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# January 2024



08

## Making History

For more than 50 years, artists have been drawn to a quiet, tucked-away studio row in Edom.

*Story by Patti Pfeiffer  
Photos by R.J. Hinkle*

## 12 Dreaming Big

Students and community leaders collaborate to build tiny homes that help veterans become whole again.

*Story and photos by Laura Jenkins*

### ON THE COVER

TJ Phillips at a tiny home at Langetree Retreat and Eco Center near Liberty.  
*Photo by Laura Jenkins*

### ABOVE

Joe Hopps works on a bird-house at his studio in Edom.  
*Photo by R.J. Hinkle*

04

### Currents

The latest buzz

06

### TCP Talk

Readers respond

18

### Co-op News

Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

29

### Footnotes in Texas History

The Green Carpet  
*By W.F. Strong*

30

### TCP Kitchen

Texas Citrus  
*By Vianney Rodriguez*

34

### Hit the Road

Moment's Notice  
*By Chet Garner*

37

### Focus on Texas

Photo Contest: Local Landmarks

38

### Observations

Touched by an Angel  
*By Martha Deeringer*





# Brimming With Wisdom

**NATIONAL HAT DAY** is January 15, as if Texans ever needed another reason to don a cowboy hat.

Certainly, everyday wearers know this truism, shared with us by Alice M. Wolf, a member of Navasota Valley Electric Cooperative, as she “finished this sentence” back in November 2021:

“A Texan would never ... set his hat down brim down.”

Read more about hats in *Cowboy Hatters*, April 2016, on our website.

## Class Is Not Dismissed

In honor of National Classy Day—January 17—*Texas Co-op Power* writers and editors note these esteemed Texans:

**Luke Savage**, a former Texas Christian University pitcher, started the nonprofit Blessed Feet, which has collected thousands of pairs of used baseball cleats for budding baseballers in the U.S. and Dominican Republic.  
—Chris Burrows

**Simone Biles**, who owns the most gymnastics medals, exhibits poise in her willingness to speak out against sexual abuse and advocate for mental health awareness.  
—Jéden Clark

The late singer **Selena Quintanilla Pérez**’s career was brief but impactful, redefining Latin music for a new generation and an expanded audience. Even at her young age, she was involved with charities and humanitarian causes, especially those benefiting Texas children.  
—Alex Dal Santo

**Mary Kay Ash** said about her cosmetics company’s beauty consultants: “Here’s a woman who’s never had any praise at all for anything she’s ever done. Maybe the only applause she’s ever had was when she graduated from high school. She wants recognition. So we praise her for everything good that she does.” The company does good, too—supporting cancer research and survivors of violence.  
—Jessica Ridge

**Ima Hogg**, born in the 19th century, turned her family’s oil money to philanthropy, including the arts and mental health programs.  
—Tom Widlowski



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

If I could turn back the clock ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our November prompt: **Why doesn't somebody invent ... ?**

A washing machine that dries the clothes, folds them and puts them up.

NANCY BECKER  
CONCHO VALLEY EC  
PAINT ROCK

A canoe-shaped hotdog bun to hold all the condiments and chili.

MIKE WEBER  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES  
GRANBURY

A key fob that could roll up the windows on your vehicle when it starts raining and you are inside at work.

LARENDA BRADSHAW  
JASPER-NEWTON EC  
JASPER

A smoke alarm that can be serviced at ground level or without a ladder.

FRANK M. WAGNON  
FORT BELKNAP EC  
SOUTHLAKE

Visit our website to see more responses.

Too Much Latitude?

Look at a map too long and weird details emerge.

For example, Portland, Texas, is nearly equidistant from Portland, Maine (1,852 miles), and Portland, Oregon (1,845 miles).

And this: A giant triangle of these Portlands captures more than 30 other states.



A Passing Notion

**AS DRIVERS** faced gas shortages and long lines at the pump 50 years ago, President Richard M. Nixon signed an act January 2, 1974, lowering the national speed limit to 55 mph.

That went off the books in 1995, and today Texas boasts the highest speed limit in the country: 85 mph on a stretch of State Highway 130, a toll road between San Antonio and Austin.

**TCP** Contests and More

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OCTOBER 2023 Still in the Saddle Again

“After reading about the senior rodeo, my husband and I went to an event. It was wonderful seeing performers from 40 to 80-plus still enjoying what they love to do.”

CARLANNE HICKMAN  
TRI-COUNTY EC  
HASLET

### A Signature Moment

On the reading list for a Texas literature class at Tarleton State University was *The Time It Never Rained* [*It Still Reigns*, October 2023]. We were told there would be a guest speaker to discuss writing—none other than Elmer Kelton himself.

He was soft-spoken, generous, patient and happy to be with us. I walked away with fond memories and his signature in my own copy, which I still have to this day.

Cole Hooper  
Pedernales EC  
Wimberley

I don't recognize Elmer Kelton without his hat [*It Still Reigns*, October 2023]! Have read many of his books, including this gem. He had a way of capturing a time and place and bringing it to life through many characters. An excellent writer and storyteller.

ERNIE BATTLE  
VIA FACEBOOK



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### A Stunning Memory

I was an elementary student near Austin [*A School Day Like No Other*, November 2023]. I think most schools were getting out early so parents could take children to see the motorcade. My mother was coming to get me.

Someone came to our room and whispered something to our teacher. Mrs. Griffin put her head down on the desk and began to cry. When she looked up, she said, “President Kennedy has been shot, and he won’t be coming to Austin.” We were stunned.

When my mother came to pick me up, she was crying too. I will never forget that day.

Susie McCalla  
Central Texas EC  
Kerrville

### Family Ties

Frederick Law Olmsted is an ancestor on my mother’s side [*Appraising the Texas Landscape*, November 2023]. I am from Connecticut and worked my entire career at Hartford Hospital. In nice weather we would often go for walks on its approximately 10-acre beautiful campus, which was designed by Olmsted.

Virginia W. Smith  
Nueces EC  
Corpus Christi

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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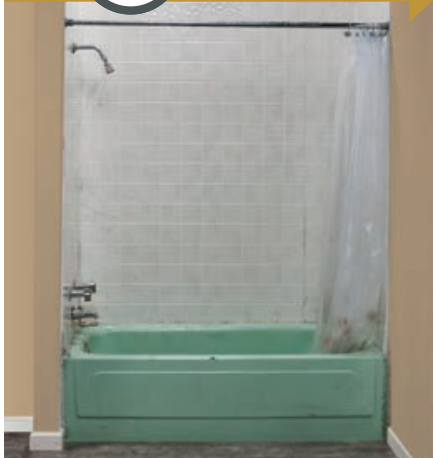
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# Making History

For more than 50 years, artists have been drawn to this quiet, tucked-away studio row

BY PATTI PFEIFFER • PHOTOS BY R.J. HINKLE

**THE SIGN SAYS** Arbor Castle Birdhouses, but within lies an array of fanciful castles that seem perfectly inviting to gnomes and pixies if not birds. Crafted from hollow cedar logs; topped with tall, curvy conical roofs; and adorned in whimsical metal touches, these are more pieces of art than avian abodes.

Creator Joe Hopps has been carving birdhouses for 25 years and started quite simply.

"I saw a hollow log, had an idea, created one, entered it into a birdhouse competition in Oklahoma where I was living, and it won first place," he explains.

Hopps recently added brushes to his repertoire, returning to another of his passions, acrylic abstract painting. "I began painting in the early '70s and began again recently because of a saw accident, which nearly cut off several fingers."

His canvases were showcased at the grand opening of a new art gallery, O3 Collective, just down the road from his shop in the small community of Edom, west of Tyler.





With a population of fewer than 400, what Edom (pronounced “E-dum”) lacks in size, it more than makes up for in gifted artists. From one-of-a-kind jewelry to high-end art and unique pottery, the small town’s main drag, FM 279, is a treasure trove of rare items and artisans eager to share their stories.

It all started a couple of doors down from Arbor Castle, at Potters Brown Collective. Once a grocery store, the wooden structure was for five decades the studio of Doug Brown, a California transplant who moved to Edom in 1970 and founded this artisan community.

A cluster of artists’ studios continues Brown’s vision. His widow, Beth Brown, a potter herself, lives next door to the studio today.

“Doug was a very humble man and wanted somewhere he and his friends could create and sell their goods and felt if he opened a place, others would follow,” Beth says. “Immedi-

ately upon seeing Edom, he knew this was where he wanted to set up shop, start an artists’ community—and he wanted it to be a true community.”

Brown wasted no time turning his dream into reality—buying buildings, setting up his pottery studio and pitching his vision to artisan friends. And they did follow.

In 1972, Brown organized the first Edom Art Festival, which drew more than 3,000 attendees. Since then, every second weekend in October, a sprawling meadow behind studio row is transformed into a bustling venue. Crafters, musicians and festivalgoers from near and far gather to enjoy the sights, sounds, food and festivities of the two-day

OPPOSITE Beth Brown is the director of the Edom Art Festival. ABOVE Arbor Castle Birdhouses along the main drag.





Zeke Zewick, right, creates jewelry using uncommon materials, above. "Not all jewelry has to be gold, diamonds and sparkly," he says.

event that includes a wine-tasting garden featuring local vineyards, musicians and crafting for kids. The festival has grown in content and count, attracting some 15,000 visitors in 2023.

After Brown's death in 2020, his building was eventually sold, but it still bears his name and remains a pottery center that sells ceramics from local makers.

And the community is still going strong.

Stepping outside, my eyes were drawn to a jewelry store of a different sort: Zeke & Marty. Even the door handles are distinctive, custom-made from sika deer antlers from Japan and carved by the owner, Zeke Zewick.

I marveled at the array of custom jewelry of every material, size and sort—even dyed bone pieces inlaid with unique gems, dispelling the adage that diamonds are a girl's best friend.

Using woolly mammoth teeth from Siberia, Turkish agates, shells from the Sea of Cortez, antlers and bones, Zewick prides himself in creating one-of-a-kind pieces.

"Not all jewelry has to be gold, diamonds and sparkly," he says. "Different material provides for different thoughts for pieces. Oxide steel is what some throw away as trash,

but I like the contrast of it with sterling."

He especially likes working with bone, which is malleable and easy to grind and polish, dyeing it with alcohol inks. The materials are uncommon, and so are his pieces.

Zewick, one of the original Edom artists, has been creating since 1969, first with leather but spending the past half-century as a jeweler. He knew Brown and received one of his original invites.

"He knew I was looking for a place to move after graduating art school," Zewick says. "This place had trees and water, and being from Lubbock, I felt we were in heaven."

Prompted by a desire to "get out of the city and move back home to a simpler, less stressful way of life," Shanna Wiggins relocated here from Austin three years ago.







She used to own a succulents shop on FM 279, and like other residents, she was eager to share her story.

“Originally, the locals were hesitant, feeling hippies didn’t belong here,” she says, “but we all love each other, so it doesn’t matter.”

For the traveler looking for a slower slice of life, Edom has a couple of restaurants serving home-cooked meals. Sips offers hand-crafted coffees, sodas and other nonalcoholic drinks.

Edom is eccentric and inviting and a true “poke-n-plumb” place: By the time you poke your head out of the vehicle, you’re plumb outta town, which adds to its charm. It’s a place where strangers don’t exist. ■

ABOVE Whimsy is a dominant feature of Joe Hopps’ birdhouses.  
RIGHT A signpost helps visitors to the East Texas town find their way.

## East of Edom

Other attractions along FM 279.

**Green Goat Winery** A cozy tasting room and covered patio overlook 7 acres of vines.

**Blue Moon Gardens** This 6-acre gardener’s paradise sells plants, tools and supplies.

**Coltharp-Beall House** The 175-year-old home has housed itinerant preachers and stagecoach travelers.





DREAMING

# BIG

Students and community leaders  
collaborate to build tiny homes that  
help veterans become whole again







**W**hat the heck are you doing?"

The sharp sound of his girlfriend's voice jolted TJ Phillips awake. But the bigger shock came when he opened his eyes.

"I had my knee on her neck," says Phillips, shaking his head. "And I was going through the motions of putting flex cuffs on her. She laughed it off after I explained that I'd been dreaming about being on active duty again. But I wasn't laughing. I knew I needed help."

Phillips, an Army sergeant who served 1991–99 and was honorably discharged, says he made an appointment with Veterans Affairs to address his post-traumatic stress disorder. But he felt like he was too young to be on all the medications they prescribed.

Instead, as many do, he turned to alcohol. And he eventually decided to live in his truck so he could save money. Ten years and five DWIs later, he was in the Montgomery County jail, awaiting a trial that was certain to yield an extended prison sentence, when he got the news that his arresting officer had suddenly died. He was free to go.

"And that's when Miss Barbara took me in," he says after an emotional pause. "Now I'm safe. I'm sober. And everything I need to get healthy again is right here."

OPPOSITE Langetree Retreat and Eco Center's community of tiny homes and assistance has helped change TJ Phillips' life. "Everything I need to get healthy again is right here." ABOVE Instructor James Gaylord and his Humble students in front of a tiny home they built.

Barbara Lange gave Phillips, 54, the key to a tiny home at the Langetree Retreat and Eco Center near Liberty, between Houston and Beaumont. But she'll be the first to tell you that she's only one of many who are making Phillips' recovery possible.

"Somehow we all got the memo independently of one another," Lange says. "And then somehow we all found each other. What are the odds?"

There was no actual memo, of course. But indeed, several people in the same corner of Texas had a similar idea around the same time.

At the outset, none of them knew each other—or even about each other. They were simply focused on the same goal: to support veterans by providing them with tiny homes. Their collaboration has no name. There's no one in charge. But it has yielded something much greater than the sum of its parts.

**A**llen Segura, who recently retired as assistant principal and director of career and technology education for Summer Creek High School, says the idea to integrate building tiny homes into the Humble school district's curriculum came from a bout of insomnia in 2018.

"Late one night I was scrolling through Facebook and saw some people in St. Louis who were building tiny homes for homeless veterans," Segura remembers. "And the simple thought came: 'I wonder if our students could do that?'"

He bounced the idea off James Gaylord and Missi Taylor, who teach CTE classes in construction, architecture and design at high schools in Humble, a Houston suburb whose name is pronounced "Umble." They were in.

"We had been teaching these classes for years, but it was mostly theoretical," Segura says. "Actually building houses would not only let them put what they're learning into practice, it would also help them understand the importance of serving others."

Under the supervision of the three educators, the students developed a presentation and pitched it to Superintendent Elizabeth Fagen, who took it to the school board for approval. Thus, in 2018, Humble ISD's Big Heroes, Tiny Homes program was born.

Meanwhile, about 40 minutes east of Humble, Lange, a retired social worker, was teaching leadership and environmental sustainability at the retreat center she and her husband built in 2004.

Their doors have always been open to people in crisis. They housed numerous people after Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005. They took in referrals from Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare, a community-based nonprofit serving those living with mental illness and intellectual disabilities. More recently, Lange had begun working with





Kingwood Park High School students work on a tiny home.

several Veterans of Foreign Wars chapters in an effort to address the crisis of homelessness among veterans.

"I had already started converting a shipping container into a tiny home for one of the veterans I was assisting when I came across a newspaper article about Missi," Lange remembers. "A VFW volunteer named Mark Bowen said, 'Barbara, why don't you go to Kingwood Park and tell those people that they can give us the houses?'"

Never one to leave a stone unturned, Lange went to visit the teachers in Humble. Once they saw her vast experience and her devotion to veterans, the district agreed to donate their tiny homes to Lange's effort.

**S**ince 2005, Operation Finally Home has been improving and constructing mortgage-free homes for wounded veterans, first responders and their families. But it wasn't until spring 2020 that Lee Kirgan, vice president of project management for OFH, learned about Humble ISD's big idea and suggested to President Rusty Carroll that they consider getting involved.

Six months later, Carroll surprised Segura with the news that OFH, based in New Braunfels, had secured a grant from big-box retailer Lowe's, which would provide all the building materials for Big Heroes, Tiny Homes for the foreseeable future.

"Humble ISD had a vision to build tiny homes for home-

less veterans, but they didn't have a sustainable way to source the materials," Carroll says. "By partnering them with Lowe's, we were able to lengthen their runway.

"People have been telling me for years that they wanted to build tiny homes for homeless veterans, but if they're transitional, there has to be some sort of infrastructure to support those living in them. Barbara supplied that missing piece."

Lange's infrastructure is deeply rooted in community. There are currently 10 tiny homes on her property and 27 agencies providing residents with such services as job coaching, counseling, legal aid and palliative care.

But creating a communal environment is one of her highest priorities. When she conveyed that to the people at OFH—who are helping her clear and prepare her land to receive 20 more houses over the next five to seven years—they recommended putting them in pods of six, which will serve as micro communities.

"We now know from a scientific point of view that loneliness can be as harmful to the body as cigarette smoking," Lange says. "When you're in a community of people who've been where you've been, when you're living with others who are going through what you're going through, you're less likely to feel like a freak.

"It advances the healing process."

Humble ISD is expanding Big Heroes, Tiny Homes to five high schools. The program offers students a hands-on building experience with mentoring by professionals—architects, plumbers, electricians, general contractors—giving the teens invaluable work experience and the opportunity to explore various career paths.

Due to its resounding success, other school districts and universities have reached out to Humble ISD to find out how the project works.

"Our instructors are willing to talk to your instructors," Segura says. "We are happy to connect your principals to our principals, your superintendent to our superintendent. Let us tell you how we did this."

Lange estimates that most residents will transition into permanent housing within two years. Phillips, who is approaching that milestone, may stay longer because he's become a strong leader in the community. Though he now has a job as a heating and air conditioning tech, he serves as a liaison and an advocate for the other veterans. He also assists with some of the property's maintenance and administrative needs.

"Veterans aren't homeless because they're not gifted, intelligent or experienced," Lange says. "They are broken. When you connect them with the resources they need and provide a safe place to heal, many will find their way back to the person they were before the trauma. All veterans deserve that chance." ■



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MESSAGE  
FROM  
GENERAL  
MANAGER

KATHI  
CALVERT

# Energy

AS WE ENTER A NEW YEAR, we are excited and prepared to make 2024 great for the members of Houston County Electric Cooperative. Our mission is to provide power for your way of life, and we are in the business of energy.

The definition of energy is “the capacity to do work”—we have plenty of work planned for the coming year. Our focus will continue to be the maintenance of our distribution system for your safety and the reliability of your service.

Did you know that we average 725 miles of right-of-way clearing and cut over 1,000 hazard trees outside of our easements annually to protect our members and ensure that the lights stay on? We also inspect approximately 7,000 poles a year and have a continual line patrol program to safeguard our distribution system.

While we spend significant effort to prevent outages, Mother Nature still has the upper hand, so our efforts do not stop at prevention. We will always go

to work for you—day or night, regardless of weather conditions—when your lights go out. If and when storms arise, our work does not stop until the last member’s power is restored.

We continue to strengthen our resiliency by improving our cybersecurity position with an enhanced network design and additional prevention and detection controls. Our member service personnel always stand ready to assist and answer any questions you might have.

We understand the importance of energy in your life, as it provides our members the capacity to carry out their work and build our communities. From schools to churches, water companies to pipelines, ranches to homes, we all rely on energy to get our work done. Houston County EC is here to work for you, support you and cheer for your successes.

Here’s wishing our Houston County EC members an extraordinary and productive year. ■





"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old but on building the new."  
—Socrates

# Happy New Year!

Houston County Electric Cooperative wishes you and yours a joyful and prosperous 2024.

Our offices will be closed Monday, January 1, for the holiday.

## Houston County Electric Cooperative

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Charles "Chuck" Siems  
Grady Wakefield  
David Whittlesey

### 24/7

## Outage Hotline Number

For information and to report outages, please call us.

**TOLL-FREE**  
1-800-970-4232

### ABOUT HOUSTON COUNTY EC

HCEC owns and maintains more than 5,100 miles of line to provide electric service to more than 15,000 members in Anderson, Angelina, Cherokee, Freestone, Houston, Leon, Madison, Trinity and Walker counties.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

### BOARD MEETING

Fourth Thursday, 4 p.m.\*

\*Subject to change. To verify, please call.

### MEMBER SERVICE

For general information during business hours: (936) 544-5641 local, 1-800-657-2445 toll-free

- To report an outage, press 1.
- To update your contact information, press 2.
- To speak to a member services representative regarding your account, press 4.
- Para hablar con un representante de habla español, presione 5.
- To connect, disconnect or transfer service, press 6.
- To report outdoor lighting issues or other nonemergencies regarding your electric service, press 7.

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## A Little Reminder to Help Your Neighbors

**HOUSTON COUNTY** Electric Cooperative employees and contractors need access to your property to protect the safety of the electric distribution system and restore power during outages.

Just because you have power, that doesn't mean everyone has power. Your neighbor may have an outage.

We take great pride in our response time, and you can help by allowing us access to your property.

As a utility, Houston County EC is considered critical infrastructure with responsibilities and rights to access the distribution system.

As a member of a cooperative, we are here to help each other.



# Unexpected Ways To Make Your House Feel Warmer

**YOU DON'T HAVE** to crank up the thermostat to stay warm this winter. **Try these simple strategies to stay warm without sending your energy bill through the roof.**

**Add rugs to uncarpeted rooms.** Rugs help insulate floors by trapping cool air underneath and keeping it from wafting into the room. Rugs will keep your feet warm, too.

**Install a filter whistle on your furnace.** This inexpensive device will alert you when it's time to change the filter. Dirty filters prevent air from easily flowing through your heating system, which means your furnace has to work harder—and use more energy—to keep you warm.

**Move furniture away from air vents.** The air return vents on the walls or floor of your home might be an eyesore, but hiding them under carpets and couches can render your heating and cooling system inefficient.

**Add a humidifier.** When the air in your home is too dry, it will feel cooler. Keeping the humidity in the home between 30% and 50% will make the air feel warmer—and stave off the dry skin that winter usually causes.

**Insulate the door leading from the house to the attic.** It's an often-overlooked energy-waster that can let the unheated attic air seep into your home and allow the warm air from the house into the cold attic.

**Get moving.** Just moving around to get your blood circulating is often enough to make you feel warm. Do a short workout inside or take a walk outside even if the weather is chilly. When you finish, you'll not only feel warmer but also be healthier. ■

# Statement of Nondiscrimination

HOUSTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE is the recipient of federal financial assistance from the Rural Utilities Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and is subject to the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended; and the rules and regulations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which provide that no person in the United States on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability shall be excluded from participation in, admission or access to, denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any of this organization's programs or activities.

The person responsible for coordinating this organization's nondiscrimination compliance efforts is Kathi Calvert, general manager. Any individual or specific class of individuals who feels that this organization has subjected them to discrimination may obtain further information about the statutes and regulations listed above from and/or file a written complaint with this organization; or the Administrator, Rural Utilities Service, Stop 1510, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC, 20250-1510; or the Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC, 20250-9410; or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). The USDA is an equal-opportunity provider and employer. Complaints must be filed within 180 days after the alleged discrimination.

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## Slow Cooker Enchiladas

- 1 pound ground beef or chicken
- 1 ounce taco seasoning mix
- 2 cans green chiles (4 ounces each)
- 1 can refried beans (16 ounces)
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup (10¾ ounces)
- 1 can cheese soup (10¾ ounces)
- 1 can enchilada sauce (15 ounces), divided use
- 4 cups shredded Mexican cheese blend, divided use
- 10 corn tortillas, quartered

1. Brown the meat in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add taco seasoning and 1¼ cups water. Simmer for 15 minutes over low heat.
2. In a bowl, stir together the chiles, refried beans, cream of mushroom and cheese soups, and half of the enchilada sauce. Mix in 3 cups of the shredded cheese.
3. Coat the inside of the slow cooker with cooking spray, then cover the bottom with a layer of tortillas. Top with a layer of cooked meat and then a layer of the cheese mixture. Repeat layers as ingredients allow, ending with a layer of tortillas.
4. Top with the remaining enchilada sauce and cheese. Cover and cook on high for 1 hour or on low for 3 hours.

SERVES 8

 Find this and more delicious recipes online at [TexasCoopPower.com](https://TexasCoopPower.com).

VLADISLAV GUDOVSKIY | IISTOCK.COM





# Powering Up After an Outage

When the power goes out, we expect it to be restored within a few hours. But when a major storm or natural disaster causes widespread damage, extended outages may result. Our line crews work long, hard hours to restore service safely to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible. Here's what's going on if you find yourself in the dark:



## 1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines:

Transmission towers and cables that supply power to transmission substations (and thousands of members) rarely fail. But when damaged, these facilities must be repaired before other parts of the system can operate.

## 2. Distribution Substation:

A substation can serve hundreds or thousands of consumers. When a major outage occurs, line crews inspect substations to determine if problems stem from transmission lines feeding into the substation, the substation itself or if problems exist further down the line.

## 3. Main Distribution Lines:

If the problem cannot be isolated at a distribution substation, distribution lines are checked. These lines carry power to large groups of consumers in communities or housing developments.

## 4. Tap Lines:

If local outages persist, supply lines (also known as tap lines) are inspected. These lines deliver power to transformers, either mounted on poles or placed on pads for underground service, outside businesses, schools and homes.

## 5. Individual Homes:

If your home remains without power, the service line between a transformer and your residence may need to be repaired. Always call to report an outage to help line crews isolate local issue.

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## 5¢ FAMOUS FLAVOR STICKS

They're terrific! Everybody likes these tasty mint and assorted flavored candy sticks. Available in two tasty varieties—the popular mint sticks... and the delicious assorted flavored sticks. Fine examples of Atkinson superb candy craftsmanship. Packed 120 sticks to the box. 16 boxes to the shipping case.

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Here's a flavor loving Tropical Coconut taste thrill that is always FRESH... and stays fresh... summer or winter. Packed 24 bars to the merchandising box. 16 boxes to the shipping case. Also available in the 120 count "Vend-Pac".

## 5¢ CHICKO-STICKS

A fascinating combination of our own delicious, fresh peanut butter and golden roasted tropical coconut. Yummy! A new year-round taste treat! A fast-moving... profit-maker! Packed 24 sticks to the box. 16 boxes to the shipping case.

## 5¢ PECO BRITTLE

A delicious brittle combining selected crunchy, flavorful peanuts and the tenderest flakes of Tropical Coconut. Packed 24 bars to the colorful sales box. 16 boxes to the shipping case.

# The Sweetest Family

Atkinson Candy Co. is still churning out smiles from the heart of East Texas

BY JEFFREE WYN ITRICH

THE PEOPLE OF LUFKIN know that a bit of Willy Wonka magic dwells in their midst, but few outsiders know of its existence.

For 92 years, Atkinson Candy Co. has been sweetening lives in all 50 states and several other countries. Some know the company for their hit candies from decades ago: Chick-O-Stick, Slo Poke, Black Cow, Mint Twists and Long Boys, to name a few. But it's still churning out sweets in East Texas, and it's still owned by the same family.

Third- and fourth-generation members of the Atkinson family and more than 150 employees crank out candy at their nondescript factory on West Frank Avenue. A shop there sells candy and other merchandise, though factory tours are no longer offered.

Eric Atkinson, the company's president and grandson of its founders, B.E. and Mabel Atkinson, says his grandparents were seeking a way to make a living during the Great Depression. His grandfather often said that

Marketing from the 1950s.

even when money was scarce, nearly everyone had a penny—and penny candy was an affordable extravagance for those down on their luck.

Although the company has been around since 1932, Eric is quick to point out the family didn't start manufacturing candy until the 1950s.

"In 1932, we were a candy 'jobber,'" he explains. "That's how we started off." His grandfather made two-day trips to Houston, where he purchased candy and then sold the treats to mom-and-pop shops on the return trip.

Later on his grandfather decided to start making his own candy. He bought machines and started producing confections. At first, it didn't go well.

"My uncle, Joe Atkinson, stepped up to the plate," Eric explains. "He was more mechanically minded. And within a few weeks, he made the candy profitable."

Though Eric was born and raised in Dallas, he spent a lot of time in Lufkin. He has fond memories of visiting as a kid, crawling around on burlap bags of peanuts that would sometimes topple over and spill.

"Once I got into big trouble because I decided to go swimming in the big vat of roasted peanuts," he says. "The supervisor, he didn't know what to do. Granddaddy came over like I was in trouble. I had peanut oil all over me."

Another time, when he was older, Eric was driving the forklift in the warehouse, stacking pallets and not paying attention to where he was stacking them.

"I didn't realize I had stacked them all the way up to the roof," he says. "That was the last time they let me drive the forklift for a long time."

Turns out he's a better leader than forklift operator. In 2022, the company produced over 9.5 million pounds of candy.

"We still make our candy using the batch process, in small batches, and we're still the same family that's always made this product," says Eric, who has a son learning to be a candymaker and whose daughter is the executive officer running the day-to-day operations.

"That sort of consistency is being lost when the private equity companies buy out family businesses," he says. "They really aren't into the manufacturing aspect; they're into making money. Sadly, that's when those brands lose their soul because it's no longer about the quality, it's about the money."

Atkinson Candy Co. is still small by comparison, even after opening a facility in Guatemala in 2010 and a 30,000-square-foot expansion of their Lufkin plant a few years ago. The Guatemala plant allowed the company to take advantage of lower sugar prices available in Central America during a time when sugar was becoming more difficult to source in the U.S.

Beyond the numbers and business, there is a magical aspect to the place.

After all, they've been creating joy for 92 years—back to when a penny bought a piece of candy. Willy Wonka does make an appearance once a year, during Halloween, when Eric—in costume—and his employees give out candy to the children of Lufkin.

No one can tell those kids that Willy Wonka doesn't exist. ■



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The blade is full tang, meaning it doesn't stop at the handle but extends to the length of the grip for the ultimate in strength. The blade is made from 420 surgical steel, famed for its sharpness and its resistance to corrosion.

The handle is made from genuine natural bone, and features decorative wood spacers and a hand-carved motif of two overlapping feathers—a reminder for you to respect and connect with the natural world.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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— H., Arvada, CO



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



St. Patrick's Day 1949 for his monolithic hotel. He wanted Hollywood stars but was told that the only way Hollywood would come was if there was a movie opening to attend. But no big studio would launch a film in Texas in those days.

So McCarthy decided to fund his own film—*The Green Promise*, starring Walter Brennan and a young Natalie Wood. In so doing, he had the premiere and hotel grand opening at the same time. Brilliant.

And Hollywood came. Howard Hughes gave McCarthy a good deal on one of his planes so he could fly stars to Houston. McCarthy also chartered a party train that brought in hundreds of celebrities for the opening.

The evening was regarded as the most prestigious event in Houston's social history. And it likely remains so. Everyone who was anyone was there. Ginger Rogers was there. So was Errol Flynn. It was partially broadcast live on national radio by NBC and hosted by actress, singer and World War II pinup girl Dorothy Lamour—until the hotel crowd got out of hand.

Many loved the Shamrock for its sheer size and art deco style: the Emerald Room, where Frank Sinatra sang; the Cork Club that overlooked Houston; and the hotel's grand devotion to its Irish theme.

But not everyone was impressed. Renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright called the Shamrock's 63 shades of Irish green an "architectural venereal disease."

The Shamrock was sold to Conrad Hilton in 1955 and was known as the Shamrock Hilton until it was demolished in 1987. Today, the Texas A&M Health Science Center sits on the site.

I think McCarthy would like that. He was, after all, an Aggie. ■

# The Green Carpet

The grand opening of Houston's lavish and large—but short-lived—Shamrock Hotel

BY W.F. STRONG

**THERE'S A SCENE** in the 1956 movie *Giant* when Jett Rink, played by James Dean, tells the characters played by Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor that he's struck oil. And not only that, he insinuates, it's payback time.

Rink is a hard-drinkin', fierce-brawlin', tough-talkin', uncultured Texas oil well driller who strikes it rich. But everybody in Texas knew that Dean was really playing Glenn McCarthy, a Houston wildcatter who struck it rich—cover of *Time* magazine rich.

The fictional Rink spent millions of dollars building the Emperor, the biggest hotel in Texas. The real-life McCarthy did the same. But McCarthy

called his the Shamrock Hotel.

The Shamrock, nicknamed the Houston Riviera, was the grandest hotel in Texas when it was built in 1947 and the largest outside of New York or Los Angeles.

It was 20 stories tall, counting the two-story emerald Shamrock sign on top, and it towered over southwest Houston. The hotel cost \$21 million to build in the 1940s—or about \$300 million in today's money. It had the biggest hotel pool on the planet—so large that people water-skied in it. There were 1,100 rooms, all air-conditioned and each with a TV and radio, which was remarkably high-tech luxury back then.

McCarthy planned a grand opening for



# Texas Citrus

A variety of dishes come alive with the state's prized produce

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

South Texas is home to the delicious ruby red grapefruit. From marinades and salads to cocktails and cakes, ruby reds are so versatile. This grapefruit loaf cake, one of my favorite ways to bake with them, is brimming with the fruit's tart and sweet goodness.



## Grapefruit Loaf Cake

### CAKE

- 3 eggs
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup plain yogurt
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon grapefruit zest
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup grapefruit juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups flour
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt

### GLAZE

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons grapefruit juice
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon vanilla extract
- Thinly sliced grapefruit, for garnish

1. CAKE Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 5-by-9-inch loaf pan with nonstick cooking spray.
2. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, yogurt, brown sugar, oil, grapefruit zest, grapefruit juice, cinnamon and vanilla.
3. In another bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder and salt.
4. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and mix until just combined. Avoid overmixing.
5. Pour batter into prepared loaf pan. Bake 30–35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.
6. Remove from oven, allow to cool for 10 minutes, and carefully remove cake from pan.
7. GLAZE Whisk together powdered sugar, grapefruit juice and vanilla.
8. Place grapefruit slices on cake and drizzle with glaze.

### SERVES 8

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez while she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Ruby Red Grapefruit Salsa.



## Texas Citrus Ceviche

TANNER FULLMER  
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Fullmer's ceviche is a refreshing no-cook appetizer that will wow your guests. Citrus juices cure the shrimp while jalapeño lends spice and avocado adds a touch of creaminess. Serve this bright and flavorful ceviche chilled and with tortilla chips for a beautiful presentation.

- 1 pound wild-caught Gulf shrimp, peeled and deveined**
- 1 cup lime juice**
- ¼ cup lemon juice**
- 1-inch ginger piece, peeled and minced**
- 1 red onion, diced**
- 3 cloves garlic, minced**
- 1½ oranges, peeled and diced**
- 1 grapefruit, peeled and diced**
- 1 cucumber, peeled and diced**
- 1 large avocado, pitted and diced**
- 1 bunch cilantro, chopped**
- 1 jalapeño, seeds removed and diced**
- 1½ teaspoons salt**
- Tortilla chips**

1. Cut shrimp into desired size and place into a large, nonreactive bowl. Add lime juice, lemon juice and minced ginger. Stir to combine. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate 45 minutes.
2. Remove bowl from fridge. Stir in red onion, garlic, oranges, grapefruit, cucumber, avocado, cilantro, jalapeño and salt.
3. Return ceviche to the fridge to chill an additional 15 minutes.
4. Serve with tortilla chips.

SERVES 6

MORE RECIPES >

\$500 WINNER

## Moroccan Chicken Skewers

CARRIE RAY  
HEART OF TEXAS EC



Marinated in a blend of citrus juice and spices and broiled to perfection, Ray's Moroccan chicken skewers are a tender, mouthwatering dish that's perfect for a weeknight meal or entertaining. Couscous and yogurt complement the skewers and round out the dish.

SERVES 6



- Zest and juice of 1 lemon**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 tablespoons honey, plus more for drizzling**
- 1 tablespoon finely grated fresh ginger**
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander**
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs or breasts, cut into large pieces**
- 2 lemons, halved**
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped**
- Couscous (optional)**
- Yogurt (optional)**

1. In a bowl, stir together lemon zest and juice, olive oil, honey, ginger, coriander, cumin, salt, and pepper for the marinade. Set aside 2 tablespoons.
2. Add chicken to marinade, turning to coat evenly.
3. Preheat broiler.
4. Place chicken onto wooden or metal skewers, then place skewers onto a foil-lined sheet pan. Add one lemon half to each corner of the sheet pan.
5. Place baking sheet in oven 4 inches from heating element. Broil until charred, about 12 minutes, turning skewers over halfway through.
6. Remove from oven, spoon the reserved marinade onto the chicken and sprinkle with parsley. Drizzle the lemon halves with honey and serve alongside for squeezing over the chicken.
7. Serve with couscous and yogurt, if desired.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**SIMPLY SALADS** DUE JANUARY 10

Come summer, we'll all be looking to escape the heat of the kitchen. Your best salad recipe could win a cool \$500. Go online and submit your favorite by January 10.







## Texas Meyer Lemon Pie

RHAE BROWN  
SAM HOUSTON EC

Lemon lovers, this easy pie is for y'all! It's jam-packed with heavenly tartness and bakes in a store-bought pie crust. Simple and sublime, Brown's lemon pie is sure to impress.

3 eggs, room temperature  
1¼ cups sugar  
½ cup Meyer lemon juice  
4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, melted  
1 deep-dish frozen pie crust, unbaked  
Whipped topping (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Whisk eggs, sugar and lemon juice until smooth. Add melted butter and whisk to combine.
3. Pour mixture into pie crust and place on sheet pan. Bake 30–35 minutes.
4. Cool completely before serving. Serve with whipped topping if desired.

SERVES 8

**TCP** Find hundreds more recipes that feature citrus fruits and juices in our bountiful archive online.

## Citrus With the Assist

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

**Use fresh citrus** in marinades for grilling or in dressings for salads.

**Brighten baked goods** by adding a touch of lemon or orange zest.

**Fold orange segments** into pancakes, waffles or warm oatmeal.

**Add lime zest to salt** for a festive salt rim for margaritas.

**Add a splash** of fresh citrus juice to your water for a refreshing twist.

**Tuck lemon slices** into the cavity of a chicken for a juicy roast chicken.

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	Sales Tax	FREE!
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Moment's Notice

A history museum in Laredo marks a short-lived republic's capital

BY CHET GARNER

**TRAVELING TO DOWNTOWN** Laredo feels like visiting a different country. Maybe that's because it was at one point in history! I'm not talking about the fact that Laredo was once part of Mexico (all of Texas was). I'm talking about the lesser-known Republic of the Rio Grande that existed for 11 short months in 1840 with Laredo as its capital.

It's a story that reads more like a movie and is best explored at its former capitol-turned-museum.

I started my travels in the San Agustin de Laredo Historic District with a chile relleno smothered in queso from El Mesón de San Agustin, a local favorite, and then set out to explore the 269-year-old neighborhood's adobe buildings surrounding a Spanish-style plaza.

One of the most significant buildings is a simple, single-story structure that was once the capitol of a new nation. Today it's the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum. I ducked my head as I stepped through the low wooden door frame and was immediately transported back in time.

The story of this short-lived nation starts in 1836, after Texas won its independence from Mexico. Residents between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande sought to quell instability along the border and decided to form their own country made up of the Mexican states of Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas. The armies of the new nation tried to fend off Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna's forces, but after a betrayal, a beheading and 283 days, the republic ended.

The museum showcases memorabilia from that time with displays, pictures, books and furniture. There are three restored rooms: an office and sitting area, a bedroom, and kitchen. The republic is gone, but I could still feel a spirit of independence permeating the museum and entire town. ■

ABOVE Chet waves the Republic of the Rio Grande flag.

**TCP** Follow along as Chet learns about the nation that was centered in Laredo. See the video 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, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

## JANUARY

09

**Orange On Your Feet: The Story of Emilio & Gloria Estefan**, (409) 886-5535, [lutchter.org](http://lutchter.org)

11

**Harlingen Sounds of Silence Tribute**, (956) 392-9757, [harlingenconcert.com](http://harlingenconcert.com)

**Bandera [11-13] Bandera County Junior Livestock Show**, (210) 260-8224, [bcjlsa.com](http://bcjlsa.com)

**Sweetwater [11-13] Nolan County Stock Show**, (325) 235-3484, [nolancc.com](http://nolancc.com)

12

**Fort Worth [12-13] Carter Anderson**, (512) 817-9535, [blcomedy.com](http://blcomedy.com)

**La Grange [12-13] Ray Wylie Hubbard**, (979) 968-9944, [thebugleboy.org](http://thebugleboy.org)

**Kerrville [12-14] Star Crossed**, (210) 492-9519, [cameratas.org](http://cameratas.org)

**Fort Worth [12-Feb. 3] Stock Show and Rodeo**, (817) 877-2400, [fwssr.com](http://fwssr.com)

13

**Abilene Don Juan by the Sea**, (325) 677-6710, [abiphil.com](http://abiphil.com)

**Brenham Uptown Swirl Downtown Brenham**, (979) 337-7580, [cityofbrenham.org](http://cityofbrenham.org)

**Fredericksburg Hill Country Indian Artifact Show**, (830) 329-2636, [hillcountryindianartifacts.com](http://hillcountryindianartifacts.com)

**Galveston Yaga's Chili Quest and Beer Fest,**  
(409) 770-0999,  
yagaschiliquest.com

**Marfa Star Party in the Badlands,** (432) 424-3327,  
tpwd.texas.gov

**Mesquite Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration,**  
(972) 216-8132,  
mesquiteartscenter.org

**Round Top Houston Jazz Orchestra,** (979) 249-3129,  
festivalhill.org

**Houston MLK Grande Parade,** mlkgrandeparade.org

**New Caney [19-20] Hold 'Em & Hit 'Em Barbecue Cook-Off,** hhclub.org

**Fredericksburg [19-21] Trade Days,** (210) 846-4094,  
fbgtradedays.com

**Bastrop [19-21, 26-28, Feb. 2-4] Freaky Friday,**  
(512) 200-3826,  
bastropoperahouse.org

**Victoria Lyle Lovett and His Large Band,** (361) 576-4500,  
victoriasymphony.com

**Plano [20-21] Dallas Area Train Show,** (972) 941-5840,  
dfwtrainshows.com

**Amarillo Bert Kreischer,**  
1-800-692-1338,  
amarillotheater.com

**Richards Guthrie Jones,**  
(936) 436-9050,  
wscwinery.com

**Raymondville [24-27] Willacy County Livestock Show & Fair,** wclsf.com

MORE EVENTS >

## TCP Submit Your Event

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



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## Hit the Road

### Event Calendar

Fairs, festivals, food and family fun! Pick your region. Pick your month. Pick your event.

With hundreds of events across Texas listed every month, TexasCoopPower.com has something for you.

**TCP Plan now**  
TexasCoopPower.com/events



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### Pick of the Month

#### Goosebump Jump

Granbury, January 20  
(817) 573-5548  
visitgranbury.com

Help kick off the winter tourism season with a jump into the frigid waters of Lake Granbury. The forecast includes a 100% chance of snow and shivers, and an after-party will warm you up with coffee, cocoa and cookies.

#### JANUARY EVENTS CONTINUED

26

**La Grange Marcia Ball**,  
(979) 968-9944,  
thebugleboy.org

**Fulton [26-27] Cruising  
the Coast Quilt Show**,  
piecemakersbythebay.org

**South Padre Island  
[26-28] Market Days**,  
spimarketdays.com

27

**Jefferson Mardi  
Gras Queen Mab Ball**,  
(903) 665-3733,  
mardigrasupriver.com

**Port Aransas Garden Club  
Home Tour**, (361) 834-4130,  
portaransasgardenclub.org

**Round Top Asleep at the  
Wheel**, (979) 249-3129,  
festivalhill.org

29

**Johnson City [29-Feb. 23]  
Wine Lovers Celebration**,  
(872) 216-9463,  
texashillcountrywineries.org

30

**Harlingen Barbara  
Padilla**, (956) 392-9757  
harlingenconcert.com

FEBRUARY

01

**Frisco East-West Shrine  
Bowl**, (813) 281-8686,  
shrinebowl.com

**Bandera [1-3] Cowboy  
Mardi Gras**, (830) 796-4849,  
11thstcowboybar.com

02

**Fredericksburg First Friday  
Art Walk**, (830) 990-8160,  
visitfredericksburgtx.com

**Granbury Aquatic Wild  
Workshop**, (650) 471-3285,  
tpwd.texas.gov

**Lake Jackson Colbie  
Caillat**, (979) 230-3658,  
brazosport.edu

**Temple [2-3] Father  
Daughter Dance**,  
(254) 298-5690,  
templeparks.com

**Humble [2-4] Rodeo**,  
(281) 241-7436,  
humbleroдео.com

**Galveston [2-13] Mardi  
Gras**, (409) 770-0999,  
mardigrasgalveston.com

03

**North Zulch Volunteer  
Fire Department Chili  
Cookoff**, (979) 488-9214,  
facebook.com/nzvf

**Sweetwater Lift  
Every Voice**,  
sweetwaterauditorium.org

# Local Landmarks

They define our landscapes, become guideposts when giving directions, and are a point of pride in communities large and small. Texas landmarks are as full of character and charm as the Texans who create them.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

**1 CASE RAMIREZ-MELTON**  
LAMAR ELECTRIC

Sunset at the Eiffel Tower in Texas' Paris.

**2 CARL BURNHAM**  
PEDERNALES EC

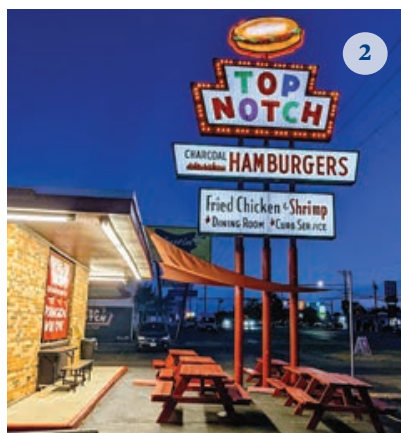
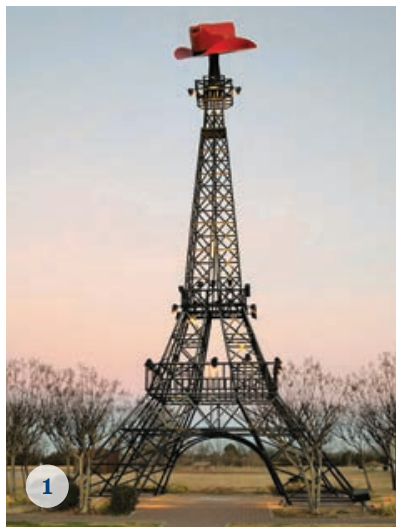
A longtime Austin favorite, Top Notch has been grilling up burgers and other fare since 1971.

**3 MARK BONAME**  
JACKSON EC

You can see these Easter Island statue replicas on the loop in Victoria.

**4 DENNIS MURPHY**  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

The blueprints mistakenly had inches instead of feet, and the builder in Wichita Falls made it as it was written.



## Upcoming Contests

**DUE JAN 10** Rides  
**DUE FEB 10** Food and Cooking  
**DUE MAR 10** Shells and Scales



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

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





## Touched by an Angel

An unflappable donkey imparts peace on a farm

BY MARTHA DEERING  
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN TOMAC

**GROWING UP**, my family lived on a tree-lined street in Waco but longed for the country life, so my parents bought land in nearby Rosenthal. It was only 24 acres, but we called it “the farm.”

Excitement at the farm escalated when our next-door neighbor—who owned a real farm—came home one day with a trailer load of donkeys. They were a sight to behold—all those impossibly long ears sticking up above the sides of the trailer.

I was smitten. My grandmother had just read Marguerite Henry’s *Brighty of the Grand Canyon* (about a burro that lived in the gorge) aloud to me, and this load of donkeys made my heart ache. I begged my parents to buy one.

Unloaded into a pen, the donkeys were a mixed bag—fat, thin, gentle,

grumpy, young and ancient—but one little brown jenny with shaggy hair and a white nose poked her head through the fence. Her kind brown eyes gazed right into mine. My parents, imagining the word “babysitter” printed in large letters on her forehead, cheerfully handed over \$25. I named her Bright Angel, after the donkey in Henry’s book.

Bright Angel was no Secretariat. She had one speed, a slow walk. She was kind-hearted and quiet and held no animosity toward any living thing. Eventually, she became my best friend.

If I rode her down the gravel road to the little gas station on the corner, she waited patiently outside while I went in to get a Grapette and a Zero candy bar. She won best supporting actress for many a flickery homemade Western after my older brother got an 8 mm movie camera for his birthday.

When Christmas approached, my school, St. Alban’s in Waco, decided to enter a float in the citywide parade. My parents volunteered Angel to ride on the float and carry the Virgin Mary to Bethlehem.

When we loaded her onto the flatbed trailer, she didn’t twitch an ear. I was the Virgin Mary, a most exalted role for a 6-year-old. A large man dressed as the angel Gabriel stood near the front of the float with a tinfoil trumpet in case of unanticipated excitement, but even the bands and the firetruck’s siren left Angel unperturbed.

She got a cinnamon roll for her fine performance.

Eventually my brothers and I graduated to horses and our parents to larger farms, but Angel lived a long and peaceful life as a cherished member of the family, proving that even the most unlikely of best friends can be a lifelong treasure. ■



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