

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

Snowbird Migration



PLUS
**HOLIDAY
BAKING
CONTEST
WINNERS!**
PAGE 26

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

A MAGAZINE ABOUT TEXAS LIVING

A Sweet Season

Tis the season—for Winter Texans!

This month's feature focuses on a great migration that occurs just about this time every year: the flight of retired Midwesterners escaping the frozen north to bask in the sunny climes of South Texas. Local populations swell and entertainment opportunities abound for these "recycled teenagers." But it's not all shuffleboard and square dancing. Many of these "snowbirds" serve as volunteers, bringing dedication, time and special skills to their adopted communities.

Drum roll, please! Our Holiday Baking Contest, sponsored by Adams Extract, takes center stage this month.

Selecting a winner from the more than 1,300 recipes submitted was a long and arduous process for Food Editor Shannon Oelrich. She had lots of help, though. Our Texas Co-op Power staff baked the 50 semifinalists' recipes, and the association headquarters staff graded them on everything from taste to appearance to that "holiday feeling."

The finalists' recipes were baked again in the professional kitchen of the Institute of Hospitality and Culinary Arts at Travis High School under the direction of Olivia Balderrama, chef instructor. A final taste test by both bakers and staff revealed our grand-prizewinning recipe—White Chocolate Ribbon Pumpkin Cake With Maple Glaze by Anna Ginsberg, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative. Anna will receive a check for \$3,000; four runners-up will receive \$500 each.

From the entire Texas Co-op Power staff to all of our readers: We wish you a peaceful and joyous holiday season.



Peg Champion
VP, Communications/Publisher



All decked out for Christmas, **SYDNEY STONE** stands on tiptoe to give Santa Claus a holiday smooch. Sydney and her mom, **SHERRI L. STONE**, belong to United Cooperative Services. For more Santa Claus photos, turn to page 37.



WILL VAN OVERBEEK

A gathering of the Loii. These women, who all belong to a club for people named Lois, are among the many devoted Winter Texans.

FEATURES

Snowbirds Flock to Texas 8

By Karen Hastings, Photos by Will Van Overbeek

It's Winter Texan season on the Texas-Mexico border, when thousands of retired Minnesotans, Iowans, Dakotans and other Midwesterners escape the frozen north for South Padre's beaches and the palm-lined boulevards of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Three Hours of Snow in Texas 14

By Jas. Mardis

All children wish for snow for Christmas. Even in Oak Cliff, that wish can come true.

DEPARTMENTS

Texas Living 26

Texas Co-op Power Holiday Baking Contest awards \$5,000 in prizes. Candlelight Christmas at the National Ranching Heritage Center in Lubbock.

Focus on Texas 37

Old Santas, young Santas, children and pets make Christmas special.

Texas, USA 38

By Isabel Bearman Bucher

A Bottle of Cologne and a Handmade Handkerchief

COVER PHOTO: WILL VAN OVERBEEK.

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

VOLUME 62 DECEMBER 2005 NUMBER 6

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MARLENE HAMM, Sam Houston EC

Hurrah for the Yellow-Shafted Northern Flicker!

In the article, "Here's to the Hippos, Ducks and Wampus Cats" by Clay Coppedge in the October 2005 issue of *Texas Co-op Power*, the information about Rotan High School's mascot, the Yellowhammer, is incorrect. The Yellowhammer is not a songbird and is not particular to that region. It is a large species of woodpecker and not commonly seen in that part of Texas. Why somebody chose that mascot, I don't know—maybe they were from Alabama. The Yellowhammer, technically the Yellow-Shafted Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), is also the state bird of Alabama, for what it's worth. Go Hammers!

LYLE HALE, RHS '85, CoServ EC

A Bird of a Different Feather

My husband and I enjoy reading *Texas Co-op Power* from cover to cover. We especially enjoyed the article in the

October issue by Clay Coppedge about the school mascots. However, we wonder how old his source was when he mentioned an Oklahoma town's high school mascot—the Henrietta Mud



Hens. As Henryetta (spelled with a "y" in Oklahoma) residents for 20 years, we need to set the record straight. Our athletes were called Henryetta Fighting Hens (maybe "mud hens" many years ago). Later on, some younger fans decided that "hens" was not dignified nor fierce-sounding enough, so the mascot was changed to Henryetta Knights in the mid-'80s, much to the displeasure of the older alumni.

And, by the way, a former Dallas Cowboys star quarterback and Henryetta High School alum, Troy Aikman, might take exception, too.

I could add that as a true West

Texan who grew up in a small oilfield town called Crane, I was proud to be called a Crane Golden Crane!

HELEN M. HORNE, Hamilton County EC

Ducks vs. Hippos

Clay Coppedge's article about small town high school mascots was enjoyable. I grew up as a Taylor Duck and participated on many Duck athletic teams. Nothing like walking into a gymnasium for a basketball game and the opposing crowd starts quacking. Our teams usually won, however, so it evened the score.

Our high school yearbook was called "The Mallard" and our high school gym actually had a large Donald Duck in a football helmet painted in the middle of the gymnasium floor!

We did actually play the Hutto Hippos in a game once. Probably not many other towns have ever had a contest between the Hippos and the Ducks. Pretty ferocious.

TIM KENNEDY, Pedernales EC

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM OUR READERS.

Send letters to:

Editor, *Texas Co-op Power*,
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Please include the name of your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and will be printed as space allows.

SAFE LIVING

Keep Your Pets Safe This Winter

Our furry friends need extra care in the chilly winter season, so keep these tips in mind for a healthy pet:

- Don't leave your pets outside for very long when the temperatures are low. They can get frostbite and hypothermia just like we can.
- If you have an outdoor dog, provide him extra food and a shelter with bedding. He will need more calories to produce body heat and to have a healthy, warm coat.

- It is a good idea to bang on your hood or honk your horn before you start your car in the morning. Outdoor cats and other animals will crawl up near the engine for warmth and shelter. The moving parts of the engine can harm animals hidden under the hood.
- Keep your eye out for antifreeze puddles. It tastes good to pets, but it is deadly. A tablespoon can kill a



cat and a half-cup can be fatal to a 25-pound dog.
Source: National Humane Education Society

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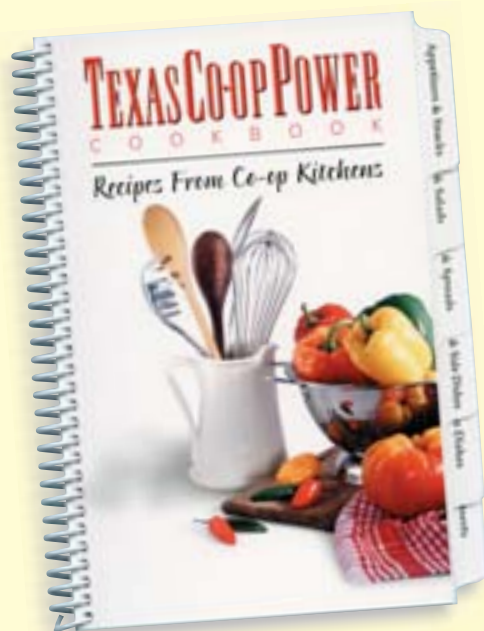
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Snowbirds Flock

to

TEXAS



By Karen Hastings

Photos by Will Van Overbeek

On a Sunday morning in January, the normally ample parking lots of McAllen's Our Savior Lutheran Church can't handle all the cars with Minnesota, Iowa and South Dakota license plates. They are spilling into surrounding streets.

Basketball nets hover over a sea of folding chairs in the gym—the only church building big enough to handle the crowd. The audience is hushed, but toes start tapping when brothers Howie and Lyle Larson crank up accordion and guitar for a lively rendition of “Come Let Us Worship” set to strains of “The Beer Barrel Polka.” They also do an “Amazing Grace” medley to the tune of “The Happy Wanderer.”

“If at any time during the service you feel like getting up and dancing,” Reverend Alan Watt jokes with the church-goers, “go ahead.”

In this land of Tex-Mex, Tejano music and tortilla soup, culture shock comes with a polka beat. It's Winter Texan season on the border, when thousands of retired Minnesotans, Iowans, Dakotans and other Midwesterners escape the frozen north for

South Padre's beaches and the palm-lined boulevards of Harlingen, Mercedes and San Benito.

Some come for the huge square-dancing programs, some for the birding opportunities in area refuges and parks, some for the eclectic array of activities set up for them in hundreds of senior-oriented RV parks and communities.

But mostly, it's the weather.

“We freeze our tutus off up there,” says retired nurse Margaret Cooper, who has been escaping Wisconsin winters for sunny South Texas since the late 1970s. “Over 20 years ago, I shoveled my last shovel of snow.”

From November through April, these graying “snowbirds” bring a Midwestern stew of polka music, clogging and quilting to the area.

“The East Coast goes to Florida and the West Coast goes out to Arizona, but the Midwest comes to Texas,” says Randy Tope, assistant manager of Fun-N-Sun RV Resort in San Benito.

“We get everything from yodeling grandmas to polka masses to country jams—and everything in between,” says Aida Hernandez, who heads up the Mission Chamber of Commerce. “Yodeling in the Rio Grande Valley,

imagine that!”

If snowbird season brings “culture shock” to the border, it's the kind that warms the hearts of area restaurateurs, festival planners and business owners. In its most recent biannual survey of tourism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, The University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg estimated that 123,000 Winter Texans, with an annual median income of \$44,560, descend upon the Valley each year. Each of the 61,500 households spends about \$4,100 during their visit on housing, food, entertainment and other activities, pumping \$250 million directly into the Valley economy.

Anyone who gripes about slow drivers in the fast lane, crowded restaurants and sold-out entertainment events “just doesn't know the gold mine that we have with the Winter Texans,” says Hernandez, whose town includes about 90 mobile home and RV parks within its limits. Hernandez says Mission has the largest number of parks in the Valley and nearly doubles in size during snowbird season.

“Our businesses are very, very happy between the months of October and April,” she says.

Left: Cheryl Longton takes snowbirds birding.

TIME FOR FUN

Winter Texans' creativity takes many forms. Bebe McCardle, a North Dakota farmer's wife, is a member of the "Killer Bees," one of many quilting groups at Valley RV parks.

Proud of their show-quality work, the Killer Bees have a public quilt show each year at their Sunshine Country Club Estates in Harlingen. They also make dozens of simple quilts for area police and fire stations.

"If you need to take children away from their parents in the middle of the night, you have a quilt to comfort them. If their house burns down, you have something to give them that they can cling to, and it's theirs to keep," says McCardle, who first came to the Valley on her 25th wedding anniversary, and this year celebrated her 50th.

Snowbirds love to socialize, and Lois Betz of Wisconsin adds one more rea-

son to an already long list: the name "Lois." She helps organize an annual "Lois" luncheon during Winter Texan season for anybody who shares this quaint, somewhat old-fashioned bond.

"We just get together and talk," she says. "Lois is not a real popular name, as you know. But it's a real old name, a biblical name."

Howie and Lyle Larson, the polka-playing brothers, are wildly popular performers at area churches, as well as programs all over the Valley.

"We started doing these [shows] about 12 years ago," says Howie, a retired miner who calls Cottonwood RV Park in Mission his winter home. "Seems like people are always asking us to come play someplace else."

They especially enjoy the many Winter Texan "jams"—informal gatherings of musicians—offered at Valley RV parks.

"Somebody starts out, then every-

body joins in," explains Howie. "Lots of people come just to listen."

Luanne Kalas helps organize the fun at Fun-N-Sun, which claims to be the Valley's largest snowbird enclave.

"We have people who come here for the square dance program," Kalas says. "We have one guy—you don't see him out of the poolroom all day long. We have people who come just for the shuffleboard. It's a really big thing because we have one of the only indoor shuffleboard courts in the Valley. You can play all day long if you want. For some people, that's what they live for."

Ellen Kizzar, a former Winter Texan who now lives full time at Fun-N-Sun, says, "We're doing things now that we didn't get a chance to do before with our busy work and family lives." Friend Vallarie Dillon, another permanent transplant to the Valley, chimes in: "This is kind of a second childhood. We're more relaxed. We have the

Polka musicians Howie (with accordion) and Kyle Larson get a little help from one of their friends.





Paul Pierce, accompanied by wife Beverly, shows off his hula skills.

time and resources and creativity.”

Paul Pierce, a retired Illinois farmer who stays at Fun-N-Sun, has taught woodcarving, silversmithing, ballroom dancing and ukulele. Pierce even leads a daring group of male hula dancers who perform in grass skirts at area nursing homes and for the park’s annual luau each March. With the help of volunteers, the park’s huge dance hall is turned into “Paradise Island,” complete with a replica of Diamond Head, a sunset and sea birds.

A Luau King and Queen are

elected, hula dancers sway, and couples swing in floral shirts and muumuus. Each table is individually decorated by the partygoers, one with a stuffed alligator and fruit centerpiece, another with a thatched palm roof and glowing tissue paper “fire.” It has the appeal of a high school gymnasium decorated for senior prom.

Around the corner at Fun-N-Sun’s pingpong parlor, a possible explanation for all this activity comes from snowbird Marcia Bancroft of Nevada, who was enjoying a quick game after

her regular Curves workout.

“We’re just old teenagers,” offers Bancroft.

Pingpong partner Rosemary Gaenzle, a lively 70-something from Illinois, is quick to interject: “I prefer ‘recycled teenager,’” she says. “I’m not old!”

Magic Valley Electric Cooperative serves a number of RV parks for Winter Texans, including Pine to Palm, Gulf Breeze, Siesta Village, Snow to Sun and Quiet Village.

Karen Hastings is a freelance writer based in Harlingen.



A Wealth of Retirees

More than just dollars, the influx of snowbirds brings talent and experience for many cultural and volunteer organizations in a predominately low-income, less-educated region. According to UT-Pan Am, more than a third of Winter Texans volunteer an average of 10.3 hours per week with churches, schools and nonprofits. If calculated at minimum wage, that translates to another \$33 million donation to the community.

HOSTESS

Margaret Cooper's first language was Finnish—and that may be why she's been a literacy volunteer ever since she and her husband first arrived in the Valley as snowbirds in the late 1970s.

Several times a week she can be found at Jefferson Elementary in Harlingen, working one-on-one with young students who need extra help in reading. She is one of many Winter Texan HOSTS (Help One Student To Succeed) volunteers who work with a new generation of immigrants learning English.

A strawberry blonde with the authoritative bearing of a school principal, Cooper says she identifies with the

young students who come to her for help. "Maybe it's because I had so much trouble with language when I was a child," she says. "I'm not so grandiose that I think I make a difference, but it's good for me."

REFUGEE

It only took one winter as a park caretaker in Ketchikan, Alaska, to convince Cheryl Longton to head south. Now she wakes up each balmy winter morning at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge near Alamo, where she volunteers in the visitor's center and leads birding and canoeing tours.

"For me, it's a dream," says the petite Longton, who lives on the refuge with husband John in their 35-foot fifth-wheel RV, a home they haul behind their pickup. "I can be productive and get across to people my ideas about wildlife and habitat and even snakes. I enjoy opening people up to this and making them aware."

Longton, who still owns a home in Massachusetts, says she would probably volunteer at the refuge even without the free RV site. "I love what I'm doing here. I live to get up in the morning."

MARATHON MAN

Jim Cooke, 65, a snowbird from Ireland and Manitoba, was an avid soccer player and coach back in the day, and took up running only after he left team sports. A pipefitter with Canada Pacific Railway before retiring in 1996, he now wins track trophies in his age category and runs six to seven days a week along the backroads near the Fig Tree RV Park in Harlingen.

Despite a busy training schedule, Cooke also can be found coaching a boys' soccer team at Harlingen's Victor Park on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. A soccer mom who trains with him asked for his help, and Cooke found himself agreeing.

"I know soccer; I know I can teach it," says Cooke. "If I can teach a boy something in practice, and suddenly you see it happen in a game, that's the best feeling. When you see the boys improving and they're trying really hard, that's probably the biggest satisfaction there is."

"Besides, I don't enjoy sitting around watching TV."



Margaret Cooper is a literacy volunteer.



Cheryl Longton leads nature tours.



Jim Cooke coaches a boys' soccer team.

LINES DOWN— BUT NOT OUT

Downed Lines


Weather and car accidents are the main causes of downed power lines. Always stay away and warn others to stay clear of power lines. Even if they don't hum, spark or "dance," downed lines can be dangerous—they can carry an electric current strong enough to cause serious injury or even death.

Follow these rules:

- If you see a downed power line, move away from the line and anything touching it.
- The proper way to move away from the line is to shuffle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times to minimize the chance for a human path of electric current.
- If someone is in direct or indirect contact with the downed line, do not touch the person. Call 911 instead.
- Don't try to move a downed power line or anything in contact with the line by using another object such as a broom or stick.
- Don't drive over downed power lines.
- If you are in your car and it is in contact with a downed line, stay in your car. Honk your horn for help but tell others to stay away from your vehicle. Call 911 if you have a cell phone or ask passersby to do it.



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THREE HOURS OF

Young hearts in Oak Cliff have always reached for snow
with green and red felt craft stockings
glittering over the mantel of cardboard fireplaces
with a mock fire flickering against the Christmas tree
from the small, ornamental bulb beneath a tin spindle
balanced on a thin wire
that rotates the spindle's fractured top of waves and slits
that throw the tiny bulb's light outward
beyond the shadows made by the corrugated flames and logs

and these hearts want snow for Christmas
so without full thought the mind's eye swallows that same hope

maybe it is all the televised singing;
"Frosty ... the snowman ... was a jolly, happy soul!"
or that reindeer tune where the red nose glows through the white night

or maybe it was just the white-faced singing of the now dead
their youth preserved even until now
Rosemary Clooney, Danny Kaye ... Bing Crosby and the brunette

all of them dressed in their version of hope and love and more Christmas
than is possible to ever have for this armpit of Texas

and they are singing
convinced that if only the sky would bleed white for one night
that all which is wrong in their lives on the road would be made right
that if only the back studio wall would open up onto a white blanket
even love among their pitiful lot would be possible
and so
with their faces hurting their mouths unleash a plea upon the annual viewing lot

and they sing
and in Oak Cliff the small, brown-eyed faces,
lit alternately by the flickering lights of television
 and the H.L. Green department store fireplace,
believe it will come for them as well

SNOW IN TEXAS

and so they sing
and their words are as much a list to be checked twice
to be rolled carefully and placed cautiously, unfurling beside the sugar cookies and milk
left in the roach-occasioned living room
as any such wish across the landscape of hope and time and wanted things
left in the midst of Christmas eves across the rest of the world
and they sing

“Let it snow, let it snow ... let it snow”
just like they do on the television
“let it snow ... I’m dreaming of a white Christmas ...”
but, the next line falters in the collision of mouth and mind
“just like the ones I used to know”

because
there is no such knowledge in Oak Cliff over an eight year span of Christmases
and so the hope falters in the throat
the brown, mind’s eye cannot make it so
for this family of young hearts

but, there is one believer in all of Oak Cliff
as the others fall away to the dark corners of sleep
having watched the stage door in the movie fall open to a sea of white flakes
and the red-lipped smiles breaking the actors’ faces
he believes it all

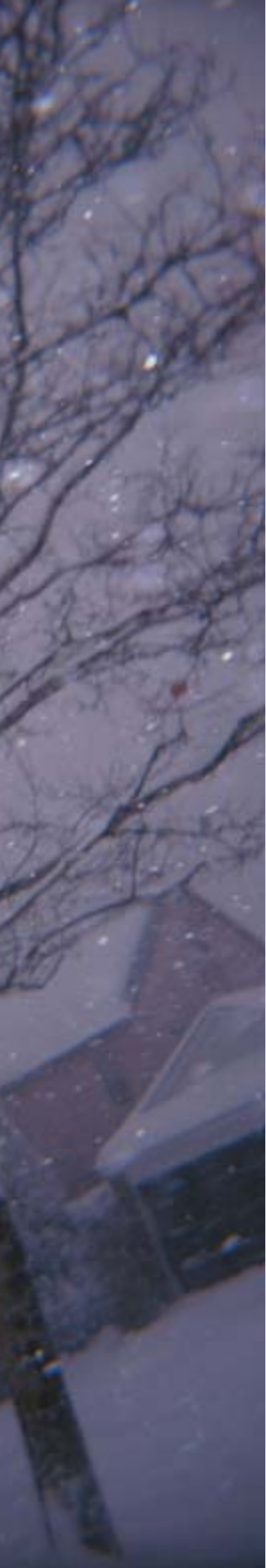
and so,
while the others feather themselves into bed sheets and pillowed dreams of “Who best”

the Oak Cliff dreamer stands for an entire hour in front of the cardboard fire
and rubs the heat from those flickers into his bones
with palms full of belief

he is warmed by this effort of the heart
and parades a too-warmed flannel pajamaed backside around the adjusted living room
as the weather man breaks into the late-night program with news of early morning sleet
and he believes

Continued on next page





and when the hours have passed and passed and passed
there is finally the chill of air chasing and claiming his early morning's breath

there is finally the sliding weight of rain
freezing and slipping into fits of colorless spit from the dark sky
as if an eraser-banging cloud had been unleashed upon the blackboard of night

and soon it is falling ... falling ... falling
just like in the movie

and the dreamer croons his remembered lines anew
and deep within himself
as the snow begins to collect on the heads of shrubs and sills

he wants to wake the others
but the sun is breaking now behind the sky and
times like this are not to be wasted at bedsides and pulling at covers

so,
with his birthday Polaroid in hand
he dresses quietly and wades onto the screened porch
only to find that the hour of falling has ended

and the breaking sun has already started to claim back the southern December greenery

so, he takes the picture
frosty bush ... whitened blades of grass ... dalmation-spotted roof of the sedan

and finally,
a penny's worth of snow ball
balanced in the palm of his freezing, brown hand

now,
he can risk running to wake the others
even if they delay and roll over into fits of disbelief and slumber

he has the proof
leaning and coming into view
resting there ... right there ... on the fireplace

JAS. MARDIS

Jas. Mardis is a writer, editor and quilter living in Dallas. He is the recipient of a 2000 Pushcart Prize for Poetry and the father of young Langston, who loves the occasional Texas snow.

"Three Hours of Snow in Texas" appeared in Texas and Christmas, published by TCU Press in 2004.

Blessings by Rail

BY BILL CRAWFORD

From Abilene to Yoakum, Mineral Wells to Sweetwater, the Chapel Car Good Will was truly bound for glory as it traveled the gospel tracks through Texas from 1895 to 1903.

Inspired in part by the elaborate Russian Orthodox chapel cars that once traveled the Siberian Railway, ministers from various denominations launched a fleet of railroad chapel cars in the 1890s to serve isolated communities. The American Baptist Publication Society built seven, including the one that had the most service in the Lone Star State, Chapel Car Good Will.

In 1895, Edwin Stanton Strucker and his adventurous young wife, Nettie Viola, became the first servants of the Lord to hop aboard the Chapel Car Good Will. A former railroad man himself, Strucker was proud of his rolling church, which was a true work of railroad art. Emblazoned in gilt letters across its Pullman green exterior were the words "American Baptist Publication Society" and "Chapel Car Good Will." Inside, the chapel car offered worshippers comfortable pews in an oak-paneled sanctuary. Light filtered in through white clerestory windows and a glass panel emblazoned with the motto "God is Love." At the end of the sanctuary stood a platform, a lectern and an organ.

Upon arriving in a town, the Struckers would park their chapel car on a quiet siding, then canvass the town with tracts and handbills advertising services for the round-the-clock railroad workers—at noon, evening and midnight. Sometimes Strucker found himself competing with other rolling amusements, like a circus train, but generally, the clanging of the church bell on the chapel car roof attracted a crowd anxious to experience the church on wheels.

Standing in front of the congregation of firemen, brakemen and curious visitors from nearby farms and ranches, the Reverend Strucker preached railroad-themed sermons like "Down Grade" while Nettie played the organ. At the end of the

service, the Struckers distributed Baptist tracts, Sunday school literature, and scripture cards printed in more than a dozen languages.

The Struckers' living conditions were tough. Their cramped living quarters were situated behind a thin wall at the far end of the chapel. They slept in narrow bunk berths, cooked meals in a tiny, galley-style kitchen, and hauled their own water. For air conditioning, they opened the windows. For heat, they lit a coal-fired contraption so cantankerous it earned the nickname of "Devil's Advocate."

PHOTO COURTESY AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY



This church on rails visited railroad worker camps from 1895 to 1903.

Understandably, the young couple often chose to stay at a nearby railway hotel while they ministered in a particular location.

The Struckers left their railroad ministry in November 1896 so Nettie could deliver their first child in a less trying environment. Six months later, the Reverend Eugene Gale Townsend and his wife, Hollie Harper, moved into the chapel car. Townsend, a well-known figure in the Dallas Baptist community, was the former pastor of the Central Baptist Church there. Hollie was a well-known "Bible woman" who wrote a column for the *Texas Standard*, a leading Baptist publication. The Townsends actually spent their honeymoon ministering on the rails.

"My porches are rather small," Hollie wrote about her railway ministry, "but my yard is as big as Texas!"

Through the years, the Chapel Car Good Will brought comfort to thousands of individuals. On September 8, 1900, the chapel car was parked at the Santa Fe railyards in Galveston for repairs when the great hurricane hit. The storm demolished the Galveston home of Vallie C. Hart, who was the organist on the Good Will at the time. When the storm clouds cleared, Hart found the Good Will providentially protected from harm. He sat down at the organ and began to play. A German hurricane survivor walked into the car, attracted by the music. Hart

welcomed the man and gave him a Bible in German.

"He was so grateful for it!" Hart recalled. "He said this Bible was the first and only thing he had to begin life over with except the clothes on the backs of his loved ones."

Though the Good Will left Texas in 1903, its legacy lives on.

"Many churches were started and assisted by the dedicated folks whose lives were touched by the Chapel Car Good Will," recalls Wilma Rugh Taylor, author of *Gospel Tracks Through Texas: The Mission of Chapel Car Good Will* (Texas A&M Press, 2005). "Good Will changed Texas for the better forever." Amen.

Bill Crawford has written about Governor "Pappy" Lee O'Daniel and journalist William Cowper Brann for Texas Co-op Power.

USE HOLIDAY LIGHTS SAFELY



You know the name Thomas Edison. Meet his friend Edward Johnson, the first person to hand-wire red, white and blue light bulbs to string on an ever-green tree in 1882.

The ancestors of today's elaborate strings of holiday lights include candle-like lights, hand-painted bulbs and liquid-bubbling, 1960s-style lights.

Since their creation, holiday lights have brightened the holidays. Still, they can start fires and shock people who use them improperly. Keep your home lighted and safe this season. Some tips:

- Take your time to untangle and inspect each string of lights before plugging it in. Look for tears in the wires and socket. If a string appears to be in good condition, plug in the lights and wait 15 minutes before hanging them to make sure the wires don't melt or smoke.
- Use lights outdoors only if they are rated for outdoor use. All lights—indoor and outdoor—should carry an Underwriters Laboratories label.
- Avoid plugging too many lights into sockets in the same room. Spread your decorations all over the home so you don't overburden wall sockets.
- Attach lights to timers so they will automatically turn off when you go to bed. Unplug them before you leave the house.
- Keep your Christmas tree fresh by watering it regularly and locating it away from heating vents. Dry, brittle needles paired with hot lights are a fire hazard.
- Separate the lights from heavy decorations when you pack them away until next year. If you stack your decorations for storage, place the lights on top to avoid damaging them.

GIFT-GIVING IDEAS THAT SAVE ENERGY

Holiday gift-giving is heartwarming, full of surprises, and fun. It also creates an extra 1 million tons of waste between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve every year!

Why not consider giving presents that use less energy and create less trash? Some suggestions:

- Give energy-efficient small appliances like kitchen aids and grooming devices.
- Stuff stockings with compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- Look for clothes and products made from recycled materials.
- Bestow blankets, sweaters, socks or scarves to help keep warm and hold down heating costs.
- Create a handmade gift, like a basket of baked goods, a collection of your family's favorite recipes, a videotape of family members sharing their



favorite stories, or a wreath strung with holly and pine cones.

- Buy something you know the recipient will use: tickets to a ball game or concert, a gift certificate to the video store or grocery store, or a membership in a health club.

As you celebrate the season of joy and giving, give and use wisely. Who knows how far the benefits will spread!

Cool Leftovers Quickly

Your belly and the holiday turkey aren't the only things that will get stuffed this season. Your refrigerator and freezer are going to bulge with holiday leftovers.

Keep treats tasty and safe to eat by quickly storing them someplace cool. Here are some tips:

- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours after the meal.
- Choose small containers that will let the food cool quickly.
- Eat refrigerated extras within four days after preparation. Frozen leftovers, however, stay good for up to a month. Thaw them in the microwave, then heat thoroughly.

Good news: Your refrigerator is most efficient when it's full. Still, leave enough room between items for cool air to circulate.



YOUR LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE HELPS YOU ...

Keep the holiday lights shining.

Cook all your family's favorites.

Make your home warm and welcoming.



**YOUR LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
WISHES YOU AND YOUR FAMILY A SAFE AND HAPPY HOLIDAY.**

Best of Co-op Country Contest 2006

Win a weekend for two at Messina Hof Winery, valued at \$1,000!



We invite you to participate in our fourth Best of Co-op Country contest. Print your choices on the form below in whatever categories you wish. Please include the location and a phone number if possible. Provide your name, address, telephone number and co-op. Mail this page or a copy to "Best of Co-op Country," 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704.

Entries will be judged on the number and legitimacy of nominations received. Co-op members who provide nominations for at least half the categories are eligible for a drawing. The form will also be published in several future issues. The winner of the drawing will receive a free weekend for two at Messina Hof Winery and Resort in Bryan, valued at \$1,000. Messina Hof has a bed and breakfast and a restaurant, The Vintage House, which was the readers' choice for Dining Worth the Drive this year.

Now for the rules: No petitions, each form must be mailed separately, and establishments promoting themselves cannot provide stamps or envelopes for entries.

Tours, Tastings, Gift Shop, Bed and Breakfast, Fine Dining, Picnic and Events

A visit to Messina Hof Winery and Resort is like a romantic journey to the European Wine Country. You'll find the perfect blend of Italian and German cultures, resulting in premium wines made in Texas. One hundred acres of rolling hills and two picturesque lakes help make Messina Hof unforgettable. Our wines have received many accolades, including Best Texas Wine in 2004 and 2005 in the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's International Wine Competition. Among other destination awards, The Villa, our 10-room luxury country inn, was voted Most Romantic Hideaway in the U.S. by Arrington's *Book of Lists*, and The Vintage House Restaurant was chosen one of Texas' Best Restaurants by the East Texas Tourism Association.



Best of Co-op Country General Contest Entry Form

Enchilada: _____

Water Tower: _____

Fourth of July Parade: _____



Lake: _____

Your Name: _____

Public Mural: _____

Co-op: _____

Riding Trail: _____

Address: _____

Spa: _____

City/Zip: _____

Texas Musician: _____

Phone: _____

The deadline for submitting nominations is March 15, 2006. The results will be published in the September 2006 issue of *Texas Co-op Power*.

Aw, That's No Spa

Come on, you guys. A homemade hot tub made of metal and heated by hot plates? You could par-boil and electrocute yourselves.

A hot tub or spa should be store-bought and installed by professionals, and parents should set strict rules for its use.

In the Tub

We're not sure what temperature armadillos and jackrabbits can handle. Human children and infants should be slowly introduced into a hot tub with water no warmer than 95 degrees. They should be in the water no more than 10 minutes. It's best to get approval from your physician before allowing children to use a hot tub, and an adult **SHOULD ALWAYS BE PRESENT**.

Pregnant women and people with heart disease, diabetes, high or low blood pressure, or any other serious condition also should consult with a physician before using a hot tub.

The National Spa and Pool Institute considers 104 degrees the maximum safe water temperature for adults. Safe soaking should not exceed 15 minutes. Some medical authorities recommend a maximum temperature of 100 to 102 degrees. And always drink plenty of water before and after soaking in very warm water.

Out of the Tub

Nonskid surfaces are a must, and **NO RUNNING!** Keep dry towels nearby.

Appliances

Phones, radios, TVs, hairdryers and other electrical devices should be kept safely away from the spa area. Never handle them while you're wet.

Cartoonist Keith Graves is a popular artist and author of children's books. Among his greatest hits are *Frank Was a Monster Who Wanted to Dance*, *Uncle Blubbafink's Seriously Ridiculous Stories* and *Loretta: Ace Pinky Scout*. He lives in Austin with his wife, Nancy, and the twins, Max and Emma.



GORGEOUS GGOURDS

BY JODY HORTON



Gourds on this page:

Artist: Judy Richie, Kerrville. Photos by Bill Willibey.

The funny-looking fruit of a thousand shapes has proven its versatility through the ages as musical instruments, masks, canteens, birdhouses, bath sponges, and even a brief stint in the early 1800s as Haitian currency. Today, gourds still inspire those who grow and use them.

"There is nothing you can't do with a gourd," says Robbie Pritchard, president of the Texas Gourd Society (TGS).

This sentiment is shared by fellow "gourdheads," enthusiasts who get together to talk about their passion. To date, this community has organized official societies in 18 states plus Canada and Australia, and their numbers are growing.

Gourds belong to the family Cucurbitaceae, along with squash, pumpkins, cucumbers and melons. This family of plants includes hundreds of species of vines with coiled, climbing tendrils and some of the most unusual fruits in the world. Gourds found in the U.S. are made up of three classes: hardshell, ornamental and luffa.

Hardshells are what we most commonly think of as gourds. Made up of 90 percent water, they may take several months to dry, leaving behind a woody, thick skin. Brilliantly colored and often used to decorate holiday centerpieces, ornamentals have a squash-like skin and only rarely are dried successfully, preserving a thin but delicate shell. Luffas may be eaten when young, but are more often grown as natural sponges used as

scrub brushes for bathing ("loofahs").

Cultivated throughout the world, gourds have been an important part of human life for millennia, serving both as food and as an object of utility. Hardshelled gourds have been shaped by people of many cultures into ladles, pipes, storage vessels, musical instruments and clothing. As one gourd enthusiast puts it: "Before there was plastic, there were gourds."

The endless array of shapes has engendered an interest in hardshell gourds as an art medium. For the ancient artist and the modern gourd-head alike, a certain turn of a stem or irregular twist in a fruit may reveal the ultimate form and purpose of a gourd.

"It's not like a blank canvas," says Pritchard. "You look at it and say 'What does it want to be?' A gourd already has a personality."

The objects of their fancy read like the nicknames of American soldiers in a campy WWII movie: cannonball, apple, goose, banana, duck, warty, long, canteen, penguin, kettle and snake. Other descriptive names include waterjug, caveman club, bottle, birdhouse, dipper, barrel, long-stem, bushel and basketball. Gourd sizes range dramatically from tiny specimens of just a few inches to monsters of 7 feet or longer, making gourds the world's largest fruit.

In the past decade, gourdcraft, the art of modifying and decorating dried, hardened gourd shells, has surged tremendously in popularity.

The industry supports dozens of specialty farms that ship gourds and seeds throughout the U.S. and the world. The largest of these raises nearly a half-million gourds a year.

Gourds grow just about anywhere there's water, so vines are springing up across Texas—in the Valley, the Panhandle and the Piney Woods. The TGS website lists more than a dozen larger growers, like Lone Star Gourds in Henderson with 15 acres of plants, but there are many more enthusiasts who drop a few seeds in the backyard each spring. Those who don't grow their own can find a few gourds in craft stores and more at occasional gourd shows, but generally order harder-to-find varieties from sources on the TGS and American Gourd Society websites.

Beginning enthusiasts need not be concerned about growing bored with this hobby. Methods for decorating a gourd are limited only by one's imagination and typically include carving, painting, wood-burning, basketry and various styles of inlay.

"What you can do with them is just endless," says artist Judy Richie, whose intricate Native American-themed gourds have won her "Best in Show" the past two years at the TGS Annual Show and Sell. Richie notes that many people have only been exposed to craft-style gourd items such as birdhouses. By comparison, her work is far more elaborate and sometimes sculptural, following in the tradition of renowned modern artist Robert Rivera, whose gourd creations are prized by collectors and may fetch several thousand dollars in fine art galleries.

Intrigued? Visit the upcoming gourd show at the Kerrville Arts and Cultural Center May 27-July 9 and you may find yourself among the growing ranks of gourdheads.

To find out more about gourds and gourdheads, visit www.texasgourdsociety.org or www.american-gourdsociety.org. The 500-plus TGS members are organized into 11 chapters or "patches" found throughout the state. For more information on the Southwest Gourd Fine Art Show in Kerrville, see www.kaccckerrville.com.

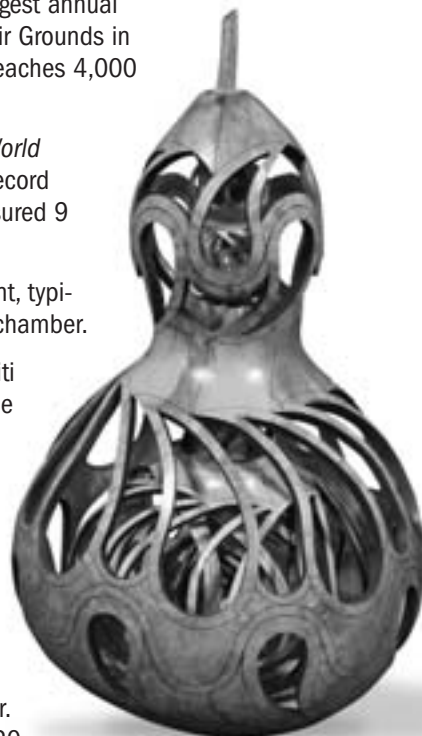
Jody Horton is an Austin-based photographer and writer who also contributed "Peaches: Ripe Off the Tree" for the June 2005 issue.



Artist: Pete Kent, New Ulm. Photo by Rick Patrick.

G O U R D F A C T S

- The Ohio Gourd Society holds the largest annual gourd show at the Morrow County Fair Grounds in Mount Gilead. Attendance typically reaches 4,000 or more.
- According to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the largest luffa gourd on record was grown in China in 2003. It measured 9 feet, 2 inches.
- The sitar, a classical Indian instrument, typically uses a gourd as its resonating chamber.
- In 1807 the governor of northern Haiti declared that all gourds must become the property of the state. Piled high on farm carts, 227,000 gourds were collected for the treasury by soldiers. To this day, the standard coin of Haiti is called a "gourde."
- Zucca gourds were a significant food staple widely grown in the U.S. and Canada in the early- and mid-20th century, but fell out of favor. The mature fruit ranges in size from 20 to 100 pounds.



Artist: Bert L. Petrie, Roach, Missouri. Photo by Bill Willibey.

Holiday Baking Contest

SPONSORED BY ADAMS EXTRACT

BY SHANNON OELRICH

If the 1,300 recipes submitted in the Texas Co-op Power Holiday Baking Contest are any indication, we have an amazing wealth of great cooks in this state! I read the recipes and narrowed them down to 50 semifinalists, then asked our staff to help bake, taste and vote on those. Four days of testing gave us 12 finalists, which were then baked by the students at the Institute of Hospitality and Culinary Arts at Travis High School (see page 29). We rated each of these using a scale that tested for taste, texture, aroma, appearance and holiday appropriateness, which gave us the wonderful winners you see below. The grand prizewinner won \$3,000 and the runners-up won \$500 each.

GRAND PRIZEWINNER: ANNA GINSBERG

Anna developed her **WHITE CHOCOLATE RIBBON PUMPKIN CAKE WITH MAPLE GLAZE** as a holiday blend of pound cake, pumpkin pie and cheesecake. Anna has a passion for cooking by experimentation and has entered many recipe contests. In the past two years, she's been a finalist in both *Southern Living* and *Cooking Light's* baking contests, the much-renowned Pillsbury Bake-Off, and other smaller contests. She insists, however, that she's not a "ringer." "I lose a lot," says Anna, "I've entered many contests. I've even sent recipes to Texas Co-op Power's monthly contest and have never won that." Anna lives in Austin with her husband and daughter. They are members of Peder-nales Electric Cooperative.

White Chocolate Ribbon Pumpkin Cake With Maple Glaze

Filling:

- ¾ cup white chocolate morsels or white chips
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- ¾ teaspoon Adams Best™ Vanilla

Cake:

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt

- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 sticks butter, softened
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons Adams Best™ Vanilla
- 4 eggs
- 1 can (16 ounces) pumpkin

Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- ½ teaspoon Adams Maple™ Imitation Maple Flavor
- 2-3 tablespoons heavy cream
- ⅛ teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour large bundt pan. To prepare filling, place white chips in microwave-safe bowl and microwave on high for 1½ minutes, stopping every 30 seconds to stir. Beat cream cheese, sugar and vanilla into melted chips. Set aside.

In medium bowl, combine flour, salt, baking powder, baking soda and cinnamon. Set aside. In large bowl, beat butter and sugar until fluffy. Beat in vanilla extract. Beat in eggs, one by one, and continue beating on high speed for 1 minute or until mixture is light. Stir in pumpkin. By hand or using low speed, stir in flour mixture. Pour about ⅓ of pumpkin batter into bundt pan. Pour filling over batter, keeping filling away from sides of pan. Pour remaining batter over filling. Bake 55 minutes or until cake begins to pull away from sides of pan. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes, then turn out of pan. Let cake cool completely before glazing.

To prepare glaze, stir together powdered sugar, maple syrup, maple flavor, 2 tablespoons cream and salt. Beat until smooth. If glaze is too thick, add remaining tablespoon of cream. Drizzle over cooled cake; store cake in refrigerator. Makes 12 servings.

RUNNER-UP: SUSAN RILEY

Susan's **DECADENT CHOCOLATE MINT TRUFFLE TORTE** began as a recipe that had raspberry liqueur in it. She's played with it for about 15 years, and this is her favorite incarnation. When-



RICK PATRICK

ever she serves the torte, people always rave. Many are surprised to find out how easy it is to make. She says, "You could put any flavor in it that goes with chocolate." Susan lives in Allen with her husband and three children. They are members of Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative.

Decadent Chocolate Mint Truffle Torte

- 6 tablespoons butter, softened
 - ½ cup sugar
 - ¾ cup flour
 - ⅓ cup cocoa
 - ½ teaspoon Adams Best™ Vanilla
 - 3½ cups semisweet chocolate chips
 - 2 teaspoons Adams Pure Peppermint Extract
 - 1½ cups heavy cream, room temperature
- Optional garnish ideas: mint-flavored whipped cream, mint leaves, chocolate mint candies



Beat butter and sugar until well blended. Add flour, cocoa and vanilla. Beat until crumbly. Press in bottom of 9-inch springform pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes. Cool. Place chocolate in large glass bowl. Melt chocolate in microwave on high 1 minute. Stir until completely melted and smooth. Add 30 seconds more if needed to melt chocolate completely. Add extract and cream and whisk until smooth. Pour chocolate mixture over crust. Chill at least 2 hours. Remove sides of pan (a hot towel wrapped around sides helps). Garnish as desired. Makes 8-10 servings.

RUNNER-UP: SHIRLEY CADDELL
Shirley has been making her **HOLIDAY CAKE SPECIAL** for 52 years, as long as she's been married. Her husband's

birthday is December 23, so she makes this festive cake for him to share with the rest of the family. Shirley lives in Otto with her husband. Her four children, nine grandchildren and two great-granddaughters all live nearby. The Caddells are members of Navasota Valley Electric Cooperative.

Holiday Cake Special Cake:

3¼ cups sifted flour
3½ teaspoons baking powder
¾ teaspoon salt
1 cup butter or margarine
2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon Adams Best™ Vanilla
1 cup milk
8 egg whites (reserve yolks for filling)

Filling:

8 egg yolks

½ cup butter, softened
1¼ cups sugar
1 cup chopped pecans
1 cup finely chopped raisins
1 cup flaked coconut
1 cup finely chopped candied cherries
(½ red and ½ green)
¼ teaspoon salt
⅓ cup pineapple juice

Sift together flour, baking powder and salt; set aside. In large mixing bowl, cream butter; add sugar, then vanilla extract, beating until light and fluffy. Add dry ingredients alternately with milk, beating after each addition. In another mixing bowl, beat egg whites until stiff, but not dry. Carefully fold into batter just until incorporated. Pour batter into 4 well-greased round cake pans. Bake at 375 degrees for 15 minutes. Remove from oven. Let stand

5 minutes. Turn out on racks to cool. When cool, spread filling between layers and on top of cake.

For filling, in a saucepan, beat egg yolks slightly. Blend in butter; add sugar. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, 5-10 minutes until sugar is dissolved and mixture is slightly thickened and glossy. Remove from heat. Add pecans, raisins, coconut, cherries, salt and pineapple juice. Cool before spreading. (Cake tastes best when stored several days in air-tight container in cool place.) Serves 20.

RUNNER-UP: DANETTE CANTU

Danette entered a family recipe, passed down from her grandma, for **CREAM CHEESE ROLLS**. The dough proofs overnight in the refrigerator, making it perfect for baking Christmas morning. She says, "Food is a big center of attention in my German-Czech family. There's always something warming in the oven at the holidays." Danette lives in Alleyton with her husband and three children. They are members of San Bernard Electric Cooperative.

Cream Cheese Rolls

Dough:

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 packages dry yeast
- 1/2 cup warm water
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 4 cups flour

Filling:

- 2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, softened
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 teaspoons Adams Best™ Vanilla

Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon Adams Best™ Vanilla

In saucepan, heat sour cream and butter over medium-low heat. Stir in sugar and salt until butter is melted. Transfer to mixing bowl and cool to lukewarm. Dissolve yeast in warm water and add to lukewarm mixture, then add eggs and flour and mix well. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Next morning, make filling by beat-



RICK PATRICK



RICK PATRICK

Left: Anna Ginsberg shows off her grand-prizewinning cake. Right: A slice of the winning cake.

ing cream cheese, sugar, egg and vanilla together until combined. Roll out dough into 4 long rectangles. Spread the cream cheese mixture down middle of each rectangle and roll up lengthwise. Seal along length and ends with fingers dipped in water. Place rolls on cookie sheets, 2 rolls per sheet. Let rise 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes or until lightly browned. Mix together glaze ingredients and drizzle on warm rolls. Makes 4 rolls, about 8 servings per roll.

RUNNER-UP: HELEN FIELDS

Helen experimented with pumpkin, which her daughter loves, and bread pudding, one of her family's favorite things, and came up with this recipe for **MAPLE PUMPKIN BREAD PUDDING WITH MAPLE PECAN SAUCE**. She says, "I normally just throw stuff together and don't cook with a recipe, so making this into a recipe to send into the contest was a challenge." Helen lives with her husband in Springtown. They have two children and two grandchildren, and are members of Wise Electric Cooperative.

Maple Pumpkin Bread Pudding With Maple Pecan Sauce

Pudding:

- 12 ounces French bread
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 teaspoon Adams Best™ Vanilla

- 2 teaspoons Adams Imitation Butter Flavoring
- 2 teaspoons Adams Mapel™ Imitation Maple Flavor
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk
- 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream

Sauce:

- 1 cup butter (not margarine), melted
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup pecans, chopped
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 teaspoon Adams Mapel™ Imitation Maple Flavor

Fill 9x13-inch baking dish with hot water to half full and place in center of oven while preheating to 375 degrees. Spray the inside of a 2 1/2 quart baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Cut bread into 2-inch cubes. Place bread in sprayed baking dish and set aside.

Whisk eggs in large bowl until they are light and fluffy. Add corn syrup, pumpkin, vanilla, butter and maple flavorings, and salt. Whisk until well blended. Add brown sugar, evaporated milk and cream. Whisk until well mixed. Pour mixture over bread. With a spoon, lightly press bread down into liquid. Carefully set baking dish in oven inside hot water bath. Bake 45 minutes.

Prepare sauce during last 10 minutes of baking time. Melt butter in small saucepan over low-medium heat. Add sugar and pecans and cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add cream and maple flavoring, cooking and stirring for 3-4 minutes more. Serve pudding warm. Top each serving with warm sauce. Makes 12 servings.



GENO ESPONDA

IHCA students helped bake all the finalists' desserts. From left, Jorge Trejo, Juana Patiño, Chef Instructor Olivia Balderrama, Joshua Coffman, Adrian Solis, Leonardo Martinez, Patricia Malagon, Bobby Collins, Stephanie Jerdan, Krystal Jackson, Alyssa Barron and Claudia Arellano.

From History Class to Test Kitchen

I'll bet your high school didn't have a kitchen like this: a 1,500-square-foot industrial facility with four Viking ranges, two 34-quart mixers and a 64-quart mixer, a chocolate tempering machine, an Italian pizza oven, and a banquet room that seats up to 100. It's the Institute of Hospitality and Culinary Arts (IHCA) at Travis High School in Austin. Under the direction of Chef Instructor Olivia Balderrama, the IHCA has become an award-winning program that trains students to become professionals in the hospitality industry. It's a three-year curriculum where students spend two class periods in the kitchen classroom learning culinary techniques, service practices and food safety. For many of the students, it's their favorite part of the day.

We can see neighboring Travis High out our office windows ... in warm weather we can see the baseball team practice and in cooler weather there's the marching band. I stopped by to ask Ms. Balderrama if her students would be willing to help us test recipes for the baking contest, a change of pace from their usual duties of making banquet-style food or to-go lunches. Students baked the 12 finalists' recipes, diligently following the exact instructions. This was especially hard for this enthusiastic group because they had so many ideas about how to make the recipes even better. They did such a great job that we've made them our "official" Texas Co-op Power test kitchen—they'll be making our readers' dishes during the months that school is in session.



GENO ESPONDA

Adrian Solis watches Alyssa Barron decorate the Decadent Chocolate Mint Truffle Torte.

TEXAS CO-OP POWER 60 Years of Co-op Cooking

WE'RE LOOKING FOR RECIPES & MEMORIES FROM THE PAST 60 YEARS.

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 10, 2005.

Do certain recipes "stir up" strong memories for you? We're looking for recipes and memories to publish in our new cookbook (available September 2006). The memory should be specific to the recipe, and should evoke a certain time period within the last 60 years. Please send your memory and recipe to New Cookbook, 2550 S. IH 35, Austin, TX 78704. You may also fax them to (512) 486-6254 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org with the subject line "New Cookbook." The deadline is December 10, 2005. Three names will be chosen from published submissions to receive a free cookbook.



Candlelight at the Ranch: Lubbock, December 9–10

How many of you remember the 1950s TV show, “You Are There”? In it, Walter Cronkite hosted reenactments of historical events, complete with “on the scene” reporters describing events as they unfolded.

I loved the feeling of stepping into a time warp, even if all the history was in black-and-white. This month you can also step back into history, and do it in living color, at the National Ranching Heritage Center (NRHC) in Lubbock.

The National Ranching Heritage Center is a combination of historical park and museum. Located on the northern boundary of the Texas Tech University campus, the 30-acre facility was established to preserve the history of ranching, pioneer life and the livestock industry in North America.

Step back in time and tour 38 authentic structures that have been relocated to the NRHC from some of the West’s most well-known ranches and show the evolution of ranch life from the late 1700s through the early 1900s. Each building reflects the geography of its original location and the materials available for construction.

The NRHC features historic windmills, dugouts, barns, corrals and pens, bunkhouse, one-room school house, blacksmith shop, ranch headquarters buildings, locomotive, stock cars, and a depot, as well as examples of unique early architecture, like a cabin made of cactus stalks chinked with mud and an elegant two-story ranch home acquired from a mail-order catalog. Each building has been authentically

restored, furnished or outfitted to reflect the period.

Candlelight at the Ranch captures the spirit of a pioneer Christmas. This holiday event, drawing more than 5,000 visitors annually, allows visitors to experience holiday celebrations as they occurred on the open prairie more than a century ago. NRHC volunteers recreate holiday scenes of trimming trees with homemade decorations and playing music around the campfire on a cold winter’s night.

All events take place at the National Ranching Heritage Center, 3121 Fourth St. in Lubbock. For more information, go to www.nrhc.ttu.edu or call (806) 742-0498.

Jim Gramon is the author of FUN Texas Festivals & Events. Jim@JimGramon.com, www.JimGramon.com.



TEXAS CO-OP POWER

EACH MONTH, WE BRING YOU THE VERY BEST TEXAS HAS TO OFFER!

Texas Co-op Power is the Texas living magazine with a rural, suburban and small town focus. Each month you will read entertaining articles about Texas people, Texas history, Texas nature, Texas travel and Texas food.

And, in every issue we feature a personal look at chosen towns in “Texas, USA” along with “Around Texas,” featuring selected events around the state.

For just \$15 a subscription, you can share *Texas Co-op Power* with friends and family members who live far away or in big cities! See page 4 for an order form.

December

1. A Feast of Ideas, **Columbus**, (979) 732-8385
1. Rotary Barn Raising, **San Angelo**, (325) 481-2646
1. Wassailfest, **New Braunfels**, (830) 808-2100
1. Christmas Stroll, **Graham**, 1-800-356-4844
1. Journey to Bethlehem, **Gainesville**, (940) 612-1829
- 1-4. Old Mill Marketplace, **Canton**, (903) 567-5445 or www.oldmillmarketplace.com
2. Carol of Lights, **Lampasas**, 1-866-556-5172 or www.lampasaschamber.org
2. Candlelight Home Tour, **Columbus**, (979) 732-8385 or www.columbus-texas.org
2. Festival of Angels, **Schertz**, (210) 658-6607
2. Country Christmas, **De Leon**, (254) 893-2083
- 2-3. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Salado**, (254) 947-5040 or www.salado.com
- 2-3. Lighted Parade, Norwegian Country Christmas, **Clifton**, 1-800-344-3720 or www.cliftontexas.org
- 2-3. Christmas Festival, **Brookshire**, (281) 934-2465
- 2-3. Journey Through Bethlehem, **Huntsville**, (936) 295-7459
- 2-3. Christmas in Goliad, **Goliad**, (361) 645-8767
- 2-3, 9. Nine Flags Festival, **Nacogdoches**, 1-888-OLDEST-TOWN or www.visitnacogdoches.org

- 2-4. 25th Anniversary Concert, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-0629
- 2-4. Christmas at Old Fort Concho, **San Angelo**, (325) 657-4441 or www.fortconcho.com
- 2-4. Weihnachten, **Fredericksburg**, 1-888-997-3600 or www.fredericksburg-texas.com
- 2-4, 9-11. Main St. Bethlehem, **Burnet**, (512) 556-3307
- 2-4, 9-11. Bethlehem Revisited, **Waxahachie**, (972) 938-9617
3. Winterfest, **Linden**, (903) 756-3106
3. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Mineola**, (903) 569-2087 or www.mineola.com
3. Parade of Lights, **DeSoto**, (972) 224-3565 or www.desotochamber.org
3. Children's Christmas Parade, **Lake Conroe**, (936) 756-4671
3. Wild Game Dinner, **Graham**, 1-800-356-4844
3. Christmas in a Small Town Tour of Homes, **Terrell**, (972) 563-5703
3. Market Day, **Port Lavaca**, (361) 552-0917
3. Czech Christmas Open House, **La Grange**, 1-888-785-4500
3. Market Days, **Rockdale**, (512) 446-0649
3. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Luling**, (830) 875-3214
3. Trail of Lights Kick-Off, **Huntsville**, (936) 291-5920
3. Christmas on the Square, **Pilot Point**, (940) 686-8139

3. Winter Wonderland, **Grand Prairie**, (972) 237-8100
3. Christmas Home Tour, **Marlin**, (254) 803-3331
3. Navidad en el Barrio, **Grand Prairie**, (972) 647-2331
3. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Crawford**, (254) 722-7332
3. Market Day, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-2201
3. Gruene Town Lighting, **New Braunfels**, (830) 629-5077 or www.gruenetexas.com
3. Ole Time Music, **Pearl**, (254) 865-6013 or www.pearlbluegrass.com
3. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Hico**, (254) 968-0888
3. Christmas Auction and Chili Supper, **Ables Springs**, (972) 533-4060
3. Come Home for Christmas, **Manor**, (512) 272-5699
3. Christmas Parade, **Shepherd**, (936) 653-2184
3. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Anson**, (325) 823-3259
3. Country Christmas, **Fayetteville**, (713) 444-6219
3. Corsicana Opry, **Corsicana**, (903) 872-8226 or www.corsicanaopry.com
3. Christmas Parade, Market & Gift Show, **Waxahachie**, (972) 938-9617
3. Christmas Home Tour, **San Jacinto**, (936) 653-2184
3. Lutfisk Dinner, **Cranfills Gap**, 1-800-344-3720 or www.cliftontexas.org
- 3-4. Candlelight Tour of Homes and Enchanted



COMING IN THE JANUARY ISSUE OF TEXAS CO-OP POWER

Texas Dance Halls

Although they may have air conditioning these days, many Texas dance halls have defied the inevitable march of time. Built by German and Czech immigrants, they have been part of the tapestry of Texas since the late 1800s.

UT's Treasure Trove

From the Watergate papers to Gloria Swanson's shoes, the Harry Ransom Center at UT-Austin preserves a wealth of collections. The public has access to many of them.

Plus:

Good cooking for diabetics, Janis Joplin Birthday Bash in Port Arthur, and more!

- Villas, **Granbury**, (817) 573-5299 or www.hgma.com
- 3-4. Fantasy of Lights Christmas Festival, **Bowie**, (940) 872-6246
- 3-4. Historic Home Tour, **Gonzales**, 1-888-672-1095 or www.gonzalestexas.com
- 3-4. Budafest, **Buda**, (512) 312-1559
- 3-4. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Streetman**, (903) 599-4090
- 3-4. Living Nativity, **Spring Branch**, (830) 885-5805
- 3-4. Christmas on the Colorado, **Columbus**, (979) 732-8385
- 3-4. Christmas Bazaar & Homes Tour, **Weimar**, (979) 725-8372 or www.weimartx.org

- 3-4. Holiday Concert, **Sulphur Springs**, (903) 438-2848
4. Polka Fest, **Ellinger**, (979) 378-2311
4. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Stephenville**, (254) 965-6190
5. Christmas Parade in the Park, **Bullard**, (903) 539-2632 or www.bullardtx.org
6. Brush Country Music Jamboree, **Three Rivers**, (361) 786-3334
7. Holiday Carillon Concert, **Victoria**, (361) 570-5788
8. Victorian Stroll, **Gainesville**, (940) 612-1829
9. Gala for New Library, **Schulenburg**, (979) 561-8705

9. Christmas Family Night, **Round Rock**, (512) 341-3342
- 9-11, 16-18. Flea Market Days, **Jewett**, (936) 348-5475
10. Market Days, **Georgetown**, (512) 868-8675
10. Carolers Afloat Boat Lighting Parade, **Port Aransas**, 1-800-45-COAST or www.portaransas.org
10. Cowboy Holiday Ball, **Luckenbach**, 1-888-311-8990 or www.luckenbachtexas.com
10. Christmas Parade of Lights on Lake Amistad, **Del Rio**, (830) 775-3551
10. Hometown Christmas, **Livingston**, (936) 327-5242
10. Historic Holiday Home Tour, **Bastrop**, (512) 303-0057
10. Christmas Boat Parade, **Clear Lake**, (281) 338-0333 or www.boatparade.classroompages.net
- 10-11, 17-18. Chicken House Flea Market, **Stephenville**, (254) 968-0888
11. Celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, **El Ranchito**, (956) 399-2022
11. Drive-Thru Christmas Luminary Tour, **Mason**, (325) 347-5536
11. Sunday Brunch Buffet Cruise, **Granbury**, (817) 279-8687
12. McDade Jamboree, **McDade**, (512) 273-2307
15. Friends of Bluebonnet Opry, **Brenham**, (979) 830-1961
16. Country Opry, **Victoria**, (361) 552-9347
- 16-18. Trade Days, **Fredericksburg**, (830) 990-4900 or www.fbgtradedays.com
- 16-18. Country Christmas, **Seguin**, (830) 379-1122 or www.texagedu.org
- 16-18. Trade Days, **McKinney**, (972) 562-5466
- 16-18. Trade Days, **Livingston**, (936) 327-3656
17. Market Days, **Victoria**, (361) 485-3200
18. La Posada, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-6969 or www.emilyann.org
- 19-23. Enchanted Holiday Forest, **Port Aransas**, (361) 749-4158
- 24-25. Ho-Ho Paddle, **Lake Conroe**, (936) 203-2697
26. Hanukkah Celebration, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-6969 or www.emilyann.org
31. First Night in the Falls, **Wichita Falls**, (940) 767-6135 or www.firstnightfalls.org

Electric Heaters

Space heaters are meant to provide supplemental heat, not to replace your home's heating system. In fact, if used incorrectly, space heaters can pose fire and burn risks.

Safety rules when using your portable electric heater:

- Read and follow the manufacturer's warnings and the use and care guidelines before using a space heater.
- Space heaters need space. Keep them at least 3 feet away from any combustible material such as bedding, clothing, draperies, furniture and rugs.
- Never use space heaters around unsupervised children and pets.
- Always turn the heater off and unplug it when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Plug space heaters directly into an outlet; do not use an extension cord.
- Electric space heaters use a lot of electricity. Plug your heater into a circuit with as little else on it as possible.
- Space heaters should be used only for supplemental heat.

**BE COOL
WITH
ELECTRIC
HEATERS**



**Texas Electric
Cooperatives**

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

This public service message is brought to you by your local electric cooperative. See your local co-op for details.

January

1. Polar Bear Swim Club, **Kyle**, (512) 268-5341
3. Brush Country Music Jamboree, **Three Rivers**, (361) 786-3334
6. Knights of Columbus Fish Fry, **Dripping Springs**, (512) 894-4470
7. Ole Time Music, **Pearl**, (254) 865-6013 or www.pearlbluegrass.com
7. Market Day, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-2201

Event information can be mailed to Around Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, faxed to (512) 486-6254, or e-mailed to aroundtx@texas-ec.org. It must be submitted by the 10th of the month two months prior to publication. E.g., February submissions must be received prior to December 10. Events are listed according to space available. We appreciate photos with credits but regret that they cannot be returned.

He Knows What You've Been Up To!

It really doesn't matter if you've been naughty or nice this year, we're sure you'll find at least one of this month's photos will inspire some holiday spirit—or a chuckle—this season. We were surprised at the variety of Santas in our readers' submissions; we saw young and old Santas, and even some skinny ones! There were Santa-decked dogs, horses, a cow or two, and even a cat that posed as Santa's beard. Happy holidays!

Car Wash is the topic for our February issue. Send your photos—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to “Car Wash,” Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, before December 10. A stamped, self-addressed envelope should be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). **Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate.** We regret that Texas Co-op Power cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline. If you use a digital camera, e-mail your highest-resolution images to focus@texas-ec.org (if you have questions about your camera's capabilities, please check the operating manual).



Sixteen-month-old KOLBY ATKINS looks like Santa told him he's getting nothing for Christmas! Kolby's the grandson of Fannin County EC members KENNETH and ROBBIE



After delivering Christmas gifts to needy children for San Antonio's Elf Louise Project (by van, not motorcycle!) for the past six years, DEVIN WILLIAMSON stops to take a break. His parents, RANDEL and KATHRYN HALE, belong to Magic Valley EC.



▲ “HMMMMMMMM, let's see ...” LAUREN TRUBENBACH paused to consider the many possibilities when Santa asked the inevitable “What do you want for Christmas?” Lauren is the niece of proud aunt/photographer DENISE BAYER and daughter of STEVE and MELISSA TRUBENBACH, all members of Cooke County

◀ Nearly 20 years ago, AMBER WINDLE (now PATE) rode OL' DANDY in the Eustace Christmas parade. Today Amber's a wife and mother to RICHIE and LAUREN, and her love for horses hasn't faded; she ropes steers in the U.S. Team Roping Championship almost every weekend. Her parents, BOBBY and DONNA WINDLE, are members of Trinity Valley EC.



PETER MAREK, 8, snapped this Santa “Claws” photo of his father, GARY, posing as the jolly old elf. If you look closely, you'll see that the Mareks' patient kitty, CISSY, is posing as Santa's beard! The Mareks belong to Bluebonnet EC.

UPCOMING in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
February	Car Wash	December 10
March	“Oops!”	January 10
April	Bluebonnets	February 10
May	School Projects	March 10
June	Summer Fun	April 10
July	Close Calls	May 10



A Bottle of Cologne and a Handmade Handkerchief

It was Christmas of 1948. Houston.

Dad stated that he'd only ever been 15 miles away from where he'd been born, except when he ran away and joined the Army. So he gave Mamma an ultimatum.

"I'm going."

We left Connecticut in a 1937 Packard with a box of Mars bars in the backseat to keep my brother, David, and me quiet. A tight knot of family waved tearful goodbyes from the country road that ran in front of our just-sold house.

The engine "fell out" while we were still in Connecticut. The gas gauge went belly-up in Pennsylvania and, out of gas, we coasted to a slow stop across from a huge hobo encampment. Dad told us to lock the doors while he walked to the little Pennsylvania Dutch town ahead to get help.

After what seemed a forever drive, we reached the outskirts of Houston, and Mom just bent over double and began to cry. This flat marshland was another world, so different from our green Connecticut. The stench of the stockyards gagged us. The belch of the oil refineries made our eyes water. Soon, the inside of the car was a hiccuping, sobbing mess.

Houston then, as now, was a booming town with oil on its mind. We rented two rooms in the back of a private home. Mom, David and I slept in the double bed while Dad slept beside us on a cot. In our closet of a kitchen, while eating a hurried supper, we kept cool by sitting in front of the open fridge until the landlord discovered us and threatened to kick us out. During the stifling nights, we wrapped wet washrags around our feet and plastered them on our foreheads just to get a fugitive escape

from the unforgiving heat. Back then, there wasn't any refrigerated air, and only rich folks had attic fans.

As the months went on, hard times came upon us. Mamma got work, so that left David and me totally alone. For the first time in our lives, we had no close family. No Nonna, no Nonno, no aunties, no uncles—we had nobody but each other. At school, the kids made fun of our Yankee

chief—a gift for Dad. On Christmas Eve, ours were the only two presents under the little tree.

"You probably know already that we have no money for presents," Dad said with a choking voice, "but I am giving this very valuable two-dollar bill to you, Isabel. And David, I'm giving you your grandfather's pocket watch. Wind it carefully, and on the hour it will play a merry tune."

With a child's aching heart, I looked at my brother. We both knew without speaking that it was time to act as if our parents had given us the most wonderful gifts in the world.

"This is a wonderful two-dollar bill," I said, with as much certainty as I could muster. "What a wonderful Christmas."

David just smiled broadly while he pressed his ear to the chiming watch.

We all sat down by the tree, and our parents snuggled us close to them. When Dad opened his gift, it was the only time I ever saw him cry. Mamma dabbed her new perfume behind her ears and declared that it smelled like heaven itself.

Mamma kept that perfume bottle on her dresser for the next 48 years. When I asked her about it years later, she looked at me with a wry twinkle in her eye and said that it had always kept her in touch with true honesty.

We buried Dad with his handkerchief. It was his only request.

Many Christmases have come and gone since that one so many years ago, but none has ever matched it in the true spirit of the star in the East—a beacon homeward to love.

Isabel Bearman Bucher wrote "Big Bend à la Canoe" in the June 2005 Texas Co-op Power.



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accents. We missed the woods, the green fields, the freedom to run, and the peace that comes from belonging to a family.

Weeks rolled into months. Christmas arrived. There was no money for gifts, but David and I found a pretty, nearly empty bottle of cologne in a neighbor's trashcan and revived it by adding water, bay rum and a few drops of vanilla flavoring. We thought our concoction smelled divine. I cut an over-large square out of an old underslip, hemmed it on all four sides, and embroidered it with a shaky "G" for George. It was a handker-