another sheet of yellow legal paper,” Nunneley says. “It was the second page of the original letter. Clearly the wind had come up and separated the letter. It had the young man’s name and the way to contact him.” She followed through and gave her blessing to his request.

It happened again years later when a polite young man, about to graduate college, rang the doorbell and nervously asked whether he could propose to his college sweetheart under the tree. “He thought it was a logical place because it was a place of so much light, hope for the future and promise,” Nunneley says.

The young Romeo kept it a secret from his girlfriend when they came to view the tree. He convinced her that he knew the owners and it would be OK to trespass and take photos under the blinding canopy.

When they went over the fence and walked up to the tree, his family and hers drove from around the corner and watched as the young man dropped to one knee and proposed. “There were celebratory handshakes and hugs and lots and lots of flash camera pictures,” Nunneley says.

No one could have predicted that an old and revered pecan tree would become the centerpiece of the holiday season in Bartonville. It has had a life of its own and now, “a light of its own,” Nunneley says. ■



OPPOSITE Nunneley began the tree-lighting tradition in 2007 to honor her father.

THIS PAGE The 60,000 LEDs have made the tree a famous attraction over the holidays.





Everybody's

BY CLAIRE STEVENS
PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Michele Jaquier, a tour guide at Two Hives Honey in Manor, shows guests a beehive frame loaded with bees and honey. Jaquier captures a sample of honey. Atlas, owner Tara Chapman's son, helps with the smoker. Honey production in the U.S. was up last year even as bees face a range of threats.

For years now, all eyes have been on the bees. In the mid-2000s entire colonies of worker bees started disappearing suddenly and mysteriously, raising alarm bells around the world. Since then, there has been serious concern for the insects we depend on to pollinate our crops and native flora. Bees are up against a whole host of threats, including habitat destruction and fragmentation, invasive parasites, and extreme weather.

But things might finally be looking up for honeybees. In the U.S., honey production was up 11% in 2023 after three years of decline, according to the Department of Agriculture.

That's due, at least in part, to the many dedicated defenders of these critical pollinators. Across Texas a growing movement



Beeswax

**Texans help each other
help the mighty honeybee
help the rest of us**

of beekeepers, educators and researchers are working to save the bees. One such defender—Juliana Rangel, a professor of apiculture who runs the Texas A&M University honeybee lab—says those efforts are starting to pay off.

The biggest threat facing the bees, Rangel says, is the varroa mite, a tiny parasite that feeds on bees and spreads viruses among colonies worldwide. Despite measuring just over a millimeter, the pests have devastated U.S. honeybee populations as they've spread since the late 1980s. Some insecticides are effective against varroa but can also have negative effects on bees.

Making matters worse, increasing urbanization has left wild and managed bees with less forage.

Bees also must contend with extreme weather amid a changing climate. The February 2021 winter storm in Texas impacted bee populations unequipped for the cold and delayed the spring blooms they rely on for food. In addition, increasingly hot summers and droughts have left many bees starving. Beekeepers can keep them alive, but they'll struggle in the heat, with poor nutrition leading to no honey yields.

Against these threats, it's impressive that bees can survive in the wild. While beekeepers keep honeybees almost exclusively, native wild bees often live secluded, in nests, making them much harder to study. But they face many of the same challenges as their managed counterparts.

"I love feral colonies because they are kind of like a beacon of not just diversity but also resilience against all of these issues," Rangel says. "If they're alive, it's because they've been able to survive on their own."

Luckily, not all bees have to do it on their own. Beekeepers across the state dedicate themselves to the pollinators.

Suzanne Truhlicka, a Lyntegar Electric Cooperative member who lives in Tahoka, just south of Lubbock, was hooked after a neighbor took her along for a hive removal in 2019. "I just became addicted to bees," Truhlicka says. "The bees are like therapy to me. They're a challenge, every day."

She now maintains 12 hives and sells honey and beeswax products online and at local shops through her business, Flying Fancy Bees. She's one of many Texans who have picked up the trade in recent years. In fact, the number of farms with bees in Texas more than quadrupled from 2012 to 2022, according to the USDA's Census of Agriculture. Texas had 8,939 farms with bees—more than twice as many as the next highest state, Ohio.

One leading contributor to Texas' honeybee craze is a 2012 state law that allows folks with 5–20 acres of land to get a property tax break under an agricultural exemption if they keep bees.

That tax break was what originally prompted Susan Allen to put hives on her North Texas property, deciding that tending bees was going to be a whole lot easier than maintaining



RIGHT Chapman has become focused on beekeeping education.

BELOW A collection of hives in September at Two Hives Honey. The smoke keeps the bees calm while keepers perform hive inspections.



Save the Bees

If you want to do your part to help bees, here are a few steps you can take:

- **Grow native plants.** While a perfectly manicured lawn might be your homeowners association's preference, having a "wild" portion of your lawn where native plants and wildflowers can grow is much preferred by bees.
- **Plant large patches of the same flower.** Bees have site fidelity, meaning they prefer to return to the same patch of flowers again and again. Having a large patch of one species, rather than just a few of each kind of flower, makes it easier for them to do so.

- **If you're ready to begin caring for your own hives,**

now is the ideal time to learn and order a nucleus colony, often just called a nuc, to get started.

Nucs are typically delivered in late spring but often must be ordered in advance.

- **Support local beekeepers.** Find a map of Texas honey retailers on the Texas Beekeepers Association's website, texasbeekeepers.org.



the hay the land had been used for. But what started as a smart financial move quickly grew into a passion as Allen, a Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative member, became more and more involved in beekeeping, connecting with other local beekeepers through the Grayson County Beekeepers Association.

The more Allen learned about bees, the more she was invested. "They're just so stinking smart," Allen says. "They're fascinating. That's what keeps me going. It's just learning more and more about them."

Beekeeping clubs exist all over Texas, gathering in churches, community centers, restaurants and homes to educate, discuss challenges and collaborate.

Best friends Rosie Lund and Meredith Pace started their honey and beekeeping supply business, Apis Supply, in 2023 and quickly realized they needed a bee club in their neck of West Texas, where high winds and dry weather make keeping bees particularly tricky. The duo helped organize curious beekeepers into the Permian Basin Beekeeping Association, which now meets monthly in Seminole.

"It's a family, really," says Pace, a Lyntegar EC member. "We all just kind of support each other. It's like, 'Oh, hey, I have an extra frame,' or 'I have an extra box,' until you can get stuff in the mail because everything takes a week to get here."

Much like the community inside a hive, the community of beekeepers depends on each other. And they depend especially on people like Tara Chapman, whose beekeeping venture goes well beyond honey production, aiming to get more people informed and excited about bees.

Chapman took a beekeeping class in 2013 while looking for a new career after 10 years at the CIA. She became fascinated with bees and decided to trade war zones for worker bees, starting with just two hives maintained by her and a friend. Her operation has grown to more than 300 hives at Two Hives Honey in Manor, just east of Austin.

Chapman doesn't get to spend as much time "in bees" as she used to but now focuses on beekeeping education. In addition to tours of the honey ranch, honey tastings and

beekeeping classes, Two Hives offers a six-month hands-on "beek" apprenticeship program. Last month Chapman published *For the Bees: A Handbook for Happy Beekeeping*.

"Beekeeping is the most nuanced form of ag there is," she says. "I will argue to my death that that is true, and it's not totally intuitive to everybody."

Chapman set out to teach people about the "bananas" world of bees, making sure they understand basic bee biology first. Inside each hive is an entire society, she explains, with a queen at the center. But the queen, while important, isn't really in charge. Honeybees make decisions democratically, communicating through pheromones and "waggle dances."

"It just so defies logic of how humans live and exist," she says. Understanding the foreign world of bees is one of the things that can make keeping them so challenging.

"I've made every mistake, and I think it's why my greatest asset is my ability to teach beekeeping," Chapman says. Those mistakes have included an incident in which an improperly secured box resulted in roughly 50 pounds of spilled honey in the back of Chapman's truck.

Luckily, she says, bees will quickly come to take care of any honey that's just sitting there for the taking, but "while they're taking care of it, it's going to be a terrifying sight for the layman that happens to be walking by your driveway."

Chapman's and others' efforts haven't been in vain. Rangel says the increased awareness and interest have been important and that honeybees are doing better now than when the public first learned about collapsing colonies—though it's too soon to say they're in the clear. Honeybee numbers can fluctuate year-to-year as environmental factors change, but Rangel says there's been a trend of about a 1% increase in the U.S. managed population each year.

"In the last 15 years, the number of studies on honeybees and honeybee health have grown exponentially, which increases our understanding of all the issues that they face," she says.

"Increased awareness by the public and the farming community, I think, is what's mostly helping." ■

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Complete a Safety Checklist To Prevent Fires

TENS OF THOUSANDS of home fires each year involve electrical distribution and lighting equipment, according to the National Fire Protection Association. These fires result in more than 400 deaths, 1,000 injuries and more than \$1.3 billion in property damage annually.

There are steps you can take to help prevent fires by identifying possible safety problems before they occur. Your electric cooperative offers the following checklist to help.

Electrical outlets. Check for loose-fitting plugs and loose wall receptacles. Replace missing or broken wall plates. If you have young children, install tamper-resistant outlets. Avoid overloading outlets with adapters and too many appliances.

Electrical wiring. If an outlet isn't working, it might indicate unsafe wiring. Have an electrician check it out. Also check for loose wires and lighting fixtures. Listen for popping or sizzling sounds behind walls. If light switches are hot to the touch or lights spark and flicker, immediately shut them off at the circuit breaker and contact a qualified electrician.

Ground-fault circuit interrupters. Make sure GFCIs are installed in your kitchen, bathroom, laundry room, workshop, garage and outdoor outlets. GFCIs help protect against electrical shock. Use the test and reset button at least monthly to ensure that they're working properly.

Arc-fault circuit interrupters. Consider having AFCIs installed in your home. An AFCI installed in a circuit breaker monitors the flow of electricity throughout your home. If the AFCI detects any abnormality, it will shut off the system, preventing a fire.

Plugs. Do not remove the grounding pin (third prong) to make a plug fit a two-prong outlet.

Cords. Make sure cords are not frayed or cracked, placed under rugs, tightly wrapped around any object, or located in high traffic areas. Do not nail or staple them to walls, floors or other objects.

Extension cords. These aren't intended as permanent household wiring, so use them on a temporary basis only. If you find you need more electrical outlets, talk to an electrician about installing more.

Light bulbs. Verify that your light bulbs are the intended wattage for the lamp or fixture they're in, and make sure they are screwed in securely.

Appliances and electronics. If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse or trips a circuit breaker—or has given you an electrical shock—immediately unplug it and have it repaired or replaced. Use surge protectors to protect expensive electronics. Make sure your appliances and electronics are placed in dry locations. If an appliance has been water-damaged, replace it.

Circuit breakers or fuses. Check that circuit breakers are working properly. Fuses should be properly rated for the circuit they're protecting.

Service capacity. If fuses blow or trip frequently, you might need to increase the capacity of your electrical service or add new branch circuits. Contact a qualified electrician to determine the best and safest option for your needs. ■

Kids Can Help With Holiday Meal Prep

EVEN IF YOU LIKE to prepare Christmas dinner by yourself so it's just right, consider letting your children—or grandchildren—in on the fun and the work this season.

Of course, you'll have to keep your youngsters away from the hot stove and sharp knives. **Still, there are lots of fun, safe ways to get everyone involved:**

Very young children can take the crusts off bread for the stuffing. They can also snap the ends off of green beans.

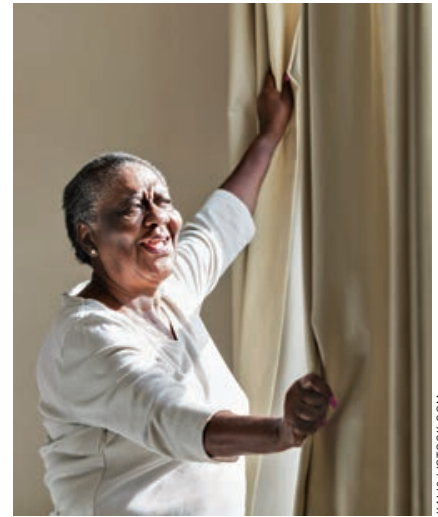
Children aged 3–5 can help pour in ingredients, and they can help stir or whisk. Have them stand at the kitchen sink to wash vegetables or let them use a hand-masher to make the mashed potatoes.

Older children can follow directions for a recipe and use cooking utensils with supervision. Let them cut, chop and peel veggies. These older kids also are strong enough to knead dough, so let them shape and divide the rolls or biscuits.

Cooking can be a great way to get kids interested in science, math and physics, as well as the history of the holiday. Talk about the food you're making, the measurements of the ingredients and the steps involved in getting food from the farm to the table.

The experience also can lead to conversations about energy conservation. Have kids turn down the heater while cooking or while company is over then explain how the extra heat of preparing a feast reduces the need to run the furnace.

The holiday might be a time to indulge, but sensible actions like using countertop kitchen appliances rather than the oven or keeping lids on pans can help ensure the feast is served without wasting electricity. ■



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WINDOW TREATMENTS do more than make your room beautiful and give your family privacy. They're also an energy-efficient tool to prevent heat from escaping your home when it's cold outside.

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- ▶ Seal drapery edges to the sides of windows using magnetic tape or fabric fasteners.
- ▶ Use a closed cornice board at the top of window coverings. The board will keep heat from entering the top of draperies and pushing cold air into the room.
- ▶ Make or buy curtain liners to place in between the drapes and the window.
- ▶ Thermal shades will help insulate your home and are easy to make with batting fibers or fiberfill.
- ▶ Snug-fitting roller shades, mounted within the window's frame, can reduce heat loss.
- ▶ Open your drapes on sunny winter days to invite the sun's warm rays indoors. Close them at dusk when the temperature drops. ■

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Never ones to miss an opportunity, we carefully steadied our glasses of bubbly and climbed into the car's long front seat. Among the many opulent features on display was a series of dashboard dials that accentuated the car's lavish aura. One of those dials inspired our 1920s Retrograde Watch, a genuinely unique timepiece that marries timeless style with modern technology.

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Dear Santa

Small-town Texas children had meager requests in 100-year-old letters to St. Nick

BY BARBARA FINLAY • ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS WORMELL

IN THE HUSTLE and bustle of the holiday season, we often hear nostalgic wishes for the simplicity of Christmases past. It sometimes seems the season has always been a time of stress, hectic shopping, expensive decoration and frantic preparation.

The old folks who grew up in rural Texas know better.

I happened on some powerful reminders of their experiences as I was looking through old newspapers in search of information on my hometown, Fife, 85 miles south of Abilene.

Now almost deserted, Fife in 1910 had more than 500 residents, two general stores, a working gin, post office, two schools and assorted churches.

The spirit of a Texas Christmas in the early 20th century is well captured by letters that Fife children of that era wrote to Santa, letters that were published in pre-Christmas editions of *The Brady Standard*. As is still true today in many small towns, children would write their local paper

with their Christmas wishes.

Their letters are revealing for not only what they say but also for what they don't say. Unlike today's letters to Santa, there were no references to brand-name items—the media-driven advertising age had not yet hit. The children's wishes then were much simpler—often they asked for only one or two items.

The generosity of the children is striking, as they often expressed modest wishes for themselves but also asked Santa to remember children who were less well off.

As I read through the letters, sometimes recognizing names of people I knew only as adults, I feel a wonderful sense of their childhood holiday spirit come to me.

I share a few of these letters, written by Fife children in the 1920s and early 1930s, in the hope that readers might recapture some of the same spirit of generosity, simplicity and fellowship in this holiday season. ■

Dear Santa:

As Christmas is near at hand we thought we would write and let you know the things which we would like most as presents. W.D. wants a school dinner bucket, a big rubber ball; Nellie Fay wants a doll, sand bucket and ball; Gladys wants a doll and we also want some nuts, apples and oranges.

Your little friends,

W.D., Nellie Fay and Gladys Bradley (1920)

Please bring me a pop gun, a sack of marbles and some candy and nuts.

Your little friend,

Cyril Farmer (1920)

After reading your letter in *The Brady Standard* I thought it was about time to write to you. I hardly know what to ask you for as you have been so good to me every Xmas. The only thing I select is a pair of bedroom slippers.

Your friend,

Voncile Duderstadt (1920)

I would like to have some chocolate candy and bananas and oranges and apples and peaches.

Your friend,

Lillian Roberts (1921)

Will you please bring my little brother and I a knife and a pair of nice leather gloves. And Santa, if you will, please bring me a nice fountain pen and my little brother a car. I have a little sister 3 years old. Bring her a doll that will say mamma and a little doll bed and lots of nuts and candy.

Love to Santa,

Charles and Floyd Tedder (1923)

Will you please bring me a scooter-scoot, a horn, a football, a blackboard and a box of handkerchiefs for Christmas and if you have anything else for me send it to some other little boy who has no parents. I try to be a good boy.

Your loving friend,

A. M. Finlay, Jr. (1924)

We have tried to be good little children. Please bring me a velocipede, a tinker toy set, some fire crackers, a ball and some caps for my gun you brought me last Christmas. Please bring Little Sister a kiddie car, a doll that says "Mamma," and a doll bed. Please bring us lots of fruit, nuts and candy. Bye-bye, Santa.

From

John Gordon and Elizabeth Maurine Tedder (1924)

I will tell you what I want. I want an embroidery set, set of dishes and a doll. I won't ask for too much, as I'm afraid you can't get around to all the children.

Your friend,

Una Ranne (1925)

I will write you a little letter and tell you of a few things I would like to have. I would like to have a new doll, as my old one has lost a leg, and I want a doll bed. I want a doll that can walk and talk, and I would like to have some little dresses, also.

Dear Santa, don't forget my little brothers, J.D. and Sid, they want a coaster wagon.

Lovingly,

Charlotte Painter (1925)

I thought I would write while I have time. I want a watch and a pistol. I want a toy flute and a toy truck and a pencil sharpener. Thank you.

From your friend,

Tom Bradley, Jr. (1927)

I've been the very best little boy lately, and if you don't hurry and come, I don't know if I can stay good much longer. I just want a few things this year, as Daddy says Santa is as poor as he is. I'd like a tractor, a car, a ball, a bat, gloves, and a lot of fruit and candy and nuts.

From

Leeman Roberts (1930)

I sent a letter to *The Brady Standard*. I want you to know I am going to write to *The Brady Standard* every Christmas. I want you to bring me a cap and a sweater for my doll and a big ball. There are many other little boys and girls that want Christmas presents. So I will go now.

Yours truly,

Golda Eileen Utsey (1930)

I have been a good little boy. Will you please bring me a velocipede, a flashlight, some apples and candy. Bring Grandpa a pair of socks and I'll put some corn at the gate for your reindeer.

Your friend,

Robert Pearce (1930)

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Black-Eyed Peace

Y2K upended New Year's traditions for Texans ready for anything

BY CHRIS BURROWS • ILLUSTRATION BY TARA JACOBY

AS KATIE WILLIAMS shopped in the run-up to Christmas 1999, the holiday wasn't on her list. The Kaufman resident had loaded up her cart with flashlights and batteries, toilet paper, water, and crates of food.

"I really think something's going to happen," Williams told *The Dallas Morning News*. "We have a pond in case we run out of water for the toilet. We can boil it if we have to drink it."

Michelle Quintiliani and her family were planning to hit the road after Christmas, leaving behind their home near the Comanche Peak nuclear plant southwest of Fort Worth.

"We're going to open our presents and then we're gone," Quintiliani told the *Waco Tribune-Herald*. "It's probably

stupid, but I don't want to chance it."

By December 30, shoppers in Victoria were hitting H-E-B hard.

"Today is busier than expected," a store manager told the *Victoria Advocate*. "This is the kind of day we expected tomorrow."

Twenty-five years ago this month, in the weeks before a new millennium, hardy Texans joined the rest of the world in making anxious last-minute preparations.

Computer experts had spent months warning that the Y2K bug might take down computer systems—and a society that was increasingly reliant on them—at the stroke of midnight. Breathless coverage took stock of the preparations as global industries—banks, utilities,

airlines—assured folks that the lights would stay on if everybody did their part to gird against glitches caused by computer systems not built with the foresight to handle the "00" in "2000."

For its part, the state of Texas spent a quarter-billion dollars on upgrades; the U.S. more than \$100 billion; and across the world, \$300 billion.

Texans weren't overly concerned though. The results of a statewide poll in October 1999 found 55% weren't worried about serious problems. One in 3 expected the lights to go out.

But they didn't.

On New Year's Eve, celebrations in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston tallied more than 320,000 total revelers.

Headline writers were ready. In the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*: "Y2K? Why Worry?"

San Angelo Standard-Times: "Y(awn)2K-Feared bug doesn't bite."

Wichita Falls' *Times Record News*: "It wasn't the night the lights went out in Texas after all."

The bug may have been a bust, but Leon Kappelmann, a University of North Texas professor who worked on several technical committees in preparation for Y2K, says the world learned a lot.

"In terms of IT management, many of us learned what a mess we had just about everywhere and realized it was past time to professionalize and improve our practices," he said. "IT had proliferated so quickly and completely over the 40 years prior to 1995, our ability to effectively and efficiently manage it had simply not kept up."

And besides, some Texans hadn't wasted any worries on Y2K.

C.M. Dehtam told the *Tribune-Herald* that he planned to be selling fruit out of his pickup on New Year's Eve.

"If it's going to happen, it's going to happen," he said. "It's not something I have any control over. I got other things to worry about, like what I'm going to eat tonight." ■

Cookie Exchange

Be the star of the swap with these family gems

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

One of my favorite cake flavors transforms into cookies for a delicious addition to your cookie exchange. With a vibrant Christmas red hue; soft, chewy texture; and a crunchy topping, they're decadent enough to feel indulgent and light enough to enjoy more than one on Christmas morning.

Red Velvet Cookies

1½ cups flour
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
¾ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
1 cup sugar
1 egg
1 tablespoon buttermilk
1 tablespoon red food color
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ cup white chocolate chips
½ cup semisweet chocolate chunks
White sanding sugar

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa powder, baking powder and salt.
3. In another bowl, cream butter and sugar with a hand mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy. Reduce mixer speed to low and add egg, buttermilk, food color and vanilla.
4. Add flour mixture in two batches, scraping down the sides and bottom of the bowl and mixing until well combined. Fold in the white chocolate chips and semisweet chocolate chunks. Cover and chill the dough in the refrigerator at least 1 hour.
5. Place 2-tablespoon scoops of dough 2 inches apart on baking sheets. Use the bottom of a glass to gently press cookies to about ½ inch thick. Sprinkle with sanding sugar.
6. Bake 10–12 minutes, until cookies are slightly puffy and set on the edges. Allow cookies to cool and sprinkle with additional sanding sugar if desired.

MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES

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



Grandma Melton's Sand Tarts

LAURA MCNABB
PEDERNALES EC

These are considered the official cookies of Texas, at least according to McNabb's family. A crescent-shaped cookie that melts in your mouth, leaving a hint of sweetness and buttery goodness, they have a tender, crumbly texture that pairs perfectly with their light, nutty flavor. The delicate powdered sugar coating gives them a festive, snow-dusted appearance, making them a perfect addition to your holiday cookie platter.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- 1 cup powdered sugar, plus more for dusting**
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
- 2 cups flour**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Using an electric mixer on medium speed, beat butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add vanilla and mix well. Reduce mixer speed to low. Add flour and salt, mixing until almost combined.
3. Gently fold in pecans with hands, being careful not to overmix. Chill dough 30 minutes.
4. With floured hands, shape 1 tablespoon of dough at a time into a crescent. Place crescents 1 inch apart on baking sheets.
5. Bake 12–14 minutes or until the edges are lightly browned. Allow cookies to cool about 5 minutes on baking sheets then transfer to cooling racks. While the cookies are still warm, dust with powdered sugar.

MAKES 3 DOZEN COOKIES

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29 >



\$500 WINNER

Flonnie's Orange Slice Cookies

JENNIFER KEITH
WOOD COUNTY EC



Keith found her grandmother Flonnie's recipe for these cookies in her mama's recipe box, and they have become a holiday staple in her house. These cookies are a delightful and nostalgic treat. The candies melt slightly during baking, creating pockets of gooey, fruity goodness throughout. A soft, chewy cookie with bursts of citrusy flavor in each bite is the merriest sweet for gifting this holiday season.

MAKES 5 DOZEN COOKIES

- 2 cups (4 sticks) butter, softened**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 2¼ cups brown sugar**
- 3 eggs**
- 2 teaspoons baking soda**
- 3 tablespoons warm water**
- 6 cups flour**
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon**
- 2 cups sweetened coconut flakes**
- 2 cups chopped walnuts**
- 1 package orange slices candy (10 ounces), diced**

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, cream butter, sugar and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, scraping down sides of bowl after each addition.
3. In a small bowl, dissolve baking soda in warm water.
4. To the large bowl, add baking soda mixture, flour and cinnamon and mix until incorporated. Fold in coconut, walnuts and candy slices.
5. Use a medium cookie scoop to place dough onto a baking sheet, leaving 1 inch between each cookie.
6. Bake 11–14 minutes, until lightly golden brown.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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There are endless ways to fill an enchilada. Share your favorite filling to roll up in a tortilla and you could win \$500. Enter by December 10.

UPCOMING: SUMMER PASTAS DUE JANUARY 10





HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

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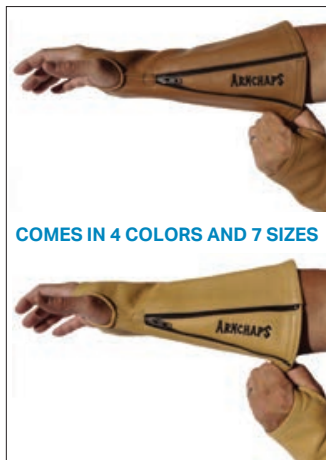
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Grandma's Italian Chocolate Spice Cookies

MARY BOLSINGER
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

These cookies have a firm, slightly crunchy exterior that gives way to a soft, cakelike interior. The harmonious blend of cocoa, cinnamon, cloves and vanilla creates a warm, spiced flavor that's perfect for the season. Chocolate is complemented by the subtle warmth of coffee, making each bite a cozy experience.

COOKIES

- 2 cups flour
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup olive oil



- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 tablespoons brewed black coffee, at room temperature
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

ICING

- 2¼ cups powdered sugar
- 3–4 tablespoons milk
- Sprinkles (optional)

1. **COOKIES:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, baking powder, salt, cinnamon and cloves.
3. In another bowl, whisk together eggs and sugar until sugar is dissolved. Stir in olive oil, vanilla and coffee.
4. Add the flour mixture and stir until smooth. Stir in the walnuts.
5. Scoop the dough with a medium cookie scoop. Roll into balls with floured hands. Place on baking sheets about 2 inches apart.
6. Bake 10–12 minutes.
7. **ICING:** Whisk together powdered sugar and milk until smooth.
8. Dip the tops of cookies into the icing mixture and top with sprinkles.

MAKES 4 DOZEN COOKIES



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Belle Reborn

Experience Tres Palacios Bay like a French explorer—without the sinking

BY CHET GARNER

THERE I STOOD in the middle of Tres Palacios Bay, part of Matagorda Bay, aboard a sailing vessel named La Petite Belle. The crew and I had set out from Palacios into the same gulf waters that French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, had sailed 338 years before.

Hopefully, our seafaring adventure wouldn't meet the same fate as the French explorer's crew.

Our expedition started in the town's historic district at the City by the Sea Museum, where every era of Palacios' colorful past is brought to life through exhibits and artifacts. Most interesting (and tragic) is the story of La Salle's doomed voyage to Texas. La Belle, one of his four ships, wrecked on a sandbar and sank into the bay's muddy bottom in 1686. Luckily the Frenchman was already on land, exploring Texas.

In the 1990s, archaeologists found the ship and resurrected its hull along with 1.6 million French artifacts. The preserved remains are on display at the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin.

La Petite Belle, a half-sized, 30-foot-long re-creation of the original, now sails the high seas of Texas, giving tourists a taste of maritime history and adventure. The jolly crew of museum volunteers seemed seaworthy as they called out commands across the deck and navigated our ship using 17th-century techniques.

I simply walked around, rattling ropes and trying not to expose my greenhorn lack of sailing knowledge. While this isn't a pirate ship, I jumped with excitement when the crew announced it was time to fire the cannons. We loaded them up with pyrotechnics and yelled "fire in the hole" as we shot at imaginary ships.

The ship is small, but the adventure is surely Texas-sized. ■

ABOVE Chet, aboard La Petite Belle, ponders a 17th-century existence.

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



Know Before You Go

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

DECEMBER

7

Castroville **Castroville Conservation Society Candlelight Home Tour**, (830) 708-5680, castrovilleconservationsociety.org

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8

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

12

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

13

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

Shiner [13-14] Christmas Village, (361) 594-3830, shinerfumc.org

Kyle [13-15] A Night in Bethlehem, (512) 268-7044, f-pc.org

Montalba [13-15] Walk Through Bethlehem, (903) 549-2319, montalbabaptistchurch.com

Palestine [13-15] A Seussified Christmas Carol and Variety Show, (903) 394-2173, thetexas theater.com

14

Brenham The 3 Redneck Tenors Christmas, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Coldspring Christmas on the Square, (936) 653-2184, coldspringtexas.org

Frankston Frankston Garden Club Christmas Tour of Homes, (817) 913-1982, frankstongardenclubtx.com

Jasper Country Lights, (409) 384-5231, tpwd.texas.gov

15

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

19

Corsicana Santa's Sip & Stroll, (903) 654-4851, facebook.com/corsicana mainstreet

Richardson [19-22] Christmas With C.S. Lewis, (972) 744-4650, eisemanncenter.com

31

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

TCP Submit Your Event

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

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Young Photographers

Slow down a moment and take in the world through the lens of a child. These young photographers are honing their skills and having a great time doing it. One thing's clear: The future of Texas photography is in good hands.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 CRYSTAL CANTU
VICTORIA EC

"I heard a frog and went on an adventure to find him," says Magi Jo, 15.

2 CARLY LATHAM
HEART OF TEXAS EC

"The fasciated bluebonnets are so exciting to find. My sister and I always try to see who can find the most variations," says Byron Ace Latham, 10.

3 MARK GARTON
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

My son, 9, learns to take pictures of Texas bluebonnets at Fort Parker State Park.

4 LAURA DAVIS
BANDERA EC

Blakely Barton, 2, has an impromptu photo session with her papa, Brad Davis.



Upcoming Contests

- DUE DEC 10 **Characters**
- DUE JAN 10 **Patterns**
- DUE FEB 10 **Family Vacation**



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Young Photographers photos from readers.



Emily's Wish

Christmas feels bleak when a family's hearts are in two places

BY FRED AFFLERBACH
ILLUSTRATION BY
THE BRAVE UNION

ON CHRISTMAS EVE 2022, it was my honor to tuck into bed my 6-year-old granddaughter, Emily. We said nighttime prayers, then she asked Santa for a bigger bike, stick-on earrings and an art set. I thought she was finished, but after a pause, she continued.

"I wish Mommy would be home from the hospital so that the whole family can be together for Christmas."

I closed Emily's door behind me. But I left pieces of my heart scattered on her bedroom floor.

Emily's mother, my daughter-in-law, Kim Afflerbach, delivered healthy twin boys five days before at St. David's Women's Center of Texas in Austin. Shortly after delivery, she experienced cardiac arrest. The cesarean section surgery apparently opened a Pandora's

box of stagnant blood clots that gushed throughout her body.

Her heart stopped beating after one nefarious clot lodged in her main artery. Fast-acting nurses and doctors performed CPR and rushed her to the intensive care unit, where she remained Christmas Eve.

Christmas morning, Emily held little sister Avery's hand as they walked downstairs together. Her shiny new bike awaited. Avery rushed to a Peppa Pig playhouse, dropped to her knees and squealed in delight.

The tree glowed in the early-morning light, and their nana removed golden-brown pigs in a blanket from the oven. I sipped hot coffee laced with Irish cream.

It looked like Christmas. It smelled like Christmas. It even tasted like Christmas. But it didn't feel like Christmas. There was something missing—Mommy.

Christmas Day at a hospital is a rather solemn occasion. Folks carry on the best they can. A skeleton crew in the cafeteria dishes out turkey and dressing and gravy. Doctors and nurses and families of patients smile while passing in corridors and sharing elevators.

Kim remained sedated. She had received multiple transfusions by then and would need more. Yet doctors remained optimistic. They eschewed invasive surgery. And we waited.

Finally, Kim moved out of the ICU on New Year's Eve and into a private room.

Come January 5, Emily's father, Eric, pushed Kim's wheelchair down hospital hallways toward the valet parking. Nurses, doctors and staff lined their exit route, clapping and waving, holding out flowers and balloons, and offering heartfelt goodbyes.

It's often said that a request delayed is a request denied. But that's not always so! Emily's entire family celebrated Christmas 2023 at home together. Emily and Avery, twin brothers Bryson and Jackson, Daddy—and especially Mommy.

Although a year late, Emily's Christmas wish came true. ■



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