

THE CARDINAL:  
OUR STATEWIDE BIRD

HOW 'BOUT A HAND  
FOR FINGER FOODS

I'LL BE GONE  
FOR CHRISTMAS

# Texas Coop Power

FOR TRI-COUNTY EC MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2022

## Silent Night

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



TRI-COUNTY  
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*

## 10 Continuing a Christmas Ritual

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

*By Melissa Gaskill  
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

### ON THE COVER

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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*By Babs Rodriguez*

# 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.

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## 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](mailto: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.



## 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

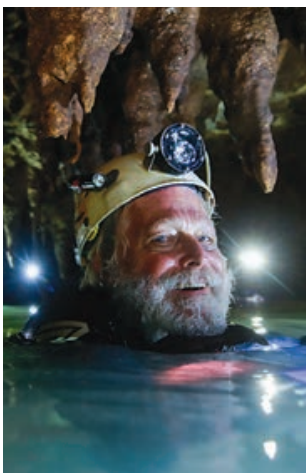
A similar story is told about how George Mitchell’s epiphany for the Woodlands came about [Good on Paper, September 2022].

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



ERIC 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

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1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor  
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.

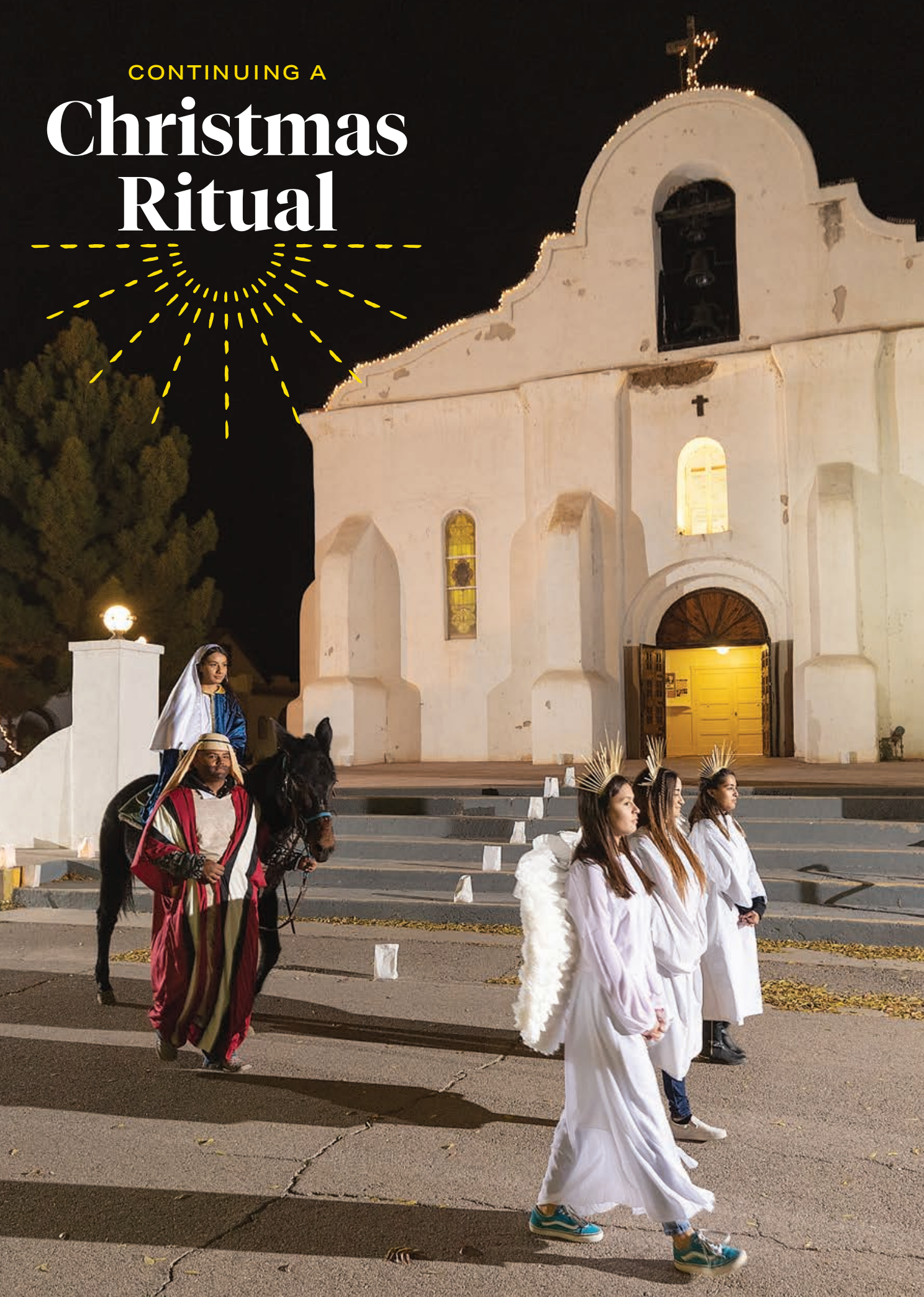
There is a similar bird, actually another member of the cardinal family, known as a pyrrhuloxia. The male has a striking crest that's larger than the cardinal's but is colored mostly gray and crimson. They are common on ranches in South Texas during the winter. Their beaks are much more parrotlike than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



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.

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. ■

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



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OFFICER

# A Light at the End of the Tunnel

**AS WE NEAR THE END** of 2022, we know that many of you faced significant challenges. Tri-County Electric Cooperative experienced one of the hardest years in our 83-year history due to Brazos Electric Power Cooperative’s Chapter 11 bankruptcy. For those of you following my columns the past 21 months, this is not new. If you are just tuning in, or you need a refresher, below is a shortened timeline of the significant milestones. 800800103

Thankfully, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. By the time you read this, the confirmation trial will be done and Judge Jones will have ruled on Brazos’s plan to exit bankruptcy. Due to print timeline constraints, we do not have an update for this issue, but we expect the plan will be approved. We scheduled a virtual town hall for November 21 to update the membership on the hearing. If you were unable to join us, a recording is available online at [tcectexas.com/brazos](https://tcectexas.com/brazos).

Throughout the entire Brazos bankruptcy we have fought for you, the member-owners of this co-op. I have left no stone unturned, and your board and leadership team have worked relentlessly to ensure your best interests were at the forefront. Due to these efforts, we believe you are in the best position possible post-bankruptcy. Tri-County Electric Co-op is meeting our portion of the Brazos bankruptcy debt through traditional financing methods with CoBank, a member of the Farm Credit System, rather than securitization. Securitization locks our members into paying for the debt over a period of 15-30 years. Financing with CoBank provides more flexibility to pay down debt, including using the Capital Credits we earn through CoBank to reduce our debt, rather than lining the pockets of Wall Street investors. 800755183

Traditional funding through CoBank is the best option for you, our members. Starting January 3, 2023, members will see a new line item on billing statements for the Brazos Financing Utility Plan Rider. This

2021

**February 25**

The state legislature starts hearings on Winter Storm Uri. Legislative officials question leaders at ERCOT and the PUC. Investigations state the ERCOT grid was within 4 and a half minutes of complete failure.

**April**

We continue to ask the difficult questions related to the storm, including costs. Brazos has yet to provide answers to our satisfaction. We learn Brazos’s generation fleet did not perform as expected during the winter storm, leaving us exposed to the high prices on the ERCOT market.

**May**

Tri-County Electric Co-op Board of Directors unanimously call for the resignation of Brazos senior management, including the Executive Vice President/ CEO. Leaders of ERCOT and the PUCT were all held accountable and asked to resign based on decisions made during the storm, and it was time for change at Brazos as well.

**August**

Brazos considers Senate Bill 1580 and House Bill 4492 to securitize the costs of Uri. Securitization would pass on the debt to members for 15-30 year terms. We believe it’s critical to explore alternative financing options and for Brazos to explore asset sales.

**February 13-19**  
Winter Storm Uri

**March 1**

Brazos files for bankruptcy in part due to the power bill received from ERCOT. The bill for one week was more than 3 times the entire power bill in 2020. As a member-cooperative, Tri-County Electric Co-op received little warning that Brazos was filing for bankruptcy.

**May**

We learn that if the Brazos generation fleet had performed at minimum industry standards, much of the financial devastation would have been avoided. The Brazos load comprises less than 1% of the total ERCOT load, yet Brazos holds the majority of unpaid ERCOT claims related to the winter storm.

**May 31**

The legislative session ends with more than 300 bills related to the state’s electric grid, mainly pertaining to regulation around weatherization of generation units, ERCOT market design, load shed obligations, creating a disaster alert system, ERCOT and PUCT governance.

**November**

Power costs rise due to the increased cost of natural gas.

tariff will recover costs related to Brazos Winter Storm Uri costs and costs associated with leaving Brazos as our wholesale power provider under our All-Requirements Contract. Based on the calculations according to the tariff, the amount will be \$0.0112/kWh beginning in January 2023 and will be re-evaluated every 6 months.

Please join us at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, December 12, 2022, for a virtual rate hearing to learn more about Brazos Financing Utility Plan Rider. 8004672701

We will continue to uphold our promise to take care of you, our members. While the Brazos bankruptcy is coming to a close, we still have work to do. Assuming the bankruptcy plan is confirmed, Tri-County Electric Co-op will be able to procure our own power from the ERCOT market without Brazos starting March 1, 2023. We are working with consultants and see a promising power supply future.

I want to personally and publicly thank many of our employees who have worked so hard this year during such tough economic times while doing an amazing job of serving our members' needs. The member service personnel and linemen have endured a lot of harsh comments from our frustrated members while knowing that we were all working hard for our members. The employees of this cooperative have experienced the same struggles as our members with everything going up in cost that impacts our personal lives and families. I appreciate their hard work because all that work has made the cooperative successful. Many of their efforts to do their job while taking up the mantle of assisting our cooperative with this Brazos bankruptcy has not gone unnoticed by myself and even the Tri-County Electric Co-op Board of Directors. I give God praise each day for our employees at this cooperative because I am proud to work for each of them. We are in this together. ■

NOTICE OF NEW TARIFF

Notice is hereby given that Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Inc. (the "Cooperative") intends to add a new tariff to its rates for electric service. Pursuant to Texas Utilities Code section 41.061 the Cooperative has adopted a resolution approving a new tariff effective January 3, 2023.

The proposed Brazos Financing Utility Plan Rider will be for bills mailed on or after January 3, 2023, with the corresponding usage period. It is anticipated that the proposed tariff will be \$0.0112/kWh consumed according to the calculation. The Brazos Financing Utility Plan Rider affects members in all rate classes.

You may obtain further information concerning the proposed tariff and/or a copy of the proposed tariff by calling the Cooperative at 817-444-3201.

A meeting to discuss the proposed tariff will be held virtually at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, December 12, 2022. Members may participate by streaming online at [tcectexas.com/brazos](https://tcectexas.com/brazos) or by calling 855-710-6229

December

The Brazos board continues to evaluate securitization as the primary financing option. Brazos filed a motion to extend the exclusive period for Brazos to present a reorganization plan. We objected stating securitization, the plan Brazos was proposing, would fall directly on the backs of the end consumers. Despite our efforts, the bankruptcy court gave Brazos more time to propose a restructuring plan.

March-September

Mediation continues, and due to legal obligations specific updates are limited.

November 14

The confirmation trial is set for approval of the Brazos bankruptcy exit plan.

November 21

Tri-County Electric Co-op holds a virtual town hall to update members on the Brazos Bankruptcy exit plan.

January 3  
Brazos Financing Utility Plan Rider to be billed to members.

2023

2022

February

After seven days of testimony, from parties including the former ERCOT CEO, former PUCT commissioners, Brazos senior leadership and industry experts, the highly anticipated Brazos/ERCOT claim objection trial, at the bankruptcy court's suggestion, enters mediation. Tri-County Electric Co-op is an interested party and therefore has a seat at the table to ensure your voice is represented.

September

Brazos files their proposed exit plan, making the information public. The plan proposes Brazos would pay unsecured creditors 89.5 cents on the dollar, and considers the remaining amount would be funded through debt, bankruptcy financing, cash on hand, and the sale of Brazos's natural gas-fired generation fleet. Additionally, Tri-County Electric Co-op will be relieved of our all-requirements contract obligations and can procure our own power starting March 1, 2023. And last, the plan includes changes to Brazos management.

December 12

Tri-County Electric Co-op holds a virtual rate hearing for the Brazos Financing Utility Plan Rider.

March 1

Tri-County Electric Co-op is free to procure power from the ERCOT market independently.



For Marion and Ron Dearman, raising Christmas trees is a labor of love.

# Making Memories in the Trees

## 4D Farm has all the ingredients to kick off Christmas fun

BY BOB BUCKEL, COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA REPRESENTATIVE

**FOR CHILDREN**, the wait for Christmas feels like forever.

As we get older, that reverses, and it feels like the holiday is here and gone in a moment.

Ron and Marion Dearman understand both ends of that spectrum.

For one, they're grandparents who've been married 58 years. They've raised two kids and now have three grandchildren who live close by and love everything about Christmas.

But they're also farmers whose crop has to grow five years before it's ready for market. They're retired, but they still work hard, year-round, for something that's basically over in two weekends.

The Dearmans grow Christmas trees. 800879156

Ron, a retired chemical consultant, and Marion, a retired educator, own and operate 4D Farm – a Christmas tree marketing mecca located in rural Parker County north of Weatherford. It has been a labor of love for them since 1998.

Much of their year is spent planting trees, setting up and monitoring the drip watering system, fighting pests, mowing among the trees and pruning – shaping them as they grow into that perfect, classic Christmas-tree profile.

It all comes to a head the Saturday after Thanksgiving, when as many as 1,000 people wind their way through the countryside to 3900 Upper Denton Road, just off North Lake Drive. They'll wander through the trees that are ready – about 5 to 7 feet tall – pick one out and either cut it themselves or have the Dearmans' crew cut and net it for them, and load it in their vehicle.

But there's more to this forest than the trees.

Those who visit can enjoy crafts and cookies, barbecue and music, hayrides and hot chocolate. There's a small shop with a big porch, and another large, covered area where folks can sit and escape the elements – heat, rain or snow – while the kids roam among the trees.

They'll sell about 600 trees in two weekends, and then it will be over 'til next year.

"It's really only about three days," Ron said. "We go two weekends, and we're only open Saturday and half a day Sunday."

Seasoned shoppers know the home-grown Leyland cypress and "Blue Ice" Carolina Sapphire cypress trees will be gone quickly, so they come early to make their choice. Visitors can also choose from among 285 Frasier firs and pines that are ordered and shipped in to supplement the home-grown crop.

Prior to the post-Thanksgiving shopping frenzy, photographers bring families out for Christmas-card photos. Some will spend



the whole day enjoying the Christmas ambience.

In recent years, parking has become a challenge. The Dearmans want everyone to be able to park on the place and stay off the road, since the farm is located on a dangerous curve. Last year, they took out a couple of rows of trees just to provide more parking spaces. 8005019101

They're always looking out for their guests.

"We had apple cider for years with cookies, and the bees stung a couple of people," Ron said. "So we cut out the apple cider, and now we do hot chocolate."

"They don't bother the hot chocolate," Marion said.

4D Farm is a family operation. Ron and Marion's son and daughter-in-law, Dean and Glenda, live nearby. They and their three children, Brady, 13, Hannah, 10, and Preston, 8, are all involved, along with Glenda's parents, Lewis and Nancy Herring.

Neighbors come over, too, and help with the crafts and barbecue on sale weekends. 800703032

Marion starts baking cookies in October, freezing them, and Glenda goes into high gear, baking and bagging cookies just prior to the first sale weekend.

They lost about 400 trees in the big freeze of February 2021, along with some of their wells – even though their power was "off and on" as Tri-County Electric Co-op rotated outages to help reduce load during the crisis.

"I have a woodstove, but I was kind of happy that at least we had heat," Ron said. "My mother is in her 90s, and we were concerned about keeping the heat on for her."

Weather-permitting, she'll be on hand for this year's sale. Brady has been promoted from picking up trees to netting them alongside his grandpa Lewis. Hannah gets to drive the golf cart this year, picking up trees that have been cut. Preston is on cookie duty.

"They're all desperate to be part of it," Marion laughs. "It's a family affair."

And you can be sure, the kids' eyes aren't the only ones with a twinkle in them. ■



PHOTOS, TOP TO BOTTOM: Colorful lights and snowflakes add to the atmosphere inside the shop at 4D Christmas Tree Farm. This year's crop of Leyland cypress and "Blue Ice" Carolina Sapphire cypress trees will go quickly. 4D Farm looks like Christmas even when it's sunny, but most visitors come the weekend after Thanksgiving.

# And...We're Live!

BY KENNEDY L. MOORE, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

ON OCTOBER 4, 2022 the Annual Meeting went live for the first time ever. The meeting has been virtual since 2020 because of COVID-19 concerns and a fast-growing membership and included prerecorded and live sessions. Holding the meeting completely live this year allowed members to receive the most up-to-date information on their co-op.

“Things went very smoothly,” Director of Communications Annie Watson said. “Going live allowed us to actively connect with our members. Opting for a virtual meeting has significantly increased member participation since members do not have to drive to Weatherford.”

The meeting began with President/CEO Darryl Schriver announcing the results of the Board of Directors election. A total of 19,612 ballots, or 19.2% of the membership, participated in this year’s election – vastly exceeding the quorum requirement of a minimum 3% of membership participation. Districts 5, 7, and 9 had seats on the ballot. For District 5, incumbent Steve Harris was reelected, with 10,071, or 52.4% of the vote. For District 7, nomination candidate Sommer Portwood was elected with 11,279, or 58.6% of votes, and for District 9, incumbent Max Waddell was reelected, receiving 100% of the votes, as he ran unopposed. 3110500001

Following the business portion of the meeting, Chief Financial Officer and VP of Finance Melissa Watts presented financial updates. Watts pointed out that billing statements will now be itemized and “include the Customer Charge, Energy Charge, PCRF, Outdoor Light Charge, and applicable fees and taxes.” Additionally, Watts announced a new, stabilized rate of 14.425 cents per kWh. This 5.78% overall increase was approved in April but deferred until October due to rising costs of natural

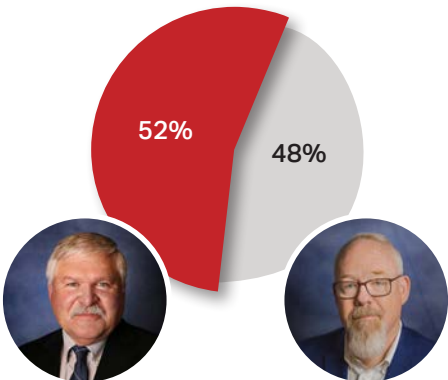
gas and power costs for members.

Next, Chief Operations Officer and VP of Operations Wesley Scheets gave an update on operations. “Over the past year, we have focused on upgrading infrastructure to reduce the length of outages and meet the needs of our growing communities.” In addition, Scheets also shared members had power 98% of the time, with outages lasting an average of two or less hours. Chief Strategy Officer and VP of Engineering Janet Rehberg provided an update on solar. She emphasized the importance of affordability for all members, highlighted the purpose of the engineering team, which is to help members make informed decisions regarding solar, and explained Tri-County Electric Co-op’s buy-back method. “Our solar program revolves around the net-zero method, meaning we will buy back on a one-for-one basis up to what you consume,” she said. “Tri-County has a very generous solar program as we purchase your solar at our retail electric rate.”

Schriver returned to the podium and emphasized the importance of cybersecurity and member data. He cited that Tri-County Electric Cooperative has not had a shutdown or operation data loss like most other utility companies. “In 2022, Tri-County Electric Co-op received 2,770 malicious messages,” he said. “Our cyber software and firewalls protected against 99.5% of the emails.

Finally, Schriver provided an extensive update regarding the Brazos bankruptcy. He mentioned that Tri-County Electric Co-op has been the only cooperative to push for answers and advocate on behalf of its membership. The bankruptcy was officially filed under chapter 11 on March 1, 2021. In May 2021, Tri-County Board of Directors passed a resolution calling

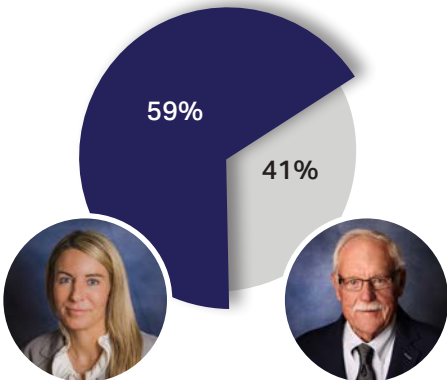
## District 5



Steve Harris

Mike Hall

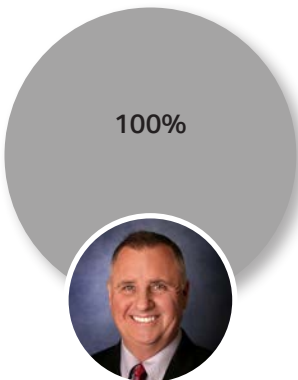
## District 7



Sommer Portwood

Larry Miller

## District 9



Max Waddell



for the resignation of Brazos senior management . In August 2021, Schriver pointed out that “Brazos considers taking advantage of Senate Bill 1580 and House Bill 4492 to use securitization to cover the costs of [Winter Storm] Uri. Securitization would pass on the debt to members for 15 – 30-year terms.” In November of 2021, power costs began to rise due to the increased cost of natural gas. In February 2022, Brazos agreed to engage in mediation, and Tri-County Electric Co-op had a seat at the table. If the proposed exit plan is approved, Tri-County Electric Co-op would be relieved of its obligations under the All-Requirements Contract to purchase wholesale power from Brazos effective March 1, 2023. The plan is set to be reviewed in a confirmation trial on November 14, 2022. Tri-County Electric Co-op will held a virtual Town Hall on November 21, 2022 to provide an update based on the outcome of the trial. If you missed the town hall, a recording is available at [tcectexas.com/brazos](https://tcectexas.com/brazos). 8000667101

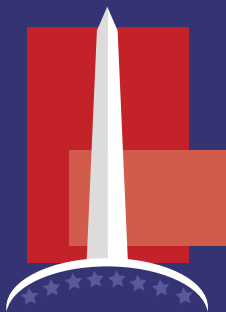
Leaving no stone unturned, the board decided to finance the debt through CoBank, a member of the Farm Credit System. “Borrowing through CoBank will allow us to earn capital credits that can be paid against our debt, rather than lining the pockets of Wall Street investors,” Schriver said.

Members were reassured that the cooperative is understanding and mindful of the economic hardships and inflation costs. The CEO affirms that “exiting Brazos and procuring our own power will help us keep your rate as low as possible.”

It is an honor to work for our members, and we are in this together! ■

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Darryl Schriver

### Board of Directors

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John Killough, District 6 - Vice Chairman

Margaret Koprek, District 2 - Secretary/Treasurer

Kevin Ingle, District 1

Jorden Wood, District 3

Jerry A. Walden, District 4

Steve V. Harris, District 5

Sommer Portwood, District 7

Michael Sivertsen, District 8

**24/7**

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# Cranberry Bread

BY BRENDA ANNE HARRELL  
SPRINGTOWN

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup sugar or Splenda
- 1 cup packed dark brown sugar or brown Splenda
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 2 cups of roasted cranberries
- 1 14-oz. can of whole berry cranberry sauce
- 2 tsp. almond extract
- 1 20-oz. can crushed pineapple, well drained
- 1 – 1 1/2 cups chopped pecans, optional

1. Set out three 3 bowls. In a large bowl, combine the dry ingredients of flour, sugars, baking soda, salt and cinnamon. Stir with a whisk until well combined.
2. In the second bowl, mix the eggs with the oil and butter. Put the cranberries in an oven-safe dish and bake at 350oF for about 10 minutes, JUST until no longer hard – tap with back of a spoon.
3. In the third bowl, mix the cranberry sauce with the almond extract. Add in the roasted cranberries JUST to mix.
4. Fold the drained pineapple, nuts and cranberry mixture into the flour mixture. Gently, don't overwork! Add the oil mixture and combine JUST until everything is moist and dry ingredients are combined.
5. Spray pan of choice with a cooking spray to prevent sticking and add the dough.
6. Bake uncovered at 350°F for 1 hour and 5 minutes.
7. Enjoy!

**COOK'S TIP:** The secret to this recipe is in the word "JUST"!



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# SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

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.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our **Sedona Turquoise Collection**. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you could secure 26 carats of genuine Arizona turquoise for **just \$99**.

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



# 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

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. ■

# 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](http://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**  
**⅓ 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**  
**½ cup panko breadcrumbs**  
**½ 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**

**TCP** Remember, we have nearly 1,000 recipes on our website to make your holidays perfect. Search by dish or ingredient and dig in.

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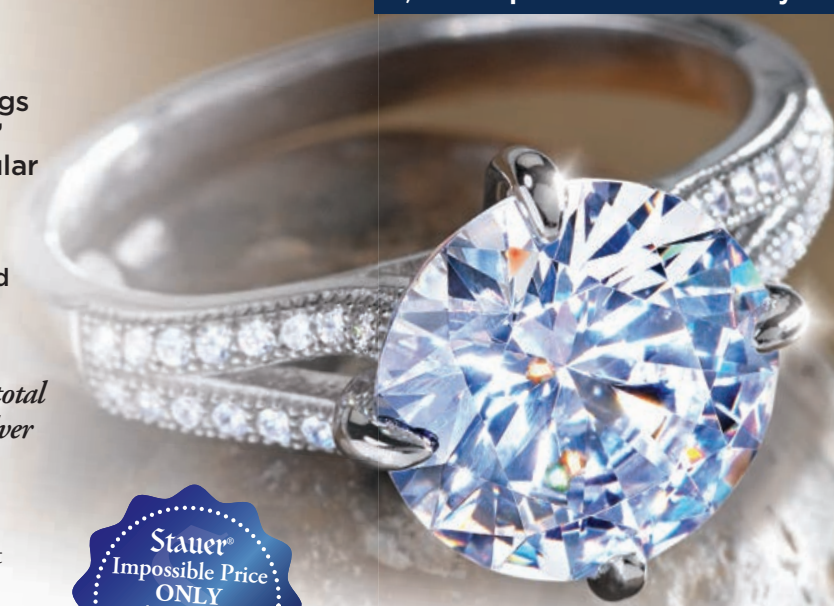
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## 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](http://newbraunfelsconservation.org)

**Dallas [8-11] Lone Star State Classic Dog Show**, [dallasdogshow.com](http://dallasdogshow.com)

**Granbury [8-11, 15-18, 20-23] Miracle on 34th Street**, (817) 579-0952, [granburytheatrecompany.org](http://granburytheatrecompany.org)

### 09

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

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

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

**Palestine [9-11] The Man Who Wanted To Be Santa Claus**, (903) 922-1146, [thetexasattheater.com](http://thetexasattheater.com)

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

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

### 10

**Canton East Texas Book Bash**, [easttexasbookbash@gmail.com](mailto:easttexasbookbash@gmail.com), [easttexasbookbash.weebly.com](http://easttexasbookbash.weebly.com)

**Chappell Hill Christmas Home Tour**, (713) 562-6191, [chappellhillgardenclub.com](http://chappellhillgardenclub.com)

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

**Huntsville** Houston Family Christmas, (936) 294-1111, samhoustonmemorialmuseum.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] Redbud Artisan Market Holiday Show, (512) 660-3328, redbudartisanmarket.com

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

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

**Texarkana** Christmas at the Perot, (870) 773-3401, texarkanasymphony.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

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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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](http://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, [texascob.com](http://texascob.com)

16

**Tyler K-Love Christmas,** (903) 525-1100, [gabc.org](http://gabc.org)

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

**Leander [16-18] GoGames360,** 1-866-582-5422, [gogames360.com](http://gogames360.com)

17

**Amarillo Amarillo Symphony: Happy Holiday Pops,** (806) 376-8782, [amarillosymphony.org](http://amarillosymphony.org)

**Bandera Horse-Drawn Wagon Rides With Santa,** (830) 688-3063, [banderacowboycapital.com](http://banderacowboycapital.com)

**Boerne Winter Solstice: Rudi and the Rudiments,** (830) 537-4212, [cavewithoutaname.com](http://cavewithoutaname.com)

18

**Brenham The Grand Ol' Christmas Show,** (979) 337-7240, [thebarnhillcenter.com](http://thebarnhillcenter.com)

**Coldspring It's a Charlie Diggs Christmas,** [charliediggs.com](http://charliediggs.com)

**Waco Carpenters Legacy: A Christmas Portrait,** (254) 296-9000, [wacohippodrometheatre.com](http://wacohippodrometheatre.com)

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

**Grand Prairie Michael Martin Murphey's Cowboy Christmas,** (972) 854-5076, [texastrustcutheatre.com](http://texastrustcutheatre.com)

**Richards James Zimmerman,** (936) 436-9050, [wscwinery.com](http://wscwinery.com)

**Stonewall Annual Tree Lighting,** (830) 644-2252, [tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov)

22

**New Braunfels Deck the Dancehalls,** (830) 606-1281, [gruenehall.com](http://gruenehall.com)

**Palestine Christmas Carol Sing Along,** (903) 723-3014, [visitpalestine.com](http://visitpalestine.com)

31

**Elgin Glowing Into 2023,** (512) 281-5724, [elgintexas.gov](http://elgintexas.gov)

**Fredericksburg Countdown to 2023,** (830) 997-7521, [fbgtx.org](http://fbgtx.org)

## JANUARY

01

**Round Top Linda Patterson and Friends: Organ Duets,** (979) 249-3129, [festivalhill.org](http://festivalhill.org)

**Surfside Beach Polar Plunge,** (979) 233-1531, [visitbrazosport.com](http://visitbrazosport.com)

# Winter Wildlife

Step into the crisp air, slide a gloved hand over snow packed all around, and see evidence of animals large and small as you step into a sparkling winter wonderland. When a twig snaps behind you, you'll have to act fast to capture an image as stunning as these.

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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](https://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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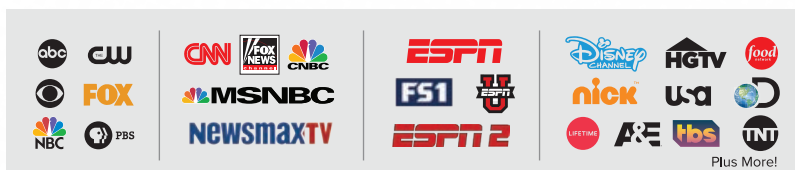
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