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BUT MEMORABLE

TAKING TEXICO  
FROM NEW MEXICO

FINDING HOPE  
AMID DEVASTATION

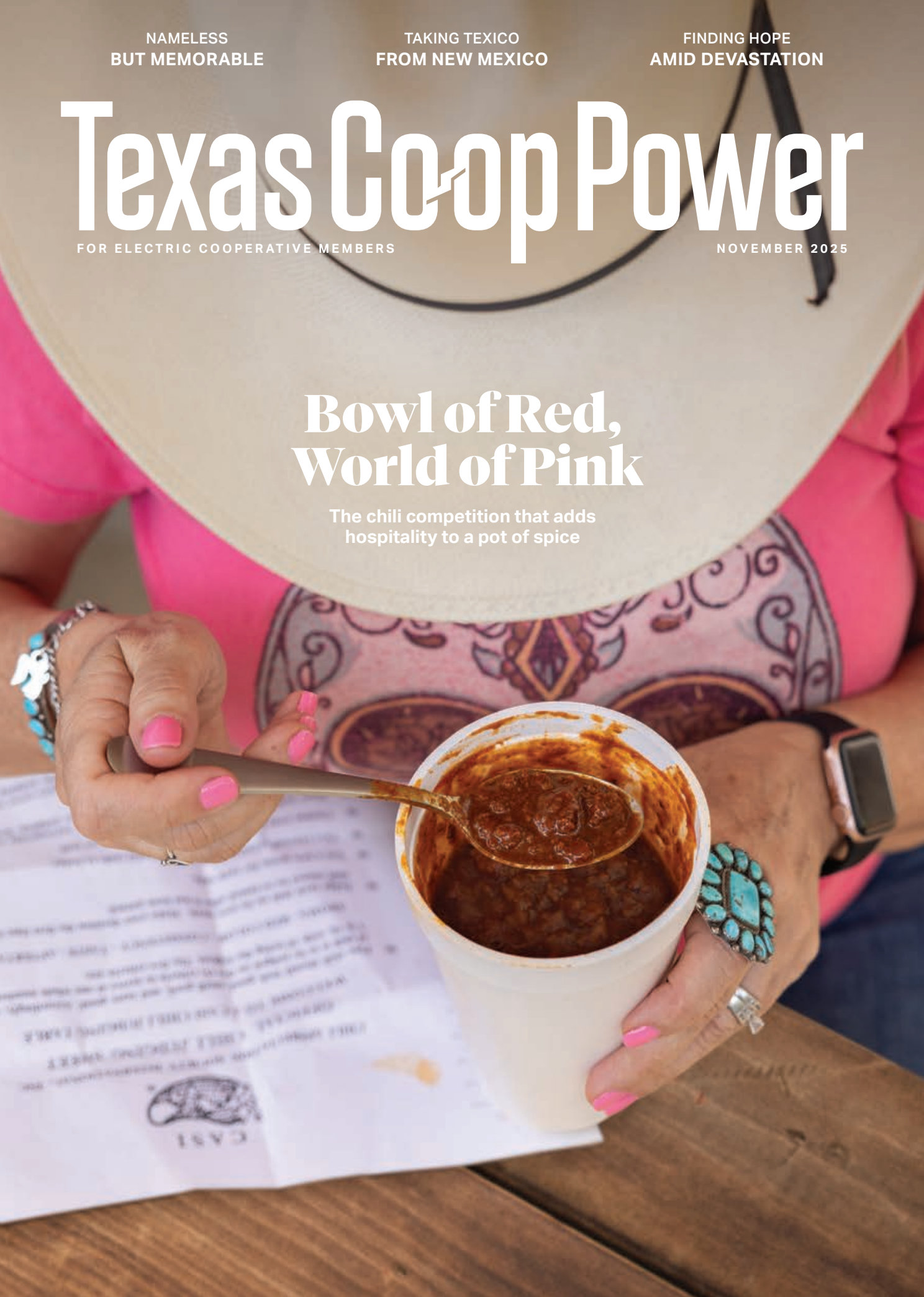
# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

NOVEMBER 2025

## Bowl of Red, World of Pink

The chili competition that adds  
hospitality to a pot of spice



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# November 2025



12

## 06 Spice—And Everything Nice

A chili competition born of spite becomes one based around community.

*Story and photos by Julia Robinson*

## Name Dropping

A ghost town called Nameless rallies to be remembered.

*By Anna Mazurek*

04

### Currents

The latest buzz

05

### TCP Talk

Readers respond

16

### Co-op News

Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

25

### Footnotes in Texas History

Taking Texico  
*By W.F. Strong*

26

### TCP Kitchen

Turkey Time  
*By Vianney Rodriguez*

30

### Hit the Road

Saving Grapes  
*By Chet Garner*

33

### Focus on Texas

Photo Contest:  
Abstract

34

### Observations

Giving Thanks  
*By Claudia Sullivan*

ON THE COVER

Terry Foresman seeks the taste of success.

*Photo by Julia Robinson*

ABOVE

The Gray family's ancestral house in the community of Nameless.

*Courtesy Mary Cameron*



# Hit the Brakes

**TEXAS IS APPROACHING** a distressing milestone this month: 25 years during which not a day has gone by without at least one traffic fatality.

Since the streak began November 7, 2000, more than 88,000 people have died on Texas roads. The Texas Department of Transportation's End the Streak campaign strives to change that.

The streak nearly ended one day in January 2024, when there was just one fatality—caused by a driver running a stop sign.

“More drivers are choosing to engage in more than one risky driving behavior,” says April Ramos of the National Safety Council. “This includes impaired driving, drowsy driving, aggressive driving, and seat belt misuse and nonuse.”

The Pedernales Electric Cooperative member is OK with the fact that her 17-year-old son is in no hurry to get his driver's license. And when he does?

“My biggest advice to him, aside from following all the rules of the road, is to not be in a rush, avoid aggressive drivers and put your phone away.”

## TCP Contests and More

### \$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Five-Ingredient Dinners

### FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Still Life

### RECOMMENDED READING

We shared *A Bowl of Red* with readers in October 2008. Time to dig in again. Read the story at [TexasCoopPower.com](https://TexasCoopPower.com).



ENTER ONLINE



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Changing our clocks twice a year is ...

**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 September prompt: **My favorite football team is ...**

The 2020 Texas School for the Deaf Rangers, who won the state championship after 164 years.

ROSS SCHUMANN  
PEDERNALES EC  
DRIPPING SPRINGS

Any team that beats Alabama.

JAMES FAMBRO  
COSERV  
MCKINNEY

The one my grandson is playing on right now.

EDITH HUFFMAN  
GVEC  
HALLETTSVILLE

Any Texas team in the game.

STEVE BAILEY  
PENTEX ENERGY  
GAINESVILLE

My son's YMCA flag football team with his elementary school friends.

NADALYNN HAMILTON  
HILCO EC  
GLENN HEIGHTS

Visit our website to see more responses.



## Hinterland Healing

National Rural Health Day, November 20 this year, didn't exist when Dr. James Lee Dickey went about healing folks and saving lives in 1920s Williamson County.

Dickey was the only Black physician in the county, and he worked to expand facilities so African Americans could get proper health care. His focus included expectant mothers and a vigorous vaccination program to curb a typhoid fever epidemic.

STOP SIGN: ANN CANTELOW | DREAMSTIME.COM. DR. DICKEY MURAL: IN YOUR SPACE, INC | COURTESY THE WILLIAMSON MUSEUM. WATCH: WIESLAW FILA | DREAMSTIME.COM

SEPTEMBER 2025 It's in the Bag

“I grew up in the '50s eating Fritos. My favorite was adding them to my bologna, mustard and mayonnaise sandwiches. It added a crunch.”

MICHAEL RANGE  
WISE EC  
DECATUR



©ISELA GOPPEL

**Tooting Fritos' Horn**

When we lived in San Antonio, kids loved to visit the concession stand when it was our daughter's high school band's turn to serve because we started a tradition of yelling “Frito pie!” when anyone ordered one [*It's in the Bag*, September 2025].

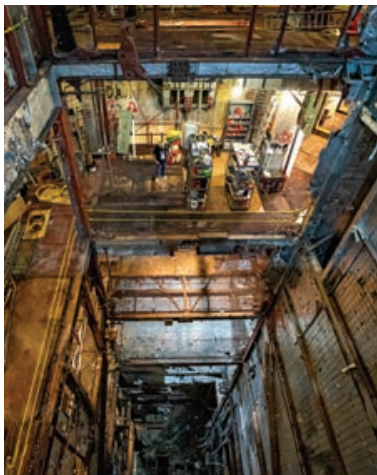
Sarah Nichols  
Central Texas EC  
Cherry Spring

As a mid-1950s preteenager, I vacationed with my San Antonio cousins. One supper my aunt Ruth Hooper served my first Frito pie. Even now, I remember it as the most exotic dish I had ever eaten.

R. Helmer III  
Central Texas EC  
Austin

**Cold War Remnants**

As a young man I worked on silos as an ironworker during the summers



ERIC W. FOHL

between college semesters [*Counting Down*, September 2025]. A friend and I worked in southern Arizona, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota.

I have often wondered what was done with the decommissioned silos. There are many of them.

Sheridan Duncan  
Southwest Texas EC  
Menard

**Trail Rides**

*Mounts in the Hills* [September 2025] is a great resource to save and use as a guide to ride in Texas. The trails I use the most are at Ray Roberts Lake State Park, which are maintained by the Lake Ray Roberts Equestrian Trails Association.

With the loss of so much open space due to development, it is great we have so many trails available. We would love to have more.

Gabrielle Gordon  
Tri-County EC  
Tarrant County

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# Spice—And Everything Nice

A chili competition born of spite becomes one based around community

**Texans know:** Chili is so much more than just a bowl of red.

That wasn't always the case for Teena Friedel—not many years ago, when she worked for the city of Irving and was tasked with spicing up a city festival.

“I started trying to think of ways to make a festival more fun,” she says, “and one of the things I found was something called a chili cook-off, not knowing what that entails.”

Friedel joined her local pod of the Chili Appreciation Society International to learn the rules and process of a sanctioned competition. After her 2006 event, she remained part of the chapter but was reluctant to get more involved. “They asked me if I wanted to cook, and I did not want to do it,” she says.

After much cajoling and a crash course in cooking chili, she was finally persuaded to compete.

“I made the final table that first day and placed second in showmanship,” Friedel says. She was hooked. “I said, ‘Oh, honey, if I’m cooking chili, I’m going all in.’”

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT From left, René Chapa, Beth Baxter and Teena Friedel mix laughter with chili-making, a process that can take three hours. Competition chili typically includes several chili powders. Final-round entries at the 2025 Texas Ladies' State Chili Championship Cook-Off in Seguin.

ABOVE Donna Dodgen—Seguin mayor and a contest judge—takes a taste.



TOP An entry in the junior competition gets loving attention from an adult.

ABOVE Paisley Banks brings her chili to the judges. The 7-year-old from La Grange won the junior competition.

OPPOSITE Reese Satsky, wearing her crown from the 2024 junior championship, dishes up her chili.

The community embraced her.

“If I needed anything, somebody gave it to me, and seeing how much fun everybody had, and part of your entry fee went to charity, and that feels really good.”

In the birthplace of chili, the official state dish comes with a storied history that represents Texas’ bold, rich culture. CASI, one of three standard-bearers for chili cook-offs in the state, hosts hundreds of competitions annually across the continent, raising \$729,000 for charity during the last full fiscal year. But none of those events have the vibrance, camaraderie and history of the Texas Ladies’ State Chili Championship Cook-Off.

It’s as much about Texas hospitality as it is secret spice mixtures, and it’s a testament to the power of women in a traditionally male-dominated domain and the close-knit bonds that good food fosters.

The TLSCCO holds a unique place in chili history. The event was created in direct response to the 1970 formation of the Chillympiad, a famous San Marcos cook-off that barred women. In response, legendary rancher and humorist Hondo Crouch offered up Luckenbach, the town he owned near Fredericksburg, for a separate cook-off in 1971 called Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned. It was for women only. And it was an instant hit.

The event evolved over the years to support more entrants and found its footing in Seguin, about 35 miles east of San Antonio, in 1991 as the second-largest chili cook-off in Texas, just behind the distinguished Terlingua International Chili Championship. While it’s no longer the second-largest, the women’s competition is still a qualifier for Terlingua, meaning winners gain immediate entry to the most prestigious cook-off of the year.

## Heating Up

On a warm April day at Max Starcke Park in Seguin, there's a huge spread of cars, campers and tents, all in residence for the TLSCCO weekend. A flag with the CASI logo flies above the proceedings, centered around a covered pavilion in a grove of pecan and sycamore trees along the Guadalupe River.

With 135 cooks, the competition is fierce but also clearly fun. Tents, tablecloths, T-shirts and décor are in bright pinks, purples and yellows. Previous champions stroll around wearing tiaras and bright sashes. Men, working behind the scenes, wear pink polos. Everywhere is the sound of women laughing.

Under the pavilion, the junior competition is already underway, with four girls ages 7–15 tending their pots in front of the main stage. Last year's junior champion, Reese Satsky of Friendswood, is back, wearing her crown.

At the appointed hour, they parade their chili through a glitter-speckled purple arch to the turn-in table, reminiscent of a beauty pageant victory lap.

Outside the pavilion, the adult competition is just getting started. Cooks can begin their chili anytime but most plan a three-hour cook for the 1 p.m. turn-in time, when all competitors must present their chili to judges in 32-ounce plastic foam cups, marked only with ID numbers for anonymity. The visiting and socializing quiet down as the burners are lit.

"A lot of people think if you go to a cook-off, it's just, you know, a free-for-all," says Beverly Maricle, the cook-off's board president. "We do party. We do have a good time but take what we do very seriously. After chili is turned in, or during the resting period, then you walk around and you visit with everybody, but when you're cooking, you're cooking. It *is* a competition."

René Chapa of Grand Prairie, the 2023 chili world champion and 2014 ladies state champion, is among this year's top competitors, browning her meat on a custom-painted camping stove under a purple awning with six other cooks, including her mom, Beth Baxter. All are dressed in pink shirts that read, "Spread Kindness."

"Everybody does their own things a little bit differently," Chapa says. "And so, you know, I'll tweak it here and there. She tweaks hers here and there."

While traditional Texas chili consists of beef (usually cuts of stew meat) cooked low and slow with a blend of peppers, garlic and onions, competition chili is more concentrated.

"This chili is not like a Wolf Brand Chili. You're not going to sit there and eat a whole bowl; it's very spicy," Chapa says. "We've got five, six chili powders in here."

Stew meat is left behind in favor of chili ground beef, and any vegetables are blended to create a gravy. Judges taste a single spoonful of each chili before recording a score, so each bite needs to pack a consistent punch.

"Competition chili is a little bit stronger, a little saltier, a little spicier," says Maricle, a member of GVEC. "You want a little back bite, but if the tears are running down your face, your pot's too hot."



**“You want a little back bite, but if the tears are running down your face, your pot’s too hot.”**

Each entry is judged based on five factors: aroma, color, consistency, taste and aftertaste. At the end of each round of judging, half the entries advance and the tasting begins anew.

Pat Krenek, 2001 and 2003 ladies state champion, has been coming to the competition since the Luckenbach days.

"You have to start out with a decent recipe," she says. "You crank it up, put it in that cup, turn it in and wish for the best. Once you cook your pot, it's out of your hands."

Krenek loves the atmosphere of the event. "This is just a relaxing time. It's not a beauty contest, so you don't have to dress up or do your hair and makeup," she says. "And the men are the ones working."

## Cooking Down

Stoves get turned off during the chili's resting period as the spices work their magic. And then there's a last-minute crush of activity before the mad rush to the turn-in table.

At Chapa's tent, a band of visiting competitors brings out a tray of Jell-O shots, and everyone toasts to each other's good luck. Some go back for seconds.



LEFT Chapa coats her plastic foam cup with a spoonful of chili.

ABOVE Friedel relishes winning the 2025 cook-off.

About 10 minutes before turn-in time, Chapa primes her entry cup by pouring in a spoonful of chili and swishing it around the edges, coating the cup in a familiar red color. Precoating the cup takes some of the plastic foam smell away, giving the aroma the best chance of scoring high.

At its core, this is a competition, but it's also about the experience. For the participants, it's a chance to show off their skills and gain recognition but also to nurture the bonds of a supportive statewide community.

Jeff Bauer, a CASI board member from Pinehurst, is sitting in the shade as his daughter Madalynn Bauer, 18, is cooking in the adult division for the first time. "At barbecue cook-offs, nobody will help you. It's all about me, me, me, me, me," Jeff Bauer says. "But chili cooks, they'll help you."

He competed for years on the barbecue trail before finding the chili circuit.

"It got to the point to where I was spending almost \$800, \$900, \$1,000 a weekend at barbecue competitions," he says, "and without sponsorship, there's no way an average Joe can do that."

Bauer made the switch to chili in 2012, bringing Madalynn with him to competitions. "I mean, the chili cook world is just so much more friendly."

The kindness of the chili community is a common refrain among TLSCCO competitors, many of whom return year after year. There's an unspoken understanding that while

everyone is there to win, the real victory is the chance to support one another.

When Friedel, the reluctant cook from Irving, was diagnosed with cancer in 2011, words of encouragement poured in from CASI members from across the U.S.

"I never felt so much love from strangers in my entire life. I got cards in the mail from Minnesota, Ohio. I don't even know who these people were, but they knew me from the cook-offs," Friedel says. "It was just the most moving and precious thing to have people help you when you struggle. I have a whole chili family now."

## Crowning Moment

For judging, hundreds of people—including members of the public—are divided among tasting tables.

"We like to have a minimum of 200," Maricle says. On this day, some parks employees and litter cleanup crews have been recruited. The mayor of Seguin, Donna Dodgen; city employees; and longtime chili judges line the final table to determine the winners.

The main stage features custom purple camp chairs, part of the award booty for the top 20 cooks.

After the final tastings, the pavilion overflows with competitors, their supporters and curious onlookers. The winners are announced from 20th place to first by the entry numbers on their cups. Sharp cries and shouts of excitement rise up

as winners emerge from the crowd, accept hugs from friends and then are escorted on stage.

Beth Baxter's number is called as 20th place, and she takes a seat in her camp chair. As she's handed a chilled glass of champagne, the number of her daughter, René Chapa, is called as 19th place, and the two women reunite on stage with laughter and hugs.

The camp chairs are almost full as the reserve champion's number is called. A proud Jeff Bauer lets out a whoop of joy and spins his daughter Madalynn around. As the runner-up, she will head to Terlingua after her first year of competition.

When the championship announcement comes, Friedel

looks radiant as she rises from the crowd. It takes her a few minutes to make her way to the stage, slowed down by all the hugs she receives along the way.

She's crowned by last year's winner and handed a bouquet of yellow roses and a large trophy, which she will carry around to competitions until next year's winner is declared. She dabbled in chili cooking on a lark, and now—with the help of her "chili family"—she's a state champion.

"I already knew it was going to be me," she says later. "It was really weird, I just knew I was going to go get that crown." ■

# The Roots of Red

BY DENNIS RAY SCHNEIDER

**Like many** quintessentially American foods, chili (or more accurately chili con carne) was born from that unique amalgam of cultures found in the U.S. And like many foods rooted in home cooking, a precise origin is hard to track down.

Though some writers have suggested chili has an Aztec or New Mexican origin, Frank X. Tolbert's *A Bowl of Red*, one of the definitive books on chili, opines that most historians agree it originated in San Antonio. *A Bowl of Red*, Joe E. Cooper's *With or Without Beans*, and Robb Walsh's *The Chili Cookbook* write that the dish was seldom found in Mexican restaurants or homes until the 20th century.

It was, however, found in Texas in the 1800s.

You had in San Antonio during that time the influx of Spanish culture along with the meat animals of the Old World—sheep, goats, pigs and above all, cattle—present in abundance by the beginning of the 1800s.

Tolbert, Cooper and Walsh have suggested that immigrants from the



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Canary Islands brought to San Antonio on the order of the Spanish king in the 1700s were the originators of chili. There is a line of evidence in the red mojo sauces that Canarian foods are known for, composed of ground chiles of varying degrees of hotness, cumin, garlic and other spices. These base sauces are remarkably similar to those used in most chili recipes.

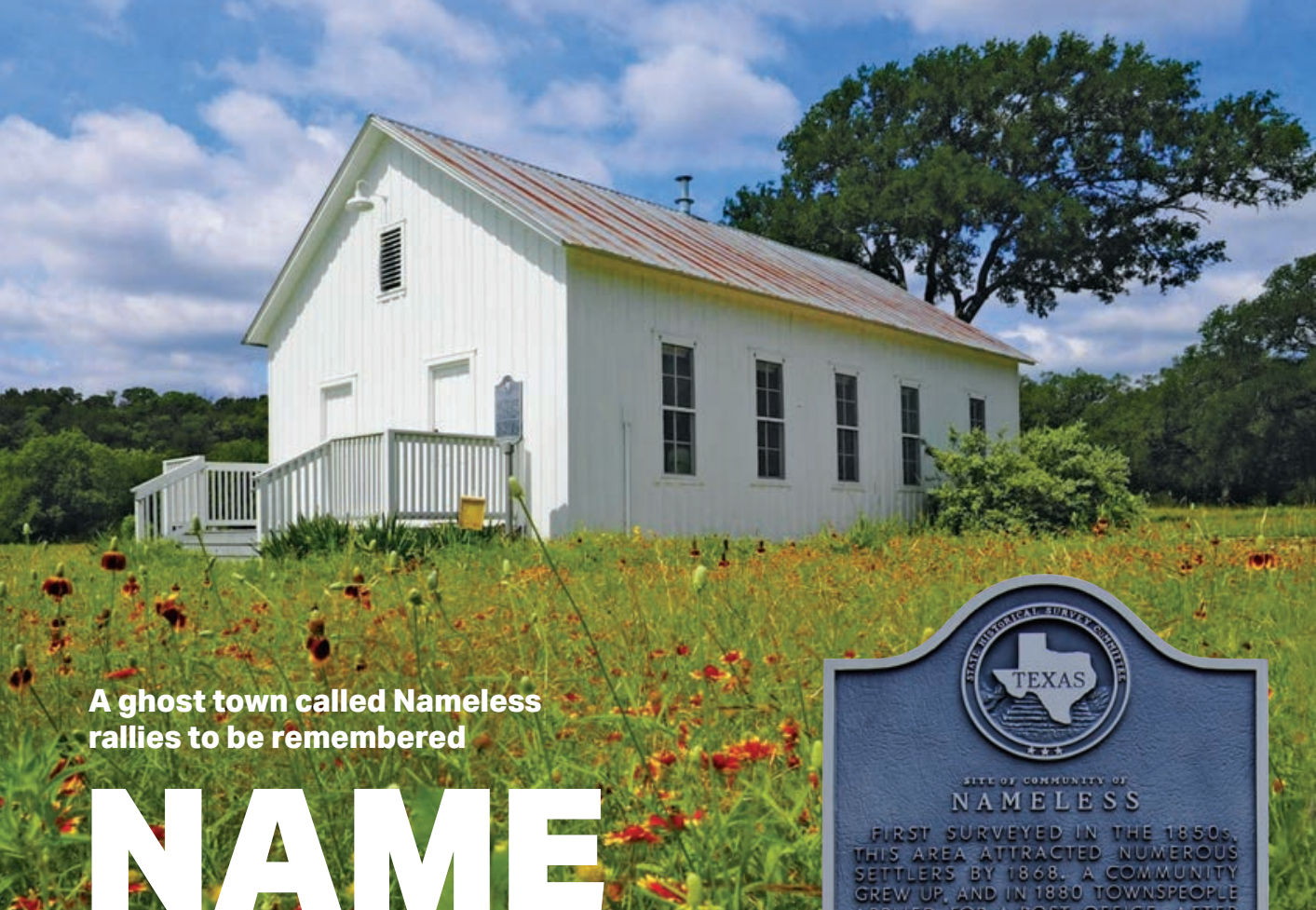
Chili appeared most prominently in San Antonio in the 1880s when it became a market staple supplied by Tejana women who became known as chili queens. In the city's open-air markets, above, these family cooks fed workers and visitors in what was becoming a major cattle center of the Southwest.

More cultural fusion spread chili across Texas. In 1894, Charles Geb-

hardt, a German immigrant who lived in New Braunfels, developed a method for turning dried chiles into a powder that could be sold to restaurants burgeoning in new railway towns. That meant a quick bowl of red could be prepared without the long cooking and processing required for the intact dried chile. His chili powder remains a staple.

In the 20th century, canned chili and chili powders powered the spread of the dish across the U.S. and beyond, setting the stage for the final (so far) evolution of the dish—the cook-off.

While the first chili cook-off may have taken place at the 1952 State Fair of Texas, the much publicized 1967 competition in Terlingua, which Tolbert helped organize, created the chili cook-off phenomenon. ■



A ghost town called Nameless rallies to be remembered

# NAME DROPPING

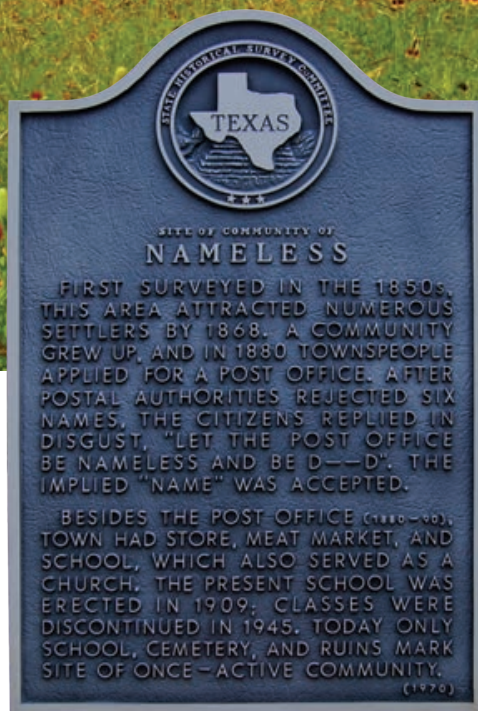
BY ANNA MAZUREK

**IN 1880,** as the story goes, a growing community northwest of Austin applied for a post office under the name of Fairview. That name was rejected by the federal government along with five subsequent applications because the names were already in use. After the sixth rejection, the disgusted townspeople replied, “Let the post office be nameless and be damned.”

That iconic line, now inscribed on the town’s historical marker, is how the community officially became Nameless (though it was often referred to as Fairview locally).

A century and a half later, few remnants of the town remain. But on April 12, nearly 300 people gathered around a 1909 one-room schoolhouse on Nameless Road in what is now Leander to celebrate the historic addition of an 1876 homestead that had been relocated to the property.

The town’s post office operated for a decade during its heyday, accompanied by a meat market, general store and the



COURTESY FRIENDS OF NAMELESS SCHOOL

school that doubled as a church. The white board and batten Nameless School operated for 36 years, from 1909 to 1945.

“Anything happening was happening at the school,” says Mary Cameron, president of the nonprofit Friends of Nameless School. “It was the center of life, especially out here in the sticks.”

“It was the center of life, especially out here in the sticks.”

The school closed when the outlying individual schools consolidated into the Leander school district, says Cameron, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative.

She grew up in East Texas but often visited her grandfather, who lived down the street from the school. After raising her children in nearby West Lake Hills, she and her husband moved into her grandfather’s house in 2007 and later



STACY COALE

## WANT TO VISIT?

Contact the Friends of Nameless School Facebook page or email [friends.of.nameless.school@gmail.com](mailto:friends.of.nameless.school@gmail.com).

became involved in the Friends of Nameless School.

The organization started in the 1950s, a century after Nameless was originally surveyed, and became an official nonprofit in 1992 as part of an effort to restore the school, which sits on property owned by Travis County. The building's extensive restoration, including a new concrete foundation made to resemble the original cedar poles, was completed in 2009 to celebrate the structure's centennial.

"Every board in the floor was pulled up, sanded, scraped, reshellacked and put back down," Cameron says. "The members were painting the inside and the outside." Ceiling fans, heat, air conditioning and a bathroom also were added.

And with that, it seemed that the only remnant of Nameless was preserved.

But in 2023, when land across from the school was being cleared for a subdivision, two historic discoveries were made.

The first was a small wrought-iron fenced cemetery, the resting place of Eliza Gray, wife of Hubbard Gray, who was a teacher and election judge. Hubbard is believed to be buried next to her in an unmarked grave. In 2024, the site was preserved and designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery.

Further construction efforts clearing a cedar brake revealed another surprise—the ruins of a home. "We didn't discover it until the bulldozer had taken out a lot of the cedar trees," Cameron says. "We never knew it was there."

Research revealed it was the homestead of the Grays, who were among the area's early settlers. They had donated an acre and a half of their property for a different school, believed to be the area's first free public school.

The cedar dog-run style house has two rooms separated by a central open area. Based on lumber markings, the structure dates to 1876.

Cameron helped lead efforts to relocate the structure, moving it across the street to the Nameless School. Taylor Morrison, the homebuilder and developer who uncovered the building, donated \$15,000 to help cover the cost.

Period reenactors were on hand for the Friends of the Nameless School's April celebration of the completion of the first phase of restructuring efforts for the Gray house—including roof repairs, reconstruction of the stone fireplace and chimney, and the addition of two porches.

A wheelchair-accessible ramp and new windows, doors and floors are slotted for the next phase. The organization is currently raising money through grants, donations and proceeds from holiday sales. At the annual Christmas in November fundraiser at the Catholic church in nearby Lago Vista, members of the nonprofit will sell handmade crafts, jams and a forthcoming cookbook.



PHOTOS THIS PAGE STACY COALE



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP The relocated and refurbished Nameless School in springtime. The ghost town's historic marker. Mary Cameron has led efforts to restore Nameless' structures.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Historian and educator Chris Twing demonstrates hand-sewing and a classic marbles game. John Nabors shows weaving techniques in front of the Gray house.

While Cameron worries about the site's future and Friends members aging out, she hopes it will continue to be a gathering space. Another community celebration is scheduled for April 2026.

"So many of us are so wrapped up in schedules and deadlines [with] no time to really slow down," Cameron says. "I would like it to continue being used by the community to take a step back in time to simpler times." ■

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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/CEO

JOHN ED SHINPAUGH

## Thankful We're Powered by Purpose

NOVEMBER IS ONE of my favorite months of the year. It's the start of the holiday season, the temperature is dropping, and friends and family gather to celebrate together. Like many of you, I often take this time to think about what I'm grateful for in life.

My list includes many of the things that you're likely grateful for—family, friends and community. But I'm also thankful for the cooperative model and the purpose that guides my job as CEO of Fannin Electric Cooperative.

As a part of this co-op, I see purpose in action every single day. Unlike investor-owned utilities, our co-op doesn't exist to make profits for distant shareholders. We exist to serve you—our members, our neighbors and our communities.

That purpose is what sets us apart. It's why we were founded, and it's what continues to drive every decision we make.



PORQUENOSTUDIOS | ISTOCK.COM

At its core, being a cooperative means being member-owned and locally controlled. That's not just a tagline; it's the heart of our business model.

Members have a voice in how our co-op operates. You elect board members who live right here in our service area and understand the unique challenges and opportunities our communities face. Decisions aren't made in corporate boardrooms hundreds of miles away; they're made here at home, by people who care about the same things you do.

This local accountability means we can stay focused on what matters most: delivering reliable, affordable electricity and providing real value to the people we serve.

We accomplish these goals by investing in essential infrastructure upgrades and technologies that strengthen our local grid and improve electric service. We work hard to manage costs and keep rates as low as possible—because we know how much rising prices affect families and small businesses in our area.

And when storms hit or outages occur, Fannin EC crews are ready to respond quickly because we live here too.

We're also planning for the future. As electricity demand grows due to new technologies and economic development, electric co-ops work to ensure we continue to meet those needs with a balanced,

reliable energy mix. We know our members care about affordability and dependability, and we're committed to delivering both.

But our commitment doesn't end at power lines.

Co-ops were built to meet community needs, and that purpose extends well beyond delivering electricity. Whether we're supporting local schools, sponsoring youth programs or partnering with volunteer organizations, we're always looking for ways to improve the quality of life in the places we serve. Community support isn't an afterthought—it's central to our mission.

That's the power of the cooperative difference. That's what it means to be powered by purpose.

Now I'd like to thank you, the member-owner. You're not just a customer—you're an owner, a stakeholder and a vital part of a larger effort to keep our community strong, connected and energized. We couldn't do this without you.

Thank you for the trust you place in us, and thank you for being a part of Fannin EC. We're proud to be your local electric cooperative. ■



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#### Daylight Saving Time Ends

Sunday, November 2  
Set clocks back 1 hour.

#### Veterans Day

Tuesday, November 11

#### Thanksgiving

Thursday, November 27  
Our office will be closed November 27–28 for the holiday.

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## November Billing Schedule

### Cycle 1 Dates

**BILLING** November 4  
**DUE** November 21  
**DISCONNECT** December 8

### Cycle 2 Dates

**BILLING** November 11  
**DUE** November 28  
**DISCONNECT** December 15

### Cycle 3 Dates

**BILLING** November 18  
**DUE** December 5  
**DISCONNECT** December 22

### Cycle 4 Dates

**BILLING** November 25  
**DUE** December 12  
**DISCONNECT** December 29

## Fannin Electric Cooperative

### CONTACT US

2201 FM 87, Bonham 75418  
P.O. Box 250, Bonham, TX 75418  
**Local** (903) 583-2117  
**Toll-Free** 1-800-695-9020  
**Web** fanninec.coop

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### Chief Financial Officer

Karen Rintelmann

### Chief Technology Officer

Wesley Hicks

### Chief Operations Officer

Beau Williams

### Director of Engineering

Tyler Hockenberry

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# Restoring Freedom

Heroes Ranch gifts guests with restorative outdoor activities that defy disability

BY PATTI PFEIFFER

**APPROACHING THE GATE**, goosebumps appeared—and stayed. I fought back tears the entire visit. It's just that kind of place—with a purpose and personal stories that are profoundly impactful.

There's the account of a blind visitor who shot a deer; a quadriplegic veteran who pulled the trigger by blowing into a tube; the visit from a firefighter with burns over 95% of his body; a son hunting alongside his dad, a former police officer left paralyzed after being shot in the head; and a dying man's last wish granted.

Located behind East Texas' Pine Curtain, the 450 acres is a ranch rarity. Cattle aren't raised here, but rather confidence, camaraderie and bonds are nurtured. Heroes Ranch is a longtime dream come true for its founder, Freeman Sawyer, a vice president at CrossCountry Mortgage in Plano, and its mission is straightforward.

Sawyer wanted a place where military veterans and their families, first responders, those with disabilities, and the families of those who died serving their country could retreat, relax, unplug and unwind in an environment that defies disability.

"Mr. Freeman wanted the most accessible and adapted hunting and fishing lodge in the country, and I believe he has achieved that," says ranch manager Luke Baker, who retired from the Army after 20 years of service. "We try to restore freedoms our heroes think they no longer have and show them they can still do things; it just looks a little different."

Finding the perfect setting took a long and extensive search. Sawyer's determination eventually paid off in 2019 when he found and purchased a parcel near Quitman, about 35 miles north of Tyler. Using personal funds, Sawyer turned the land into an elaborate and impressive hunting hideaway that opened in March 2024.

A massive American flag flying above a clear lake greets guests. The day I was there, a bald eagle was spotted flying near the flag as deer and antelope roamed below.

The guest house accommodates 18, including children. Its bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen and furniture are totally accessible, just like most everything on the ranch.

A ramp at the lake provides access to kayaks and fishing boats. There are roll-in deer blinds, tracked

all-terrain wheelchairs and all-terrain vehicles with controls that accommodate disabled drivers.

Abundantly forested, the sprawling spread is home to fallow and axis deer, blackbuck antelope and the heaviest rack on a whitetail I've ever seen. There are fish-filled lakes, shooting ranges and nature trails.

Safety is paramount, with gun checks before hunting. Guides accompany visitors on their hunts, and professionals manage the game and fish.

Extraordinary touches add to the impact. Attendees of a 2022 open house wrote letters to future guests. The letters were then enshrined in the lodge wall during construction. "Your service and sacrifice are forever etched in our hearts!" one reads. "Thank you."

Photos of the individual notes were made into a collage depicting the Lone Star flag, and the collage proudly hangs on the same wall. Interior paneling was made from timber harvested and milled on-site.

As a nonprofit organization, donations, sponsors and volunteers keep Heroes Ranch going. Wood County Electric Cooperative in Quitman has donated thousands of dollars to the organization through the co-op members' contributions to Operation Round Up. A co-op grant funded an ATV conversion, and employees have volunteered at the ranch since before it opened.

Other than transportation to and from the ranch, guests and their families pay nothing during their stay. "They don't pay a dime," Baker says. "We supply everything, process and ship their game meat. Even the taxidermy is paid for, and 100% of monies received goes to heroes' hunts."

Sawyer gained a huge respect for the military at a young age. His father was a government contractor, he had grandfathers and uncles who served, and he was surrounded by military bases while growing up in San Antonio. And his respect only grew as he grew up.

"Veterans often are thanked for their service, and while that is great and surely appreciated, to me that wasn't enough, especially for those who have lost limbs, their mobility, suffer from wounds and PTSD," Sawyer says. "I was in a position to do more and so I did." ■

U.S. Army veteran Aaron Sears, left, with Dandy Bridges of Heroes Ranch.



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# Taking Texico

How a Panhandle town 'stole' its rowdy New Mexico neighbors overnight

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY JONATHAN CARLSON

**THIS IS A TALE** of two towns established just a few years apart along the Texas-New Mexico border.

Texico, on the New Mexico side, sprang up first as a shanty along the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway in the early 1900s. It had a reputation as one of the wildest towns in the West. Its gambling halls, bars and brothels were built on an untitled parcel of property one writer called “the unsurveyed strip.”

Then, a few years later, came Farwell, just across the border. It was better built on titled lands and far more orderly.

The lore of the period claimed that Farwell stole the town of Texico, almost overnight. It's a large claim but not without merit. Here's how it happened.

Texico was a town of squatters and

wooden shacks that sprang up quickly and haphazardly. The shacks were about the size of today's average backyard shed.

They had dirt floors and could be picked up and moved easily with just a few people walking them down the dusty street to a better location and a better view.

Imagine a squatter going to sleep in his home one night, dreaming of the garden he would plant—and the next morning waking up to greet a new neighbor whose shack was sitting where the dreamed-of garden was supposed to go. But with no surveyed lots and no titles, it was difficult to claim ownership of anything.

A writer for *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Eleanor Gates, went to visit these most unc cosmopolitan twin towns at the turn of the last century. She listed the

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



businesses along one side of the street in Texico like so: “gambling-hell, restaurant, saloon, gambling-hell, billiard-parlor, jewelry-shop, livery stable, saloon.”

The buildings were made of poor wood, showed their rafters inside and had roofs of corrugated iron. These businesses were full of unsavory characters and poor souls looking for work on the railroad.

In contrast to this rootless world was Farwell, a planned community of sorts, named for the Farwell brothers of XIT Ranch fame.

There was money behind the Texas town. Buildings of fine brick rose above the prairie: a bank, two churches, a school, laundry, drugstore, lumberyard and icehouse. Little white markers that identified titled lots could be plainly seen by the squatters over in Texico.

There was a permanence to the town—and no gambling halls, dance halls or saloons. It was a place for raising a family.

It wasn't long until the men of Texico started getting their buddies to help them walk their shacks over to newly acquired titled lots in Farwell. A grand exodus happened quickly, with Texico citizens moving to Farwell, a land of promise.

Farwell's town manager increased the pressure on Texico by publicizing plans for a landscaped courthouse and a \$30,000 hotel. The locals saw that Texico might soon be dust in the wind.

And though Texico did shrink substantially, it did not disappear.

People in Farwell didn't forget the good times they once enjoyed across the border. Some of them stepped across that line often, when they wished to cut loose and drink, dance and gamble. Perhaps there was even a saying back then, “What happens in Texico stays in Texico.” ■

# Turkey Time

The many encores for Thanksgiving leftovers

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Every Thanksgiving I'm left with loads of mashed potatoes, so I love finding ways to transform them. Enter the croquette, a delightful little bite of creamy potatoes with a crispy coating. The traditional version has ham, but today I'm adding turkey to the mix.

## Thanksgiving Croquettes

2 cups mashed potatoes  
 1 cup finely diced cooked turkey  
 1 teaspoon garlic salt  
 1 teaspoon onion salt  
 1 cup flour  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 1 teaspoon ground black pepper  
 1 egg  
 1 tablespoon water  
 2 cups panko breadcrumbs  
 Vegetable oil, for frying  
 1 cup cranberry sauce  
 ¼–½ cup orange juice

1. In a bowl, combine mashed potatoes, turkey, garlic salt and onion salt. Cover and refrigerate 2 hours.

2. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Scoop 2 rounded tablespoons mashed potatoes mixture, form into a ball and place on baking sheet. Continue this process until all croquettes are formed. Refrigerate 30 minutes.

3. In a bowl, stir together flour, salt and pepper. In another bowl, whisk together egg and water. Place panko breadcrumbs in a third bowl.

4. Roll each croquette in flour, shake off excess flour, dip in egg wash, then roll in breadcrumbs to coat.

5. Add 2 inches of oil to a large skillet over medium-high heat. Preheat oven to 200 degrees to keep croquettes warm after frying.

6. Fry croquettes in heated oil in batches, until golden brown on all sides, turning as needed. Drain on paper towels. Keep warm in oven.

7. In a small saucepan over low heat, combine cranberry sauce and ¼ cup orange juice. Cook until warm and thinned to desired consistency. Add additional orange juice if needed.

8. Serve warm sauce over croquettes.

MAKES 12–14 CROQUETTES

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Turkey Tostadas With Pineapple Salsa.





## Turkey Tetrazzini

LENICE BLAIR  
TRI-COUNTY EC

When you have leftover turkey, nothing beats an extra-comforting baked spaghetti casserole. It has it all—tender turkey, fresh veggies, creamy sauce and grated Parmesan. Blair has been cooking this recipe from her sister for years.

- 12 ounces uncooked spaghetti**
- 2 slices bacon**
- ¼ cup diced onion**
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper**
- 1 cup sliced mushrooms**
- 2 tablespoons flour**
- ½ cup chicken broth**
- 1 cup heavy cream**
- ¼ cup diced pimiento peppers**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**
- 2 cups diced cooked turkey**
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cook spaghetti according to package directions. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. In a large skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Remove from skillet, allow to cool and crumble. Leave bacon drippings.
3. Add onion, bell pepper and mushrooms to skillet. Cook until tender. Stir in flour, chicken broth, cream and pimientos.
4. Reduce heat to simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce thickens. Season with salt and black pepper. Stir in spaghetti, bacon and turkey.
5. Pour into prepared baking dish. Sprinkle with Parmesan. Bake 30 minutes.

SERVES 6

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

## Stretch-a-Turkey Salad

KAY BELL  
HEART OF TEXAS EC



After I have cooked, stirred, mashed and baked an entire feast, all I crave is something I don't have to cook. Bring on Bell's salad in a sandwich with a heaping pile of chips because—let's be honest—the best part of Thanksgiving dinner is the lunch on Friday.

- 2 celery stalks, trimmed and chopped into chunks**
- 2 sweet gherkin pickles, chopped**

- ⅓ cup pecan halves**
- 1 Red Delicious apple, cored, peeled and sliced**
- 2 cups chopped cooked turkey**
- ½ cup halved black grapes**
- ¾ cup mayonnaise, plus more for sandwich assembly**
- ¾ cup rice Chex, slightly crushed**
- Sliced bread for sandwiches (optional)**

1. In a large food processor, combine celery, pickles, pecan halves and apple. Pulse until finely chopped and transfer to a large bowl.
2. Place turkey in food processor. Pulse until turkey is finely chopped.
3. Add turkey, grapes and mayonnaise to the large bowl. Stir to combine. Stir in crushed rice Chex.
4. Cover and refrigerate in airtight container until ready to serve.
5. To make a sandwich, spread a little mayonnaise on each slice of bread. Add a scoop of turkey salad and spread to edges.

SERVES 8

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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## Jammin' Quesadilla

BEVERLY NUBER  
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I'm not sure Thanksgiving leftovers have ever tasted better than as part of a quesadilla topped with cranberry bacon jam. This one is a family favorite in Nuber's household, and the jam is "always a hit, even for the most defiant cranberry haters," she says.

### CRANBERRY BACON JAM

8 slices bacon  
2 cups diced onion  
2 cups cranberry sauce  
Juice of 1 lemon

### QUESADILLA

2 cups shredded colby jack cheese, divided use  
2 9-inch flour tortillas  
1 cup chopped cooked turkey  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 jalapeño pepper, finely diced  
½ cup coarsely chopped cilantro, divided use  
½ cup cranberry bacon jam (recipe below)  
½ cup sour cream

**1. CRANBERRY BACON JAM** In a skillet over medium heat, fry bacon until crispy. Remove and drain bacon drippings, leaving behind 2 tablespoons.

**2.** Reduce heat to low. Add onion to bacon drippings and cook, stirring occasionally, until caramelized, about 15–20 minutes.

**3.** Crumble cooked bacon and add to skillet. Stir in cranberry sauce and cook until mixture slightly thickens, about 10 minutes.

**4.** Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice. Recipe makes 2–3 cups, and bacon jam can be made ahead and refrigerated up to a week or frozen up to 6 months.

**5. QUESADILLA** Sprinkle 1 cup cheese over 1 tortilla, then top with turkey, cumin, jalapeño and ¼ cup cilantro. Sprinkle the remaining cup of cheese over cilantro and top with second tortilla.

**6.** In a skillet over medium-low heat, cook quesadilla 3–4 minutes. Flip and cook an additional 3–4 minutes or until slightly crisp. Remove from skillet and slice into wedges.

**7.** Spread sour cream over top of quesadilla. Spread cranberry bacon jam over sour cream and top with remaining ¼ cup cilantro.

SERVES 1–2

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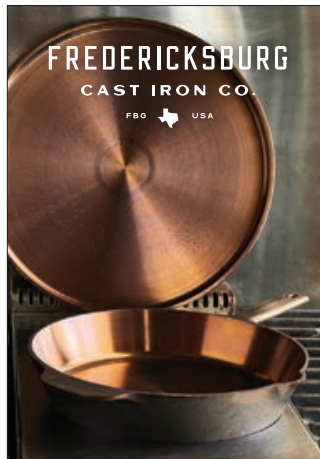
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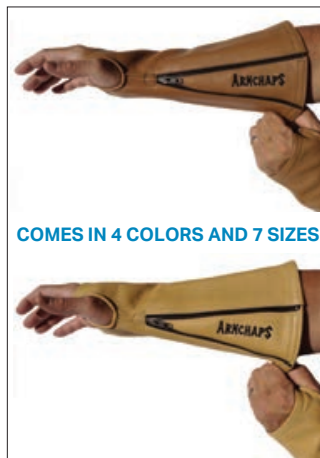
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Saving Grapes

The humble house where a Texan rescued the French wine industry

BY CHET GARNER

I STOOD IN THE MIDDLE of a quiet North Texas neighborhood, staring at a quaint Victorian home with lace curtains and a porch that looked perfect for sipping sweet tea. This is Vinita, the 1887 home of the man who arguably saved the world's wine industry—Thomas Volney Munson.

No giant tasting room. No vineyard views. Just a humble house with a Texas-sized story.

Inside I met up with a docent from Grayson College, the stewards of Vinita. They explained how a tiny insect named phylloxera wreaked havoc on Europe's vineyards starting around 1863, destroying 40% of French grapevines and sending the wine world into panic.

Enter T.V. Munson, a Denison horticulturist with an eye for resilient roots. Munson had spent decades trekking Texas, cataloging native grapes that had evolved to survive in tough, pest-filled soil. French winemakers knew of Munson's expertise, and they requested he send some of his grape hybrid rootstock to France, where it was grafted onto French vines.

The new hybrids flourished and ended the epidemic. To this day, nearly every grapevine in France sits atop American roots. For this, Munson was awarded the Legion of Honor, France's highest distinction. Not bad for a small-town Texan.

The Vinita home, tours of which can be arranged through the college, displays artifacts from Munson's life, including detailed grape illustrations and the tools he used to work the vineyards that once surrounded the historic home in Denison, along the Red River north of Dallas.

If you want to taste Munson's legacy, you can toast a glass of wine at nearby Homestead Winery or visit Ironroot Republic Distillery, which makes French-style brandy. After all, Munson's feat saved cognac, too.

Denison, better known as the birthplace of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, is off the beaten path, but for wine lovers and history buffs, it's a must-sip experience. ■

ABOVE Chet stands in front of Thomas Volney Munson's historic home, the Vinita House, in Denison.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

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

## NOVEMBER

7

**Oakville** **Dobie Dichos**, (361) 319-3067, [dobiedichos.com](http://dobiedichos.com)

**Brenham [7–9] Christmas at the Mansion**, (979) 836-1690, [giddingsstonemansion.com](http://giddingsstonemansion.com)

8

**Mabank Honoring Our Veterans Daughters of the American Revolution**, (972) 978-5126, [sarahmaplesinfo@gmail.com](mailto:sarahmaplesinfo@gmail.com)

**Mansfield Veterans Day Parade**, (817) 728-3390, [visitmansfieldtexas.com](http://visitmansfieldtexas.com)

**San Marcos Veterans Day Hangar Dinner Dance**, (737) 285-0015, [hangardance.org](http://hangardance.org)

**Smithville Tour of Homes**, (512) 237-2313, [business.smithvilletx.org](http://business.smithvilletx.org)

**Sunrise Beach Village Sip & Stroll Art Show & Sale**, [ccaasunrisebeach@gmail.com](mailto:ccaasunrisebeach@gmail.com), [ccaasunrisebeach.com](http://ccaasunrisebeach.com)

9

**Lufkin Lightwire Theater's Dino-Light**, (936) 633-5454, [angelinaarts.org](http://angelinaarts.org)

14

**Palestine [14–December 28] The Polar Express**, 1-855-632-7729, [texasstaterailroad.net](http://texasstaterailroad.net)

15

**Bluff Dale The Front Porch Christmas Market**, (817) 946-0141, [thefrontporchbluffdale.com](http://thefrontporchbluffdale.com)

**Hempstead Knights of Columbus Benefit Quilt Show**, (713) 816-1923, [kcbenefitquiltshow.com](http://kcbenefitquiltshow.com)

22

**Bastrop Baron de Bastrop's Birthday**, (512) 303-0904, [bastropcountyhistorical.com](http://bastropcountyhistorical.com)

29

**Mineral Wells Merry Wells—A Candy Cane Christmas**, (940) 325-2557, [visitmineralwells.org](http://visitmineralwells.org)

## DECEMBER

2

**Columbus Lighted Christmas Parade**, (979) 732-8385, [columbustexas.org](http://columbustexas.org)

**Waxahachie Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting**, (469) 309-4040, [waxahachiecvb.com](http://waxahachiecvb.com)

4

**Corsicana [4-7] White Christmas**, (903) 872-5421, [thewlac.com](http://thewlac.com)

5

**Grapevine Big Band Holiday Swing Thing**, (817) 410-3100, [grapevinetexasusa.com](http://grapevinetexasusa.com)

**Luling Cookies & Carols**, (830) 875-5058, [lulingmainstreet.org](http://lulingmainstreet.org)

**Brenham [5-6] Christmas Stroll & Lighted Parade**, (979) 337-7580, [jingle.cityofbrenham.org](http://jingle.cityofbrenham.org)

**Huntsville [5-6] Journey Through Bethlehem**, (615) 975-1334, [journeythroughbethlehem.com](http://journeythroughbethlehem.com)

6

**Castroville Castroville Conservation Society Candlelight Home Tour**, (830) 708-5680, [castrovilleconservationsociety.org](http://castrovilleconservationsociety.org)

### TCP *Submit Your Event*

We pick events for the magazine directly from [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com). Submit your February event by December 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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FOR INFO

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Then hitch a hayride to historic downtown Henderson for shopping, music, food, and fun.

It's more than a festival – it's a homecoming.

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c. Total Print and Electronic Distribution	1,949,538	1,843,790
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Karen Nejttek, Production Manager October 1, 2025

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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.

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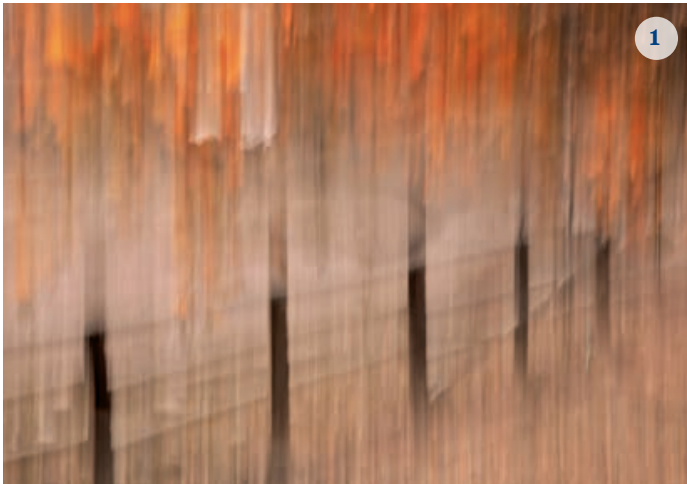
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# Abstract

Light, when used as a painter's brush, can create something new and interesting. Objects around us can take on new appearances through the lens of another. Readers sure found abstract beauty.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

**1 NARENDRA MORUM**  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC  
Grand Teton National Park.

**2 DUSTIN JOHNSON**  
PEDERNALES EC  
"Flower still life shot on a rainy day."

**3 RAY LITTLE**  
KARNES EC  
"I love rusty metal—the patterns, the colors, and none of them are the same. This rust was from a horse trailer."

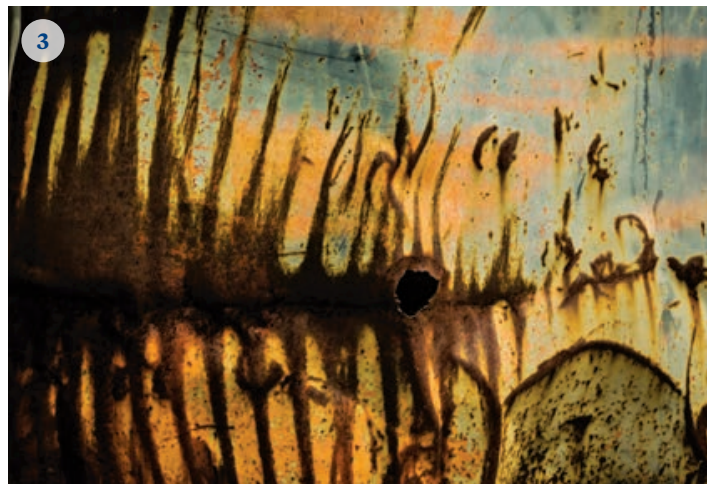
**4 JACOB SAUNDERS**  
PEDERNALES EC  
"Hand-held zooming shot looking south on Red River Street in Austin."



2



4



3

## Upcoming Contests

- STILL LIFE** DUE NOV 10
- GATES** DUE DEC 10
- CAUGHT NAPPING** DUE JAN 10



ENTER ONLINE

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Abstract photos from readers.



## Giving Thanks

When the floods took so much, helpers delivered some hope

BY CLAUDIA SULLIVAN  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
ERIC KITTELBERGER

**IN THE EARLY-MORNING** hours of July 4, the Hill Country experienced a devastating flood of unimaginable proportions that took the lives of more than 135 people.

The losses are beyond comprehension. Everyone experienced, even if indirectly, the pain of loss and the ache of failed hope.

Among the victims are 24 little girls who were having the time of their lives at summer camp. I know because I was a little girl at Camp Mystic in 1964, and I returned each summer as a counselor and program director until 1979.

In those hills and along the Guadalupe River, I learned, as many have, of the love of God and the preciousness of friendship. I learned a reverence for nature and about who I was as a person. We played, prayed,

grew and learned without a thought of the outside world.

The beautiful landscape came to feel like an extension of my body, one that feels now like an amputation.

As I gather with loved ones this month, my mind will be with the friends I lost in the flood, but I'll also be thinking of the countless stories of survival, selflessness, courage, bravery and resilience that give us all cause to be thankful.

In the days and hours following the 34-foot rise on the Guadalupe River, thousands of emergency responders from at least 26 states and Mexico, including some as far away as North Dakota and Minnesota, rushed to assist in search and rescue operations. More than 850 survivors were rescued from trees, rooftops and fast-moving floodwaters.

Of course, locals also heeded the call to action, and soon anyone with a bulldozer, tractor, backhoe, excavator or horse trailer headed to the flood zone.

The temperamental nature of the river made heroes out of ordinary people who struggled to survive.

One woman, caught in the attic of a once-peaceful riverside hotel, was forced out through a small window onto the roof. From there, she caught sight of a woman and her dog being swept away. She reached out, grabbed the woman by the arm and brought them to safety.

Not far downriver, Camp Mystic's teenage counselors walked scared campers through rushing water toward safety.

Long after the media and the searchers have left, we're still living with and among the horrors of this tragedy and its effects on our community.

So many Thanksgiving gatherings will never be the same. There will be empty chairs, empty tables.

Hold close the people around you. And cherish the stories of those willing to assist in restoring and rebuilding and mending the brokenhearted. For them, I'm thankful. ■

# 1920s Style for a 1920s Price

It was a warm summer afternoon and my wife and I were mingling with the best of them. The occasion was a 1920s-themed party, and everyone was dressed to the nines. Parked on the manse's circular driveway was a beautiful classic convertible. It was here that I got the idea for our new 1920s Retrograde Watch.

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

With its remarkable retrograde hour and minute indicators, sunburst guilloché face and precision movement, this design is truly one of a kind. What does retrograde mean? Instead of displaying the hands rotating on an axis like most watches, the hands sweep in a semicircle, then return to their starting point and begin all over again.

Retrograde watches by the big brands can set you back thousands; one recent offering from a big French fashion house is selling for more than \$150,000! But because we've designed the 1920s Retrograde Watch in-house, we can offer it to you for just \$99!

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