

THE CARDINAL:
OUR STATEWIDE BIRD

HOW 'BOUT A HAND
FOR FINGER FOODS

I'LL BE GONE
FOR CHRISTMAS

Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2022

Silent Night

The Christmas story
comes to life in San Elizario
with Las Posadas



BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS

SEE PAGE 18



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December 2022



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Roll Out the Red Carpet

All Texans know the striking blush and cheery chirps of our other state bird: the northern cardinal.

*By Mike Leggett
Illustration by Sarah Ferone*

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Las Posadas sustains a centuries-old Mexican reenactment of the biblical story.

*By Melissa Gaskill
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

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The Presidio Chapel of San Elizario.
Photo by Erich Schlegel

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The northern cardinal is ubiquitous in Texas.

Illustration by Sarah Ferone

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Hallmark of the Holidays



December 6

National Microwave Oven Day

Your electric cooperative, your trusted energy adviser that strives to help you save money on electric bills, reminds you: Microwaves use about 60% as much energy as full-size ovens.

BECAUSE OF HENRY COLE, we have Christmas Card Day, which falls on December 9.

Cole, an Englishman, sent the first Christmas card—in 1843.

He fretted over the new custom of sending personalized letters to all his friends. He simply didn't have the time.

So he printed up 1,000 postcards, below, with the greeting "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You."



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I CAN'T BELIEVE I USED TO WEAR ...

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: **The best Christmas gift I ever gave was ...**

A stove with a window in the oven door, to my mother-in-law, who proclaimed with joy, "Now I can watch my cookies as they are baking."

LINDA STEINHEBEL
VIA FACEBOOK

To my mother, in 1967, my return from the war.

ALLEN LINDERMAN
NUECES EC
CORPUS CHRISTI

In 2021, when I surprised our daughter Elizabeth with a book it took me 41 years to write about her

much-loved baby sister Rebecca, who died in 1980 at the age of 9 months.

PHYLLIS CRAM
PEDERNALES EC
AUSTIN

Visit our website to see more responses.

For the Rest of Us

Festivus, the TV holiday that isn't really a holiday, came into the vernacular 25 years ago.

The December 18, 1997, *Seinfeld* episode included a storyline about Festivus, a supposed alternative to the pressures and commercialization of the Christmas season.

“Nothing smooths out the past like a present.”

—GLADYS PARKER



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Wreaths for the Fallen

THOUSANDS OF VOLUNTEERS across the country will honor veterans December 17 by laying wreaths at graves on National Wreaths Across America Day. In Texas, 210,000 wreaths are expected to be placed at 300 locations. We featured Texans' involvement in this endeavor in *Circle of Life* in November 2018.

Wreaths Across America grew out of an effort that began in 1992, when Worcester Wreath Co. in Harrington, Maine, had extra wreaths near the end of its busy holiday season. The business arranged for the surplus wreaths to be delivered to Arlington National Cemetery and placed on headstones.



JULIA ROBINSON

Bison at the Brink

“It was also Charles Goodnight who created the cattalo breed on his Texas Panhandle ranch.”

BILL LAMZA
SAN BERNARD EC
HEMPSTEAD

Goodnight Slight

I was “buffaloed” by *Bison at the Brink* [October 2022]. I’m proud to know a Texan was responsible for saving buffalo from extinction in the U.S., but I was stunned the credit was repeatedly given to Charles Goodnight, even though the writer casually acknowledges that his “herd had been gathered and nurtured by his wife, Mary Ann Goodnight, who personally saw to it that the orphans found wandering the ranch were saved and protected.”

That’s the only time her name appeared. It’s a shame we can’t give credit where credit is due.

Susan Rosenberger
Pedernales EC
Spicewood and Johnson City

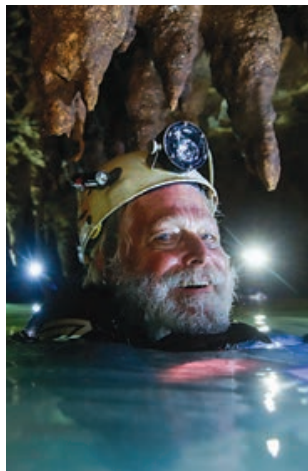
A similar story is told about how George Mitchell’s epiphany for the Woodlands came about [Good on Paper, September 2022].

MELINDA WOOD
SASARAK
VIA FACEBOOK

The Bottom Line

Eric Schlegel’s excellent photo captured a live look at the thrill and excitement of an uncharted cave explorer [Uncharted Territory, October 2022]. And Pam LeBlanc added intriguing coverage of the adventure.

Martha E. Jones
Victoria EC
Victoria



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Colossal Cluster

In December 2005 we visited the monarchs’ nesting grounds at Sierra Chincua [Funnel Vision, October 2022]. Monarchs numbered in the millions—billions? Located at about 11,000 feet in elevation in a remote area of the Sierra Madre, they literally weighed down large pine tree boughs.

Wayne P. Blackley
Trinity Valley EC
Terrell

TCP WRITE TO US
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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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Roll Out the Red Carpet

All Texans know the striking blush and cheery chirps of our other state bird: the northern cardinal

BY MIKE LEGGETT
ILLUSTRATION BY
SARAH FERONE

JUST ABOUT everyone knows that the northern mockingbird is Texas' state bird. But there's another bird we all know that is common throughout our state, nesting and feeding in brush and trees close to our homes and out in the pastures.

Some know it as the redbird, but it's correctly called the northern cardinal. This strikingly colored bird is known for its happy chirping calls that can go on all

day and for the beautiful crest and orange bill of the adults.

Cardinals are the first birds we hear and see hopping around in the brush outside our houses in the mornings. They are the last birds to go to bed every night, which makes them common prey for screech owls and other raptors. But if we ever get around to reconsidering Texas' allegiance to the mockingbird, I suggest we consider the northern cardinal. After all, at least seven other states have chosen the cardinal as their own state bird.

The redbird is ubiquitous, especially in the winter since it doesn't migrate, showing up everywhere from the border country of South Texas to the prairies of the Panhandle. All Texans know the cardinal.

Growing up in the tiny East Texas community of DeBerry in the 1950s, I spent a goodly portion of my young life walking the pastures and open fields around our house. I knocked off



more than my share of sparrows, starlings and brown-headed cowbirds as an eager beaver hunter with a BB gun.

I once made a long, long shot with my pellet rifle to kill what we called a French mockingbird. I know that bird now as the shrike, or butcher bird, named for its habit of hanging things it chases down on mesquite thorns and sharpened spikes on barbed wire fences.

I was not allowed, however, to shoot any of the small group of colorful songbirds that lived and nested near our home. The mockingbird was the state bird then, and I feared that could have gotten me locked up.

My dad, who established the shooting list at our house, probably would have pounded me for killing that shrike if he'd known about it. I kept that quiet. But Dad had a long list of birds with bright colors that I would have been in real trouble if I'd killed. Cardinals were his favorites and first on his protected list, followed by blue jays, bluebirds, scissor-tailed flycatchers and the always cooperative killdeer. Dad loved the way adult killdeers would feign injury and try to lead predators away from their babies and nests.

The beloved cardinal eats mostly seeds and nests around the edges of openings in low brush, especially in the cedar trees of Central Texas. We once had a nest that was built about thigh high in a cenizo just off the front porch of our house. I watched those pinkish eggs for a couple of weeks, until they hatched into three of the ugliest pink babies you

could imagine.

The babies got stronger and bigger and were just about to fledge when the nest was robbed by a Texas rat snake that had taken up residence in our flower bed. That was a sad morning when I found the nest emptied and the adults off squawking in the live oaks in the roundabout a few yards away.

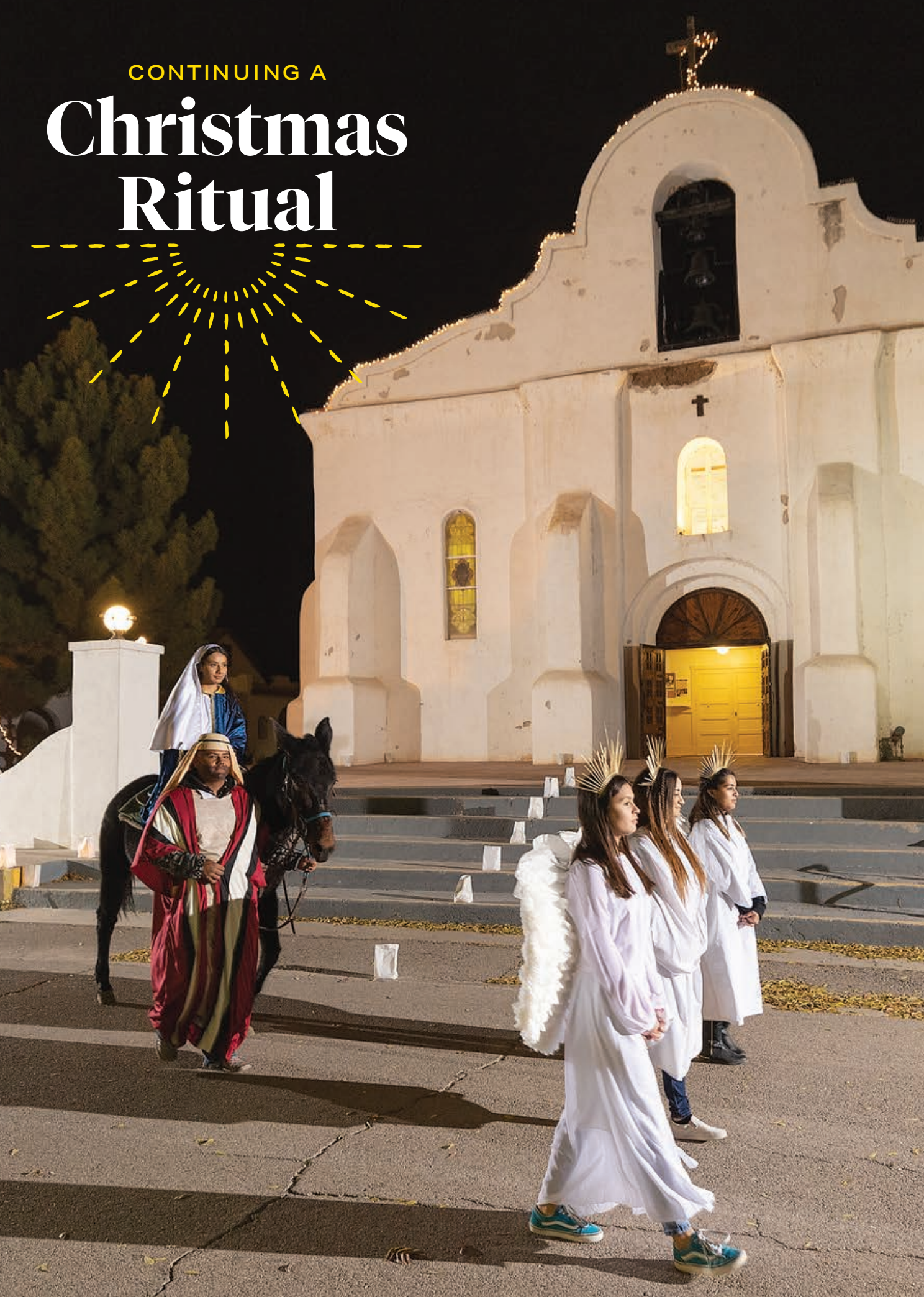
There is a similar bird, actually another member of the cardinal family, known as a pyrrhuloxia. The male has a striking crest that's larger than the cardinal's but is colored mostly gray and crimson. They are common on ranches in South Texas during the winter. Their beaks are much more parrotlike than the cardinal's obvious seed-cracking orange beak.

One ranch where I hunt has repurposed fiberglass water tanks buried in the ground for use as bow blinds. The rancher has piled dirt and brush on top of them and put one-way glass windows at eye level as you stand. It's exciting to watch the male red cardinals flit through the trees as they scout for safe feeding spots on the ground.

Often they land just outside the windows where I can study them closely from just a couple feet away. It's fascinating to watch them pick up a kernel of corn and quickly demolish it to get at the sweet meat inside. There's comfort in that tiny, mighty act—in knowing that Texans yet to come will delight in the redbird. ■

CONTINUING A

Christmas Ritual



Las Posadas sustains a centuries-old Mexican reenactment of the biblical story



AS THE LIGHT FADES on a chilly December evening, a row of luminarias glows against the white facade of the Presidio Chapel of San Elizario. The luminarias, paper bags containing lit candles, outline an adobe museum next to the 140-year-old church and extend around the plaza and on down the streets, giving the night a festive feel.

In the tree-lined plaza, a group of young people in costume gathers next to a gazebo. This is a dress rehearsal for Las Posadas, which translates as “the inns” and refers to a procession or play that reenacts the biblical story of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter in Bethlehem and the birth of

Jesus. This telling of the Christmas story originated in 16th-century Mexico and continues there and in cities and towns north of the Rio Grande with musicians and costumed children going from house to house on Christmas Eve.

San Elizario, southeast of El Paso, has strong historic ties to Mexico, and the San Elizario Genealogy and Historical Society has staged a mostly annual Las Posadas as part of its Luminarias Festival for some 20 years. Lillian Trujillo, president of the organization, says many of the participants are teens from San Elizario Catholic Church.

“Sometimes we have to talk them into it; they’re shy,” Trujillo says. “We tell them that they don’t have to speak, that it’s just dressing up and walking around.” Older kids and adults sometimes fill in any gaps. For years, the costumes were an assortment of donated and leftover items, but in 2021, the society received enough donations to buy new ones.

As the dress rehearsal wraps up, people spill from the church where Mass has just ended, joining a crowd beneath the trees. Dozens of small children play in the leaves. Customers line up at a food truck at the back of the plaza. Las Posadas begins.

Students playing Mary and Joseph—the former perched on a real, live mule—make their way past the steps of the church, the mule’s hooves clapping on the pavement. In the gazebo, Trujillo reads the Christmas story aloud, her voice projected over speakers, as an “innkeeper” at the top of the steps turns the couple away. They continue on to the gazebo,

where they settle on bales of hay, and the girl playing Mary pulls a baby doll from under her robe.

Youngsters dressed as wise men step forward to present their gifts: boxes representing gold, frankincense and myrrh. Under a nearby tree, the angels tell those dressed as shepherds the news of the baby’s arrival, and they all make their way into the gazebo to see him. The story is familiar to everyone here.

Las Posadas complete, the players scatter, some pausing to pet the placid mule. In front of the museum, boys and girls from a local folklórico class in traditional dress entertain the crowd with lively dances. Then the youngest kids take turns having a go at a giant piñata. Finally, Santa Claus shows up in a firetruck, sirens blaring and lights flashing, to hand out toys. The night ends with a drawing for bicycles, and every child entered takes home a shiny new bike and helmet, thanks to generous donations.

OPPOSITE Students reenact the biblical story of Mary and Joseph, who, led by angels, seek shelter in Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus.

ABOVE A dazzling dancer at the San Elizario Luminaria Festival.



The church sits at the center of the community, literally and figuratively. In San Elizario, as in other small towns all along the Rio Grande, church bells once served as a timekeeper, ringing at noon to signal lunch break; when it was time for Mass; and to announce weddings, baptisms and deaths.

THE COMMUNITY spends weeks preparing for the festival, which is held on the second or third Saturday of December—December 17 this year.

Local families founded the San Elizario Genealogy and Historical Society in 1997 after a conversation at a family reunion about the importance of passing this area's rich history on to younger generations. Board member Elizabeth Baker-Teran's parents, Teresa and Miguel Teran, were among the founders. "They wanted to preserve the genealogical history of the families of San Elizario and the historical buildings that are still there and to educate the public about the hundreds of years of history," Baker-Teran says.

That history includes construction of the presidio chapel by the Spanish for members of the military and their families in 1788. That first chapel flooded in 1829, and another was built to take its place. In 1877, the existing, larger church was built. Its walls were repainted and the current electric lights installed in the 1950s. The Stations of the Cross on the walls inside date back to about 1918.



The church sits at the center of the community, literally and figuratively. In San Elizario, as in other small towns all along the Rio Grande, church bells once served as a timekeeper, ringing at noon to signal lunch break; when it was time for Mass; and to announce weddings, baptisms and deaths.

San Elizario anchors the El Paso Mission Trail, which includes two other historic missions. The Ysleta Mission, originally built in 1680, is considered the first and oldest mission established in Texas and is the second-oldest continually active Catholic parish in the U.S. The original Socorro Mission was completed in 1691, making it the second-oldest Texas mission; the current building dates to 1843.

Socorro Road, which runs from Ysleta to Socorro to San Elizario, is the designated Mission Trail. The 9-mile route follows a segment of the El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (Royal Road of the Interior), a trade and supply route that ran from Mexico City to present-day Santa Fe, New Mexico, linking communities, missions and presidios. The oldest road in North America and once the longest, El Camino Real, or what remains of it, was designated as a National Historic Trail in 2000.

Originally, San Elizario, Socorro and Ysleta all sat on the south bank of the Rio Grande, in what became the country

of Mexico. In the 1829 flood, the river cut a new channel, leaving all three churches on the northern bank. When the U.S. declared the deepest channel of the Rio Grande as the international boundary with Mexico in 1848, these communities became part of the U.S.

The Los Portales Museum occupies a circa-1850 building in San Elizario and tells the area's history. The exhibit room is small but contains a wealth of maps, photos and descriptions of significant events and everyday life in the area. At one point, the town supported a trade in salt from the Guadalupe Mountains. Local farmers employed a complex irrigation system to grow grapes, pears, onions and wheat, which was ground in a private gristmill.

Trujillo says that for many of the families that attend the Christmas festival, the evening fittingly has been about holiday fun. For Trujillo, whose family has been here since the 1700s, an annual Las Posadas is part of keeping that history alive. ■

OPPOSITE A service inside the Presidio Chapel of San Elizario, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. ABOVE Folklorico students perform dances that trace their origins to Indigenous peoples of Mexico.



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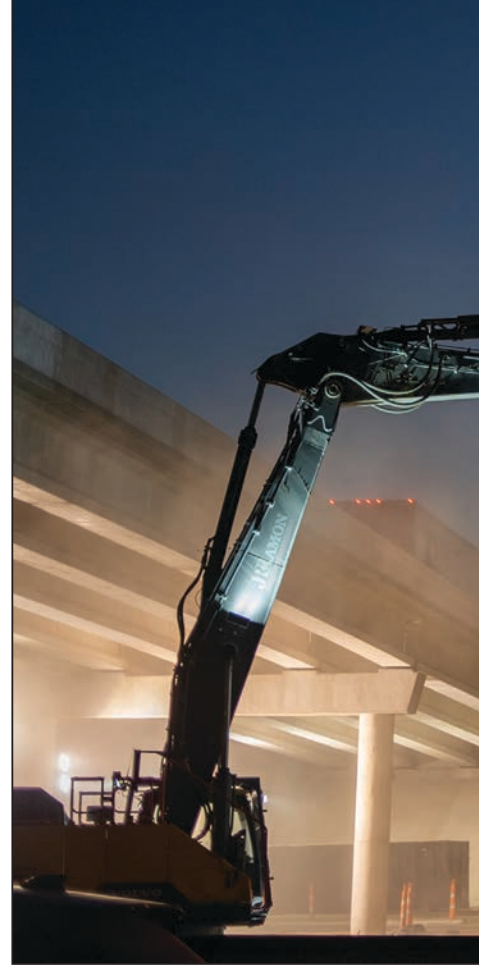


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the ROADS ahead

Projects of all sizes crisscrossing the Bluebonnet service area are planned in the coming years to smooth the flow of traffic

Story by Melissa Segrest • Photos by Kelly West

POP QUIZ. Which is worse?

A: Being trapped in traffic, creeping ever so slowly, because the road you're on wasn't built to handle the weekday rush-hour crush.

B: Being trapped in traffic, still creeping slowly, because the road you're on is under construction for a few years so that overpasses, lanes, wider shoulders and medians can be added.

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projects for many counties across the 3,800-square-mile Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area. Many other projects are planned to improve busy, smaller roads in all or part of the 14 Central Texas counties where Bluebonnet provides electricity. Resurfacing a road, widening shoulders, adding turn lanes and median barriers are all aspects of TxDOT's plans.

"We measure the average daily traffic on our



Clockwise from top left: A typical workday morning traffic backup on U.S. 290 near Gregg Manor Road in Manor; crews work at night to demolish a part of the old Texas 71 bridge over the Colorado River in Bastrop; Brad Wheelis, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Transportation, at the site of construction along Texas 71; progress comes at a price, as road projects across the region can add to delays.

“We measure the average daily traffic on our Texas roadways, and when we start to see those things tick up, we take note and ask, ‘How much is this increasing and do we expect that to continue?’”

— **BRAD WHEELIS**,
Spokesman for the Austin District of TxDOT

Texas roadways, and when we start to see those things tick up, we take note and ask, ‘How much is this increasing and do we expect that to continue?’” said Brad Wheelis, spokesman for the Austin District of TxDOT. “We look at (growth) numbers, and we look for trends and then decide if we need to increase capacity or make some safety improvements on a road.”

TxDOT manages projects on interstate, U.S. and state highways, as well as farm-to-market and ranch-to-market roads. Sometimes cities or counties help with project planning, which can speed the process. Otherwise, counties and cities pay for their own road projects. Developers are responsible for the roads within the subdivisions they build.

The Austin District of TxDOT includes 11 counties, six of which are all or partly within the Bluebonnet service area: Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Lee, Travis and Williamson. The Bryan District of TxDOT oversees road projects in 10 counties, including Washington and Burleson on the eastern side of Bluebonnet’s service area, and Milam on the northern side.

Not all improvements are major projects. In many cases, “we might add shoulders, a safety enhancement,” Wheelis said. “On some of the more rural roadways, we’ll build a continuous center-turn lane — a big safety improvement that also improves mobility.”

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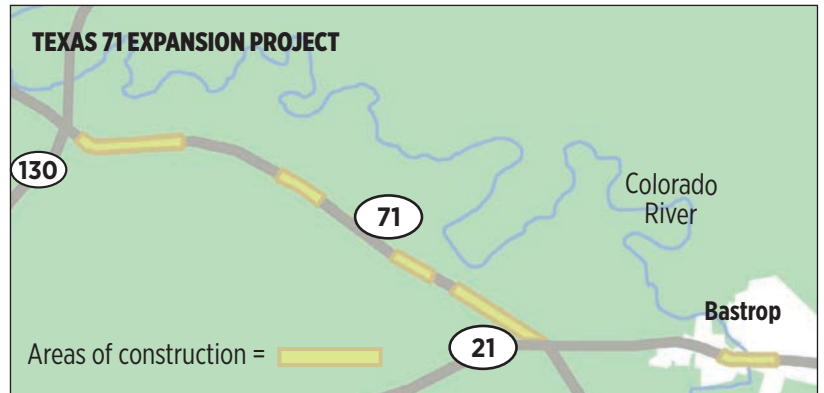
Large road projects dot the Bluebonnet region

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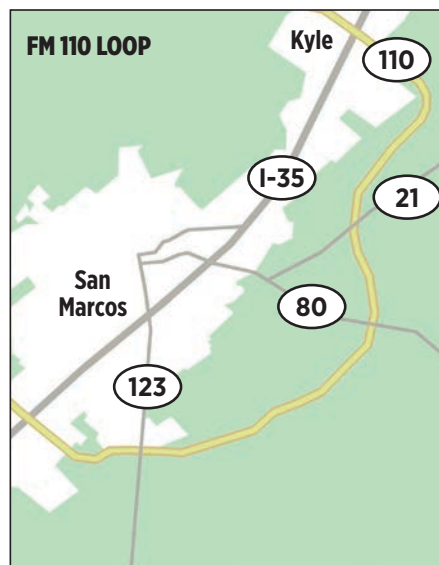
SOME OF THE largest road projects in the Bluebonnet service area have already begun or will start in the next few years:

Texas 71 from Texas 130 to Bastrop

A multiphase, multiyear series of projects that will eventually remove all traffic lights on the highway's main lanes from east of the Texas 130 toll road all the way to Houston. It will be several years before the projects are finished, but two significant segments are nearly complete or well underway. Construction of an overpass to carry Texas 71 traffic over Ross and Kellam roads in southeastern Travis County is planned for completion in 2024, and all lanes of the new bridge over the Colorado River in Bastrop are slated to open in 2023. Planned overpasses at Tucker Hill Lane, Pope Bend Road and FM 1209 in Bastrop County do not have timelines yet. The projects are forecast to total \$199.4 million.



Five sections of Texas 71 from the Texas 130 toll road east past the bridge over the Colorado River in Bastrop will undergo dramatic changes that will ultimately eliminate traffic lights all the way to Houston. Below, the new bridge over the Colorado in Bastrop is near completion and scheduled to open in 2023. *Mike Siegeler photo*



FM 110 loop east of San Marcos

Hays County continues to be one of the fastest-growing in the country, and traffic on Interstate 35 reflects that. When it is complete, this loop east of San Marcos will provide an alternative to I-35. One of the project's three segments is under construction. A new 6.5-mile, two-lane road with 10-foot shoulders will stretch from I-35 to Texas 80 in Caldwell and Hays counties, including construction of an overpass above Texas 21 near the San Marcos airport. That new road will connect with portions of FM 110 that will reconnect with I-35 south of San Marcos. The project began in 2022 and could be complete in 2023 at a cost of \$36.5 million.



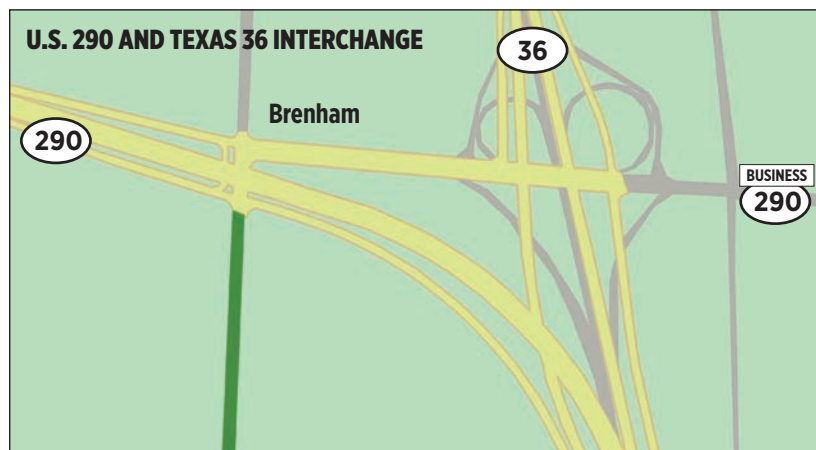
A new road is being built in eastern Hays and part of Caldwell counties to connect with FM 110 and create a continuous half loop east of San Marcos. The project will provide an alternative to a busy stretch of Interstate 35. *Melissa Segrest photo*



U.S. 290/Texas 36 interchange, Brenham

The cloverleaf interchange of U.S. 290 and Texas 36 in Brenham will be rebuilt, with a planned start in 2026 to create a direct flow of traffic on U.S. 290. Another phase of the project will widen a different stretch of the highway and add medians. *Mike Siegeler photo*

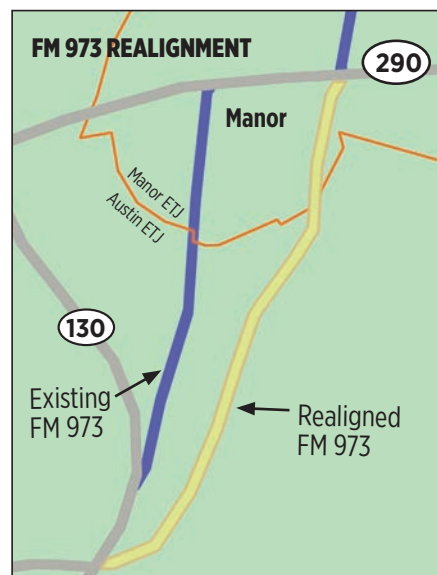
The existing cloverleaf design for the intersection of the two busy roads is no match for today's traffic. "The annual average daily traffic is on the order of 45,000 vehicles per day at this location, which represents about a 100% increase in traffic in the last 10 years," said Juan Quiroz, the TxDOT Bryan District's planning engineer. "The new design will improve safety and operate much more efficiently." Construction of a new direct-connect interchange is scheduled to start in 2026 and should take two to three years to build. In addition, a stretch of U.S. 290 will be widened to a four-lane highway with a wide grassy median. Altogether, "the estimated construction cost now is \$103 million," Quiroz said. "It's one of the bigger projects in the Bryan district."



Traffic on FM 973 in Manor is currently forced to zigzag along U.S. 290 and through the city's narrow streets. A planned realignment will create a wider, straight route on FM 973 south to Texas 130. *Joe Stafford photo*

FM 973 realignment east of Manor

Rapid growth across the Manor area of eastern Travis County has generated heavy traffic on both U.S. 290 and the Texas 130 toll road during peak hours. Many area drivers use FM 973 to bypass that intersection to reach Texas 130 from Manor. The existing FM 973 is narrow, zigzags across U.S. 290 and takes sharp turns through the middle of Manor. TxDOT plans to realign and expand FM 973 and route it to bypass Manor to the east. That would create a direct, continuous six-lane road with a grassy median and multiple turn lanes. The project would include construction of four overpasses and bridges over two creeks. Construction hasn't started, and no timeline has been set, but eventually the cost of the project is estimated at \$200 million.



Continued on next page



Juan Quiroz, planning engineer for the Bryan District of the Texas Department of Transportation, says reconstruction of the U.S.290/Texas 36 interchange in Brenham should begin in 2026.

Continued from previous page

Some other significant road projects planned for the Bluebonnet region include:

- Texas 142 in Caldwell County: New lanes will be added on the stretch of 142 from Texas 80 east to the Texas 130 toll road. There is no timeline for the project, which is estimated to cost \$53 million.
- FM 60 in Burleson County: This road is slated to be widened to four lanes from its intersection with Texas 36 to west of FM 2039 near Snook. TxDOT's project planning document estimates the project will be completed by 2024 at a cost of \$34.29 million.
- Texas 21 in Bastrop County: This state highway is scheduled to be widened to a four-lane divided road from CR 130 near Bastrop State Park to just north of U.S. 290 near Paige; twin overpasses will be constructed over U.S. 290 as well. The project is expected to start in 2024 at an estimated cost of \$50 million.
- FM 2720 in Caldwell County: TxDOT has in its project plan the addition of lanes and shoulders on the stretch of this road from Texas 21 at Uhland to Texas 142 in Lockhart. There is no timeline for the project, which is estimated to cost \$53 million.
- FM 969 in Travis and Bastrop counties: A short stretch in western Bastrop County is being widened and shoulders are being added for an estimated cost of \$2.5 million; a 1.8-mile stretch from Hunters Bend Road to Taylor Lane in eastern Travis County will also be widened. Construction of that is expected to start in 2026 with a potential price tag of \$8.95 million.

From moving utility lines to discussions of proposed road projects, Bluebonnet works in tandem with TxDOT. "It really does take a partnership to move these projects forward," Wheelis said.

Bobby Colwell, spokesman for the Bryan District of TxDOT, spoke about the mission and the goals of his district: "We strive to implement effective planning and forecasting processes that deliver the right projects in our region, including in Burleson and Washington counties, on time and on budget. Our plans are always evolving." Quiroz, also of the Bryan

The longer view: Planning for 2045

While the Texas Department of Transportation plans many of its projects for the next decade, another road-planning organization in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region looks more than 20 years into the future.

The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, or CAMPO, is mandated by the federal government to work with a range of area elected officials, state and local transportation agencies and technical experts, including Bluebonnet at times. CAMPO develops plans that address all aspects of transportation, including roads and bicycle lanes, transit systems and future growth. It covers six Central Texas counties, five of which — Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson — are within all or part of the Bluebonnet service area.

CAMPO's plans and studies are key in determining how federal money is allocated for transportation projects.

With some of the nation's fastest-growing counties in CAMPO's territory, "it is difficult to get ahead of the growth," said Doise Miers, CAMPO's community outreach manager. "We're looking at doubling the population by 2045 for the entire six-county region. Right now, we've got about 2 million people in the area and we're looking at probably more than 4 million people in the next 25 years." Counties east of Austin are where



Doise Miers, community outreach manager for the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, or CAMPO, says the region's population is expected to double by 2045.

CAMPO expects the most rapid growth.

"As part of our 2045 plan, we put together a regional arterial study," Miers said, that looks at improvements to increasingly busy farm-to-market and ranch-to-market roads. "We want to see how those could be improved and made a little bit more robust, with something as simple as a left-turn lane."

CAMPO is already working on its 2050 plan. "Having input from the utility providers and other infrastructure groups is really helpful because you all have a sense of what your service needs will be in the coming decades," Miers said. "Us having that input helps our plan be more effective and more on point."



Even a smaller community such as Giddings is not immune to traffic issues. A passing train near downtown can bring traffic to a standstill. Photo by Alyssa Meinke

District of TxDOT, spoke about the importance of working closely with utilities such as Bluebonnet when developing a project. He added that the cooperative and TxDOT have worked together closely on different aspects of the U.S. 290/Texas 36 reconstruction.

In recent years, TxDOT completed other multimillion dollar projects on U.S. 290 from Elgin east to Giddings, improving turn lanes and widening medians and shoulders in the mostly rural stretch of road. Steel cable median barriers were added as an important

safety improvement aimed at eliminating head-on collisions.

But even less populated Central Texas communities have traffic jams. All it takes is a train passing near downtown Giddings around rush hour to stop movement on U.S. 290. Even that situation is on TxDOT's radar: A "corridor study," a long-term, comprehensive analysis of the short stretch of highway and adjacent land, could bring an overpass or some other solution by the 2030s, with a potential price tag of \$10 million. ■

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THE BUZZ AT ENERGY EXPO

Solar power, battery storage and EVs were the talk of the day

By Sidni Carruthers

THE MORNING started off overcast and chilly, but that did not deter almost 100 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members from attending the co-op's 2022 Energy Expo on Oct. 22. It was Bluebonnet's seventh renewable energy event for members.

The Energy Expo, previously known as Solar Day, was at the cooperative's service center in Maxwell, midway between Lockhart and San Marcos in Caldwell County. It was the first year Bluebonnet has offered the in-person event since 2019.

This year, in addition to receiving expert information, hearing a detailed presentation and getting answers to questions about solar energy systems, members learned about residential battery storage arrays and electric vehicles.

As it has in previous years, the Texas Solar Energy Society offered a Solar 101 presentation and an installer fair. One Bluebonnet member who has both a solar system and battery storage at his home answered questions about his experience.

Bluebonnet staff members talked to attendees and provided information about the increasingly popular topic of whole-house battery systems that can store power generated by home solar arrays. Also included in the day's events was information about electric vehicles and tours of Bluebonnet's Maxwell service center, which has 292 solar panels and two rainwater collection tanks that each hold 30,000 gallons of water.

Micah Jasuta, a member of the nonprofit Texas Solar Energy Society and its former board chairman, provided a presentation about how solar installations work, their costs, how effectively they reduce power bills and what questions to ask installers. He also spoke about common myths and misconceptions about solar-generated power, best practices when choosing an installer and the basics about battery storage.



Bluebonnet's Cindy Shafer, Lockhart Member Service Representative, spoke with Bob and Nancy Arnold of Lexington as they registered for the Energy Expo events on Oct. 22 at Bluebonnet's Maxwell service center. Sarah Beal photo

After learning that the federal government will continue to offer — and increase — tax credits for renewable energy and battery storage systems, Bluebonnet members Bob and Nancy Arnold decided to make the drive from Lexington in Lee County to attend the event. “We want to do our due diligence,” Bob Arnold said. The couple has been looking into solar energy systems for several years.

Stephanie Morales, a Bluebonnet member from Dale in Caldwell County, came to the Energy Expo in search of the latest information. “I know solar has been around a while, but I know batteries have improved, so I want more information to make the most educated decision on

whether to go solar or not,” she said.

The most interesting part of the event for Audrey Castro, a Bluebonnet member from Cedar Creek in Bastrop County, was Jasuta's presentation. “He had a ton of information, some I knew, but some I didn't know,” Castro said.

Bluebonnet has had a 32% increase in the number of solar energy installations on its grid since 2021, and the co-op estimates that pace will continue for several years.

To learn more about renewable energy, go to bluebonnet.coop/energy-solutions, or call member services at 800-842-7708. Get more information from the Texas Solar Energy Society's website, txses.org.

2023 Bluebonnet Board election

MEMBERS INTERESTED in serving on Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors can run for one of four seats up for election during the Annual Meeting on May 9, 2023.

Bluebonnet's Board is made up of nine directors who serve staggered three-year terms. Directors represent one of seven districts in Bluebonnet's service area.

The four seats up for election in 2023 are District 3, Bastrop County; District 4, Lee,

Milam and Williamson counties; District 6, Austin and Fayette counties; and District 7, Washington County. The term for the District 7 seat will end in 2027 in order to evenly distribute the number of directors' seats up for election each year.

Candidates can be nominated in two ways: either by presenting a completed Application for Nomination of Candidate form with at least 50 signatures from co-op members in their respective districts or by

paying a \$250 filing fee in certified funds.

Application for Nomination of Candidate forms are available at the co-op's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor and online at bluebonnet.coop/document-center.

All candidate applications by petition or filing fee must be delivered to any Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 8, 2023. For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708.

Join in holiday cheer across the Bluebonnet region

IN COMMUNITIES across the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area, lighted holiday parades and glittering light displays are traditional December events. Here is a list of several ways to kick off the season's spirit.

COMMUNITY LIGHTED PARADES

Bastrop: The annual Lost Pines Christmas Parade will travel down Main Street in downtown Bastrop starting at 6 p.m. Dec. 10.

Brenham: The Storybook Christmas Parade in downtown Brenham will start around sundown on Dec. 3, after the Christmas Stroll.

Elgin: After the Holiday by the Tracks activities on Dec. 3, Elgin will have its lighted Christmas parade starting at 7 p.m. on Main Street. After the parade, there will be a live Nativity scene.

Round Top: The lighted Christmas parade will start on the square in Round Top at 6:45 p.m. Dec. 3.

LIGHT DISPLAYS

Do you want to take your family to see holiday lights, but you're not sure where to go? Whether you're looking for a stroll around a downtown or a drive in a neighborhood, we have gathered a few

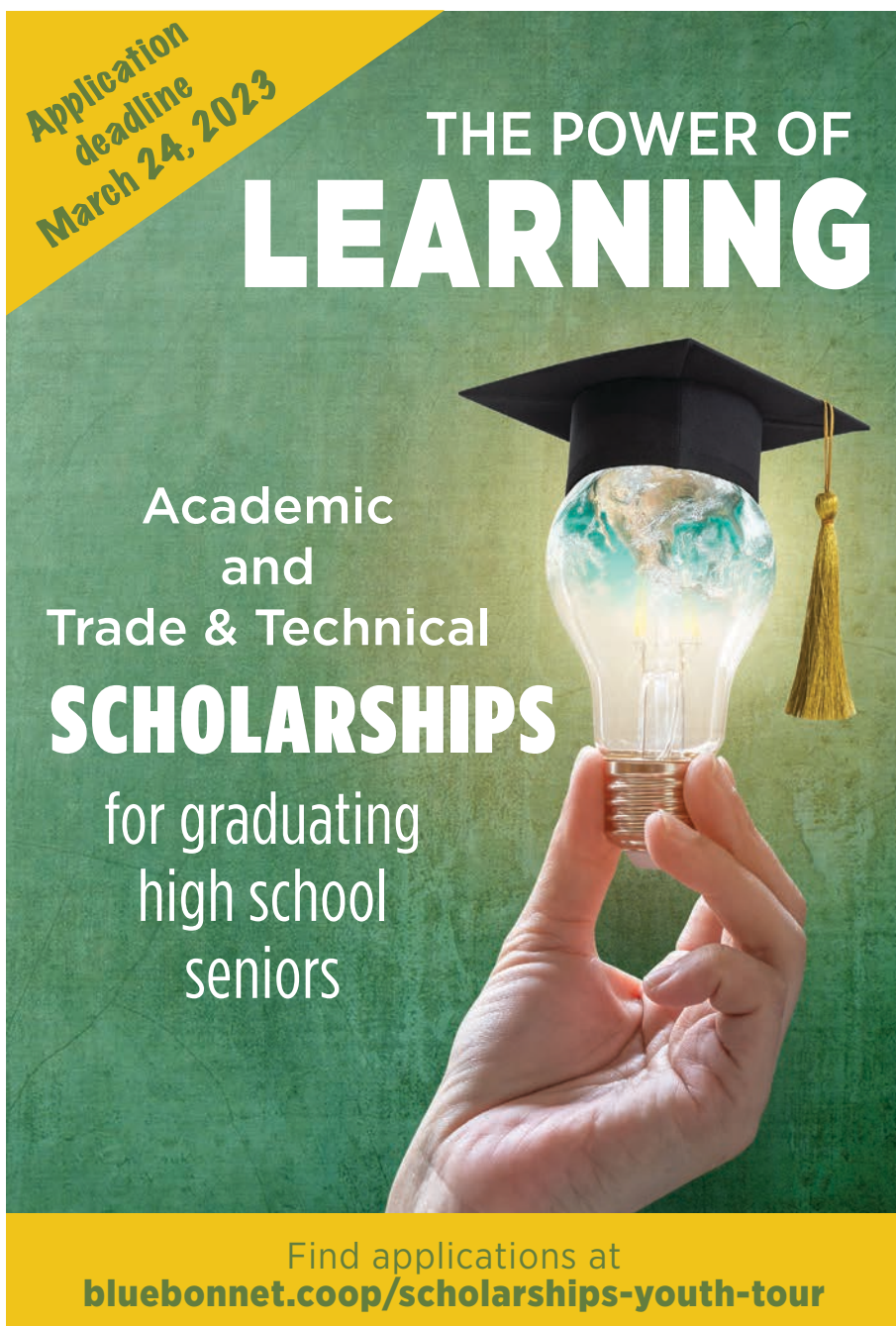
options in area communities.

Bastrop: The River of Lights started Nov. 25 and will run until Jan. 3, 2023 at Fisherman's Park, 1200 Willow St. The event hosts numerous displays of seasonal themes as you walk along the June Hill Pape Riverwalk Trail (a 1-mile round trip). The town's Christmas tree will be on display in the park, too. The park will be open until 10 p.m. nightly.

Giddings: The Cowboy Church of Lee County will host a live drive-through Nativity scene from 6-9 p.m., Dec. 15-17 at 2645 CR 117. There's no charge, but all who drive through will be entered into a drawing to win approximately 600 pounds of beef.

Luling: The Texas Yule Trail in downtown Luling will begin at sundown daily, from Thanksgiving Day through Jan. 6. While you're there, check out some of the local shops that will be lit up and open for the festivities.

San Marcos: Sights and Sounds in downtown San Marcos has an activity for everyone, with everything from arts and crafts to lights along the San Marcos River. This year, the festivities will be open from 5:30-11 p.m. on Dec. 1-3 and again on Dec. 8-11. To find out more about the event, visit sights-n-sounds.org or find them by searching "Sights & Sounds of Christmas" on Facebook.



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Does your community have a neighborhood, park or part of town that does the holidays up big? Share with us! We can help show off your neighbor's or community's hard work and spread some holiday magic at the same time. Send us your holiday light viewing recommendations by filling out the form at bluebonnet.coop/holiday-lights or sending an email to sidni.carruthers@bluebonnet.coop. We will confirm the details and provide a list of sites to see on our website at bluebonnet.coop/holiday-lights.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Dec. 23 and Dec. 26 for the Christmas holiday and Jan. 2 for the New Year's Day holiday. If you have a power outage, you can report it by texting OUT to 85700 (to register, text BBOUTAGE to that number), online at bluebonnet.coop, via our mobile app or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay bills any time online, on our mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (select option 2 when prompted).

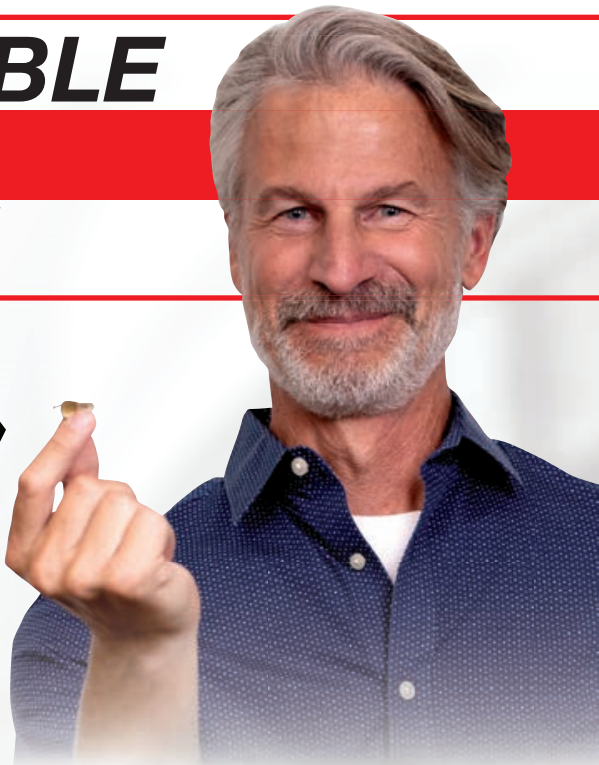
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On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise.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

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raise the Mexican flag. According to one version of the legend, he put a dime at the bottom of the hole and vowed to return one day, reclaim the coin and raise the Texas flag. Several years later, the story goes, he retrieved his dime when he returned with American forces.

It's a good story but probably not true. Walker never mentioned it in his journals, and the flagpole in the various versions of the myth is always in Perote Prison. Walker was never held there.

Walker eventually escaped—a story that would make a good novel in itself—and made it back to Texas. He joined up with Jack Hays and the Texas Rangers in 1844.

When Gen. Zachary Taylor sent out a call in 1845 for volunteers to scout for his federal troops, Walker immediately signed up. He ran messages through the Mexican lines to keep Fort Texas (soon to be Fort Brown) aware of Taylor's plans, and Walker led the charge in the battle for Monterrey.

It was after Taylor's forces had secured Monterrey, in 1846, that Walker took a brief furlough and traveled east. There he gave Samuel Colt some ideas for improving an earlier model of Colt's revolver. Colt, in gratitude, named a special, very heavy model—more than 4½ pounds—of his new six-shooter after the Ranger.

Walker next joined up with Gen. Winfield Scott's campaign to attack Mexico City, sacking Perote Prison on the way. But Walker would not live to make it back to Texas. He died fighting in the town of Huamantla in 1847.

Walker's body was eventually returned to San Antonio, interred in the Odd Fellows Cemetery, next to the unidentified remains of defenders of the Alamo. ■

A Brief but Determined Texan

Samuel Walker's violent adventures became the stuff of legend

BY W.F. STRONG

SAMUEL WALKER arrived in Texas six years after the republic won its independence. In five more years, he would be dead. But in those five years, he would defend San Antonio from Mexican forces, invade Mexico four times, escape from a Mexican prison and help design one of the most famous guns in history.

One hundred and seventy-five years later, he's also remembered as one of the most fascinating Texas Rangers of all time.

Before he was a Ranger, Walker was part of the ill-fated Mier expedition, during which 176 Texian militiamen were captured by Mexico in 1843. Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna ordered them all

shot, but cooler heads in the Mexican government prevailed, demanding one in every 10 killed instead. The Texans drew beans from a pot. Those who got one of the 17 black beans would be executed; those who drew white beans would live. Walker got a white bean.

The survivors were marched 800 miles across Mexico's brutal deserts. Once in Mexico City, Walker and some other captives were imprisoned; others were marched another 100 miles and incarcerated in the infamous Perote Prison.

There is a much-shared myth that while he was incarcerated, Walker was ordered to dig a hole for a flagpole and

Finger Foods

Make room on your plates for these yummy treats this holiday season

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

December is the perfect time of year for gathering with friends and family, and for me that always means having plenty of nibbles on hand. I love serving (and eating) appetizers. Everyone gets to taste a variety of dishes, and you don't need to worry about overfilling your plate.

Jalapeño Popper Bites

8 ounces cream cheese, softened
½ cup finely shredded cheddar cheese
½ cup chopped jalapeño peppers
⅓ cup cooked and crumbled bacon
½ teaspoon salt
Pinch ground cayenne pepper (optional)
30 phyllo shells
Pickled jalapeño slices, for garnish

COOK'S TIP For a vegetarian option, the bacon can be left out.

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a bowl, combine cream cheese, cheddar, chopped jalapeños, bacon, salt and cayenne until smooth and uniformly mixed.
3. Use two spoons or a small cookie scoop to divide mixture among phyllo shells. Place filled shells on a rimmed baking sheet and bake 10 minutes, until shells are crisp and filling is just starting to brown.
4. Let cool slightly and top each shell with a slice of pickled jalapeño. Serve warm.

MAKES 30 POPPERS

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Everything Bagel Pretzel Bites.





Cheesy Pepperoni Pizza Puffs

BEV KELLY
BANDERA EC

Young guests will love these pizza puffs, but adults will enjoy them too. If you can't find mini pepperoni rounds, use diced pepperoni or cut standard pepperoni slices into small pieces.

5 ounces (1 package) mini pepperoni rounds, divided use

2 cups flour

1 cup fresh shredded Parmesan cheese

2 tablespoons Italian seasoning

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon sugar

½ teaspoon crushed red chile flakes

1½ cups whole milk

2 eggs, beaten

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 cups shredded four-cheese pizza blend

Marinara sauce, for serving

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly coat two 24-cup mini muffin pans with nonstick spray. Reserve about ¼ cup pepperoni rounds and set aside.

2. In a large bowl, stir together flour, Parmesan, Italian seasoning, baking powder, sugar and red chile flakes. Stir in milk, eggs and oil until well blended, then stir in pizza cheese blend and remaining pepperoni.

\$500 WINNER

Texas Brisket Empanadas

ANN MCCOOL
TRI-COUNTY EC



These empanadas will be among the first to disappear from the table thanks to their flavorful filling and dipping sauce. If you like, roll the puff pastry out thinner to create more empanadas with the same amount of filling.

MAKES 12-20 EMPANADAS



EMPANADAS

1 sheet puff pastry

1 tablespoon olive oil

½ cup finely chopped red onion

1 jalapeño pepper, finely chopped

1¼ cups finely chopped cooked brisket

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

2 tablespoons barbecue sauce

1 teaspoon hot sauce

½ cup finely grated sharp cheddar cheese

1 egg

1 tablespoon water

DIPPING SAUCE

⅔ cup sour cream

⅓ cup barbecue sauce

2 tablespoons hot sauce

Lime juice, to taste

1. EMPANADAS Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Thaw puff pastry according to package directions and line two baking sheets with parchment.

2. Pour olive oil into a skillet and heat to medium, then add onion and jalapeño. Cook about 5 minutes, until starting to soften. Add brisket, garlic, barbecue sauce and hot sauce and cook another 3 minutes, stirring to combine well.

3. Transfer mixture to a bowl and stir in cheddar cheese until evenly mixed.

4. Roll out puff pastry to a large rectangle, approximately 9 by 12 inches, and cut into 3-inch squares.

5. Whisk together egg and water in a bowl and brush a small amount on edges of pastry squares. Place about 1 tablespoon of brisket filling in the center of each square, then fold over one side, bringing edges together. Crimp edges together with a fork.

6. Arrange empanadas on baking sheets and bake 20 minutes, until light golden brown.

7. DIPPING SAUCE In a bowl stir together sour cream, barbecue sauce, hot sauce and lime juice.

8. Serve empanadas warm with sauce on the side.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

BERRIES DUE DECEMBER 10

We're looking for your favorite ways to enjoy strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries and more of the small juicy delights. Submit your recipes on our website by December 10 for a chance to win \$500.



CONTINUED >

RECIPES CONTINUED

3. Scoop a heaping tablespoon into each muffin cup and top with reserved pepperoni slices.

4. Bake 20 minutes, until puffed and golden brown. Let cool 5 minutes, then remove from pan and serve.

MAKES ABOUT 4 DOZEN PIZZA PUFFS

Crispy Coconut Shrimp

VAN FULTON
PEDERNALES EC

Homemade coconut shrimp is a wonderful appetizer for any occasion. Make sure to leave the tails on when peeling the shrimp, as it will make it easier to dip the shrimp into the coatings.

- 1¼ cups shredded coconut
- ⅓ cup panko breadcrumbs
- ⅓ cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon sugar



- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 2 eggs
- 1 pound raw jumbo shrimp, defrosted, peeled and deveined
- Oil for frying
- Chopped fresh cilantro, for garnish
- Thai sweet chili sauce, for serving

1. In a shallow bowl, combine coconut and panko. In another shallow bowl, combine flour, salt, sugar and pepper. Beat eggs in a third bowl.
2. Pat shrimp dry with paper towels. Holding by the tail, dip shrimp first into the

flour mixture, coating all sides. Then dip into the egg, let excess drip off and dip into the coconut mixture, pressing gently to adhere. Place coated shrimp on a baking sheet and repeat until all shrimp are coated.

3. In a heavy-bottomed pot such as a Dutch oven, add about 2 inches of oil and heat over high to 365 degrees. Use a thermometer to monitor temperature.

4. Fry shrimp in batches until golden brown, 1–2 minutes. Drain on a rack and let cool slightly before serving.

5. Garnish with cilantro, if desired. Serve with Thai sweet chili sauce for dipping.

MAKES ABOUT 20 SHRIMPS

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Raw Deal

Dziuk's Meat Market has perfected so-called Texas tartare

BY CHET GARNER

WHEN I THINK of all the things I've eaten on the road that were most unfamiliar, a few dishes come to mind. There was the smoked cow eyeball in Brownsville, chicken feet in Houston and deep-fried rattlesnake in Sweetwater. I had to overcome some hesitations but still finished each one. That's what I expected when I set out to try raw beef parisa at Dziuk's Meat Market. But not only did I finish my plate, I left with an entire pound for later.

Dziuk's (pronounced "jukes") has been around since the 1960s, when it was started in Poth by two brothers. Later another location opened in Castroville, west of San Antonio. It's an old-school meat market where you can buy a great steak cut to order and even bring in deer for processing. But despite selling every cut of meat your heart might desire, the most popular item remains their house-made parisa.

Parisa is a traditional dish made of raw round steak that's ground up and mixed with salt, pepper, onions, jalapeños and soft easy-melt cheese. The locals buy hundreds of pounds a week to eat with crackers and bring to family gatherings. It's a regional delicacy that, as far as I can tell, is only made at a handful of markets across Medina County. Third-generation owner Kenton Sims told me to think of it as "Texas tartare."

I plunged my saltine deep into a pile of parisa then took a deep breath and a big bite. The flavor was instantly familiar: Tex-Mex spices blended deliciously with the mouthfeel and taste of a juicy hamburger. I loved it and finished off the whole platter. Then I ordered some parisa for the road—and made sure not to leave it behind in a hot car. ■

ABOVE A platter of parisa didn't last long once Chet got ahold of it.

TCP Chet cooks up another video featuring one of his culinary adventures. Watch it on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details.

DECEMBER

08

New Braunfels Old Town Christmas Market, (830) 629-2943, newbraunfelsconservation.org

Dallas [8-11] Lone Star State Classic Dog Show, dallasdogshow.com

Granbury [8-11, 15-18, 20-23] Miracle on 34th Street, (817) 579-0952, granburysociety.com

09

Fredericksburg [9-10] Christmas Journey, (830) 997-2069, bethanyfredericksburg.com

Lake Brownwood [9-10] Holiday at the Lake, (325) 784-5223, tpwd.texas.gov

Montalba [9-11] A Walk Through Bethlehem, (903) 764-8048, visitpalestine.com

Palestine [9-11] The Man Who Wanted To Be Santa Claus, (903) 922-1146, thetexasstage.com

Waxahachie [9-11] A Charlie Brown Christmas, (972) 646-1050, waxahachiecommunitytheatre.com

Fredericksburg [9-11, 16-18] Miracle on 34th Street, (830) 997-3588, fredericksburgtheater.org

10

Canton East Texas Book Bash, easttexasbookbash@gmail.com, easttexasbookbash.weebly.com

Chappell Hill Christmas Home Tour, (713) 562-6191, chappellhillgardenclub.com

Corpus Christi Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra:
Home for the Holidays,
(361) 883-6683,
ccsymphony.org

Huntsville Houston Family Christmas, (936) 294-1111,
samhoustonmemorial
museum.com

Llano Snow Day!
(325) 247-5354,
llanochamber.org

Round Top The Nutcracker,
(979) 249-3129,
festivalhill.org

Weslaco Lighted Christmas Parade, (956) 968-2102,
weslaco.com

Fredericksburg [10-11] Red-bud Artisan Market Holiday Show, (512) 660-3328,
redbudartisanmarket.com

Spring [10-11] Islamic Arts Festival, info@
islamicartssociety.org,
islamicartssociety.org

Seguin Mid-Texas Symphony:
A Storybook Holiday,
(830) 463-5353,
mtsymphony.org

Texarkana Christmas at the Perot, (870) 773-3401,
texarkanasympphony.org

Lubbock Glimpses of Lubbock History: Christmas in Lubbock, (806) 767-3733,
ci.lubbock.tx.us

Corsicana Christmas Variety Show, (903) 874-7792,
corsicanapalace.com

Katy Christmas Gift Market,
(936) 900-1900, bigtop.show

MORE EVENTS >

TCP *Submit Your Event*

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COURTESY JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ

Pick of the Month

Mariachi Sol de México de José Hernández: Merry-Achi Christmas
Midland, December 14
1-800-514-3849, wagnernoel.com

José Hernández's Mariachi Sol de México blends cultural traditions with modern genres and styles to create an award-winning sound that has appealed to listeners the world over. This is a Christmas concert you won't soon forget.

DECEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

15

Anson [15-17] Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball, (325) 696-9040, texasccb.com

16

Tyler K-Love Christmas, (903) 525-1100, gabc.org

Boerne [16-18] Kinder Fest, (830) 816-2176, ci.boerne.tx.us

Leander [16-18] GoGames360, 1-866-582-5422, gogames360.com

17

Amarillo Amarillo Symphony: Happy Holiday Pops, (806) 376-8782, amarillosymphony.org

Bandera Horse-Drawn Wagon Rides With Santa, (830) 688-3063, banderacowboycapital.com

Boerne Winter Solstice: Rudi and the Rudiments, (830) 537-4212, cavewithoutaname.com

18

Brenham The Grand Ol' Christmas Show, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Coldspring It's a Charlie Diggs Christmas, charliediggs.com

Waco Carpenters Legacy: A Christmas Portrait, (254) 296-9000, wacohippodrometheatre.com

Austin [17-23] Armadillo Christmas Bazaar, (512) 447-1605, armadillobazaar.com

Grand Prairie Michael Martin Murphey's Cowboy Christmas, (972) 854-5076, texastrustcutheatre.com

Richards James Zimmerman, (936) 436-9050, wscwinery.com

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

22

New Braunfels Deck the Dancehalls, (830) 606-1281, gruenehall.com

Palestine Christmas Carol Sing Along, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

31

Elgin Glowing Into 2023, (512) 281-5724, elgintexas.gov

Fredericksburg Countdown to 2023, (830) 997-7521, fbgtx.org

JANUARY

01

Round Top Linda Patterson and Friends: Organ Duets, (979) 249-3129, festivalhill.org

Surfside Beach Polar Plunge, (979) 233-1531, visitbrazosport.com

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1

1 MIKE PRESTIGIACOMO
BARTLETT EC

A thirsty fox.

2 FRANKI SALDIVAR
J-A-C EC

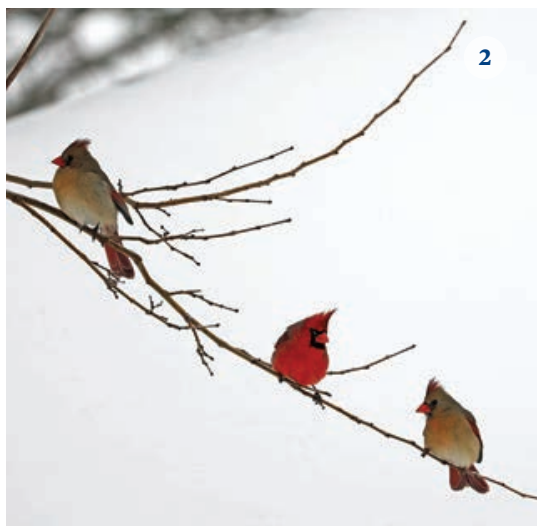
"I put a bird feeder out for the cardinals when it snowed, and they sure seemed to appreciate it."

3 RICK BLACKMORE
PEDERNALES EC

"A buck lounging in the snow during the winter storm of 2021."

4 GABRIELLE ETHINGTON
PENTEX ENERGY

A doe curiously walks up to a dove looking for food.



2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

DUE DEC 10 Riding the River

DUE JAN 10 Taking Flight

DUE FEB 10 Dad



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Winter Wildlife photos from readers.



I'll Be Gone for Christmas

The gift of escaping and passing along a mother's curious nature

BY BABS RODRIGUEZ
ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN FALES

TRAVEL DURING the Christmas season is my way of clearing my head of the clutter that can weigh down the celebration. I just need a few deep breaths beneath trees that don't have lights on them. And a spare winter landscape regenerates my spirit like nothing else.

I first discovered how meaningful such a journey could be when my son was barely school age. It was 20 years ago, just after our mom died, and my youngest brother, Jimmy, and I were struggling to reinvent the holiday season without her.

I invited Jimmy, whose eccentric education in anthropology and fishing made him an ideal camp companion, to join my son and me in a nearby state park.

As we settled into a campsite, I realized that I had been so fixated on keeping the planning minimal that I had packed no

chairs, no plates, no knife. I did bring salt and pepper, a big cake of lavender soap and one plastic fork. It was a few days after I'd hosted a Christmas event for 50 people; I was so tired I was stupid.

My brother was undaunted. Before I had discovered I'd also forgotten firewood, he had chicken seasoned and cooking nicely on his portable grill—gamely making do with the single plastic utensil. I headed to a nearby store for split logs.

When I returned, my son was barefoot. In the time I'd been gone, he'd cast his rod into the lake, then waded in after it—soaking socks and shoes. He appeared delighted to be wearing leather work gloves on his feet, like some giant splay-footed bird cozied up to the grill. Uncle Jimmy was already steaming the socks dry.

After eating, we hiked to a spectacular scenic overlook. That was when I consciously noted Jimmy's pink stocking cap. The hat was familiar. And comforting. It had been knitted by our mother. In her passion for handcrafts, Mom would get stuck in loops of creativity. Jimmy was the beneficiary of the Year of the Knitted Caps. By wearing one, he brought her along.

Jimmy also inherited Mother's adaptability and resourcefulness. We both have a heaping share of her curiosity. She taught us to pause often on any walk, to study stones and insects and scat. She was monumentally successful in opening our eyes to the natural world.

After we took in the view from the overlook, we began exploring cautiously. I focused my attention on my son, introducing him to nopales and miniscule fungi. But watching Jimmy bobbing through the woods in that pink hat, I realized it was I who most needed the lessons of this day away from the holiday: a reminder to be the mother to my son that she had been to me. ■

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