THE CARDINAL:
OUR STATEWIDE BIRD

HOW 'BOUT A HAND
FOR FINGER FOODS

I'LL BE GONE
FOR CHRISTMAS

Texas Co-op Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2022

Silent Night

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

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December 2022

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By Mike Leggett
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ON THE COVER
The Presidio Chapel of San Elizario.
Photo by Erich Schlegel
ABOVE
The northern cardinal is ubiquitous in Texas.
Illustration by Sarah Ferone

Hallmark of the Holidays

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

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

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

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

December 6

National Microwave Oven Day

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

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

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

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

Here are some of the responses to our October prompt: **The best Christmas gift I ever gave was ...**

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

LINDA STEINHEBEL
VIA FACEBOOK

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

ALLEN LINDERMAN
NUECES EC
CORPUS CHRISTI

In 2021, when I surprised our daughter Elizabeth with a book it took me 41 years to write about her much-loved baby sister Rebecca, who died in 1980 at the age of 9 months.

PHYLLIS CRAM
PEDERNALES EC
AUSTIN

Visit our website to see more responses.

For the Rest of Us

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

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

> "Nothing smoothes out the past like a present."
>
> —GLADYS PARKER

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Wreaths for the Fallen

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

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

POSTCARD: WIKIPEDIA COMMONS. VEGETABLES: LESTERMAN | STOCK.ADOBE.COM. WREATH LAYING: WYATT MCSPADDEN. BERRIES: ELENA ELISSEEVA | DREAMSTIME.COM

JULIA ROBINSON

Bison at the Brink

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

BILL LAMZA
SAN BERNARD EC
HEMPSTEAD

Goodnight Slight

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

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

Susan Rosenberger
Pedernales EC
Spicewood and Johnson City

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

MELINDA WOOD SASARAK
VIA FACEBOOK

The Bottom Line

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

Martha E. Jones
Victoria EC
Victoria

ERICH SCHLEGEL

Colossal Cluster

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

Wayne P. Blackley
Trinity Valley EC
Terrell

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

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

Texas Co-op Power

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Roll Out the Red Carpet

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

BY MIKE LEGGETT
ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH FERONE

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

Some know it as the redbird, but it's correctly called the northern cardinal. This strikingly colored bird is known for its happy chirping calls that can go on all day and for the beautiful crest and orange bill of the adults.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

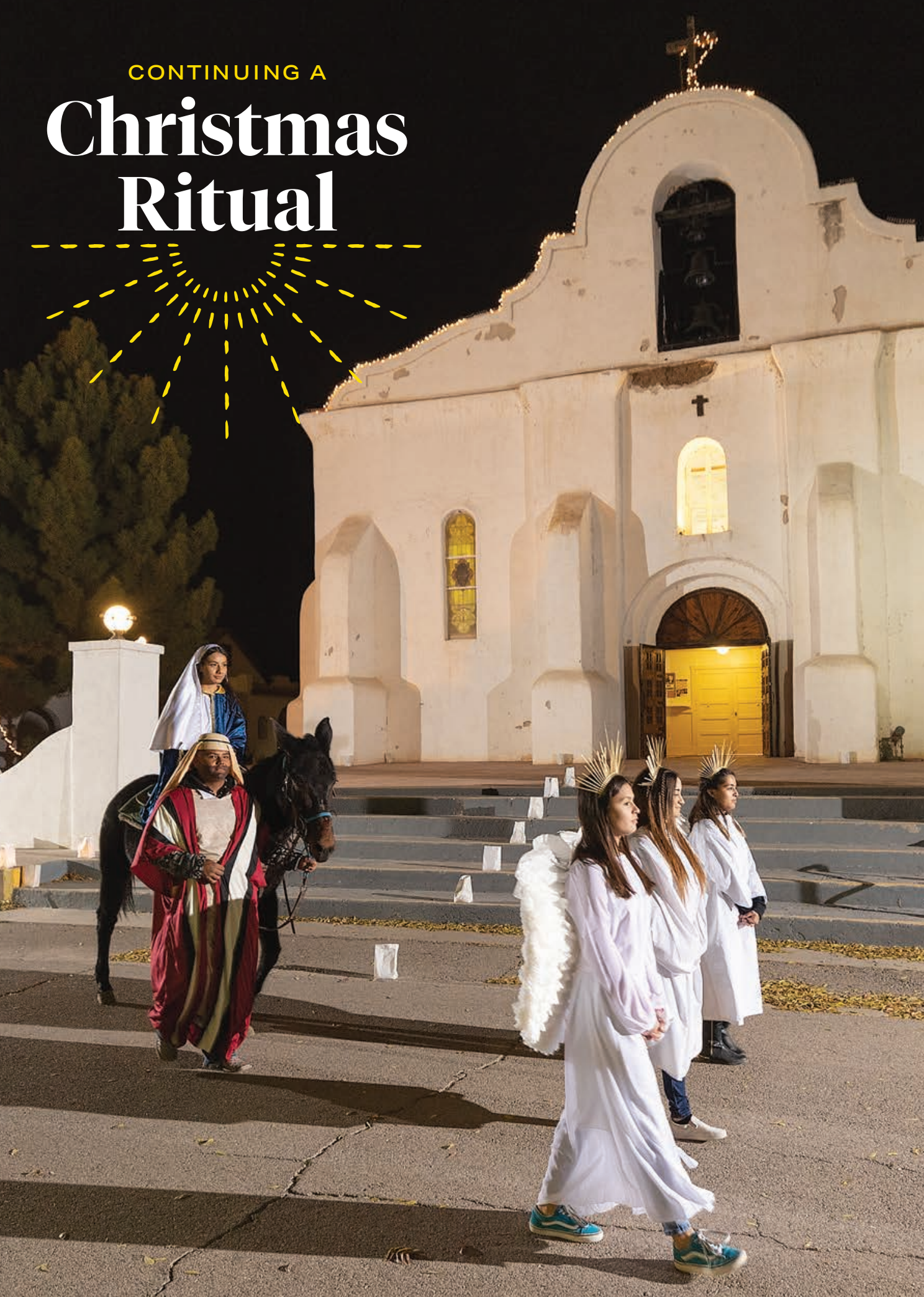
There is a similar bird, actually another member of the cardinal family, known as a pyrrhuloxia. The male has a striking crest that's larger than the cardinal's but is colored mostly gray and crimson. They are common on ranches in South Texas during the winter. Their beaks are much more parrotlike than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

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

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

CONTINUING A

Christmas Ritual



BY MELISSA GASKILL • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

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

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

In the tree-lined plaza, a group of young people in costume gathers next to a gazebo. This is a dress rehearsal for Las Posadas, which translates as "the inns" and refers to a procession or play that reenacts the biblical story of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter in Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. This telling of the Christmas story originated in 16th-century Mexico and continues there and in cities and towns north of the Rio Grande with musicians and costumed children going from house to house on Christmas Eve.

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

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

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

Students playing Mary and Joseph—the former perched on a real, live mule—make their way past the steps of the church, the mule's hooves clopping on the pavement. In the gazebo, Trujillo reads the Christmas story aloud, her voice projected over speakers, as an "innkeeper" at the top of the steps turns the couple away. They continue on to the gazebo, where they settle on bales of hay, and the girl playing Mary pulls a baby doll from under her robe.

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

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

OPPOSITE Students reenact the biblical story of Mary and Joseph, who, led by angels, seek shelter in Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus. ABOVE A dazzling dancer at the San Elizario Luminaria Festival.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Originally, San Elizario, Socorro and Ysleta all sat on the south bank of the Rio Grande, in what became the country of Mexico. In the 1829 flood, the river cut a new channel, leaving all three churches on the northern bank. When the U.S. declared the deepest channel of the Rio Grande as the international boundary with Mexico in 1848, these communities became part of the U.S.

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

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

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Is Your Holiday Décor Naughty or Nice?

WHETHER YOU'VE ALREADY decked your halls or you're just getting started, there's still time to incorporate energy savings into your holiday décor.

If you haven't strung your twinkle lights, be sure to use LED light strands. LEDs consume far less energy than incandescent lights and can last up to 40 holiday seasons. They're also safer because they're made with epoxy lenses, not glass, making them more resistant to breaking—and they're cool to the touch.

If you missed Santa's memo about energy-saving LEDs and your holiday lights are already up, you can still save on lighting costs. All you need is a programmable light timer. Most models cost $10–$25 and can be purchased through online retailers like Amazon or at big-box stores like Lowe's or Walmart. With a light timer, you can easily program when you want your holiday lights turned on and off, which will save you time, money and energy. If you're using a timer for exterior lighting, make sure it's weatherproof and intended for outdoor use.

If an all-out and bright style is a bit much for your taste, consider a more natural approach. Many Christmas tree farms and even home improvement retailers give away greenery clippings from recently trimmed trees. With a little twine, extra ornaments and sparkly ribbon, you can create beautiful garlands and wreaths to hang over your front door or windows. To add extra twinkle at night, install solar-powered spotlights to illuminate your new (essentially free) greenery. Solar spotlights can vary in price, but you should be able to purchase a quality set of four for about $30—and because they run on energy from the sun, there's no hit to your energy bill.

Laser lights are also an energy-efficient option and are very easy to install because you simply stab them into the ground and point them at your house—and they only use about 0.005 watts per hour. You can also purchase laser lights with programmed patterns and twinkly designs, eliminating the need for other decorations. Lasers come in red, green, blue and other colors.

There are also LED projectors that project large images onto a wall, such as snowflakes, reindeer and stars that move in a rotation. These devices use around 6 watts per hour.

Let's not forget those 3D items that sit in the yard, waving cheerily to passersby. This category includes inflatables and wire frame structures covered in string lights. A 5-foot-tall snowman prestrung with LED lights uses around 9 watts per hour. Compare that to an inflatable Frosty, which has only a few LED lights but also a fan that runs continuously to keep it inflated—using around 60 watts per hour. Inflatables may not be efficient, but they're still better than an old string of lights. ■

Don't Ignore Your Water Heater

YOU PROBABLY NEVER see it, but your water heater works hard all year round to make sure your family can take hot showers, rinse caked-on food off of dishes and wash your clothes at any temperature you choose.

During the winter, however, the water heater works even harder. Cold weather means it has to spend extra energy to heat water. Extra showers, laundry and dirty dishes during the holiday season mean heating more tanks of water to keep up.

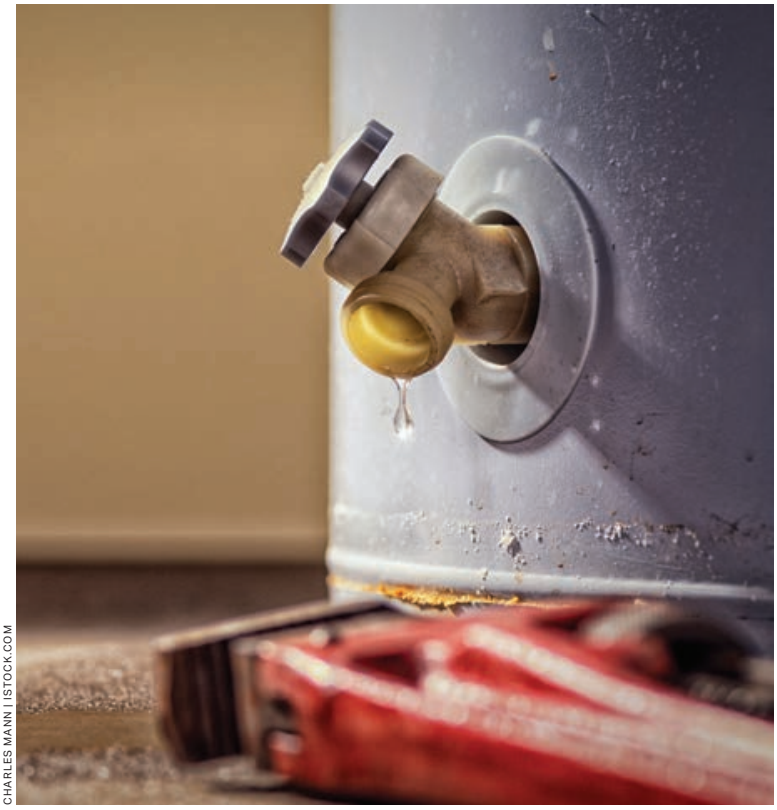
So don't ignore it. Like any appliance, your water heater needs attention and maintenance to stay in good working condition.

Take a look. Most homeowners don't look at their water heaters until there's a problem, but a glance every now and then could keep those problems at bay. If the outside of the tank is rusting or if water is leaking from it or you see rusty water stains on the floor surrounding it, call a plumber right away.

Reset the temperature. It's easier than you think to accidentally raise or lower the temperature setting on a water heater, just by knocking it with a mop while you're cleaning the floor, for example. Verify that the appliance is set to 120 degrees. You'll notice a difference in the water temperature in the shower if it's too low or too high.

Insulate the water heater. Insulating the pipes and tanks will keep heat inside the tank and prevent it from escaping into the air. Consider investing in an inexpensive water heater blanket, usually made from foil or fiberglass. It will help the tank maintain a consistent temperature. A tip: Leave it on year-round.

Call for service. An annual flush will remove sediment and minerals that can build up in the tank and reduce the water heater's efficiency and life span. ■



CHARLES MANN | ISTOCK.COM

AQUAARTS STUDIO | ISTOCK.COM

Watch Out for Fa-la-la-la Fakes

WHETHER YOU'RE BUYING lights to trim the tree or power tools to wrap as gifts, beware of bogus bounty this holiday season.

Many home products are illegally counterfeited, placing the purchaser—or the recipient of the perilous present—in danger of using faulty electrical equipment that doesn't meet safety standards.

As you do your holiday shopping, inspect your purchases for a mark from a reputable product safety testing organization, like CSA International or UL. Here are some tips to help you spot illegal counterfeiting.

If the product has an unbelievably low price, it's probably a fake. Compare the prices and warranties of similar products.

Touch and examine the product. Counterfeits are often light and feel cheaply made.

Check for misspellings or unclear printing on labels, packaging and instructions.

Poorly designed or unclear packaging with only partial illustrations could be a sign of a fake.

Look for missing items in the product box and for items that appear different from those described on the packaging.

Don't count on the retailer to weed out the offending merchandise. Even reputable vendors can be duped. ■

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Texas Co-op Power presents an illustrated *Seashells of Texas* poster by artist Aletha St. Romain, 20x16 inches, suitable for framing.

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This cookbook is filled with more than 700 recipes, including more than 300 dessert recipes.

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To order by mail, send a check or money order payable to TEC for $29.95 to Best of Typically Texas Cookbook, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701.

$29.95

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Ice Isn't Always Nice

Although much of the state is unaccustomed to snow and ice, temperatures can fall below freezing even in South Texas, potentially causing power outages. To keep safe and comfortable during a winter power outage:

Report any outages.

Turn off electrical appliances that were operating at the time the power went off. Leave one light on so you'll know when service has been restored.

Keep warm by closing off rooms you don't need and use only safe sources of heat, like a wood stove. Do not burn charcoal indoors. If you operate lanterns or fuel-fired cook stoves or heaters, make sure that you have adequate ventilation.

Don't drive unless absolutely necessary until conditions improve. If you must drive, go slowly.

Your electric cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.

PHOTOS.COM

Be Cool With Space Heaters

Space heaters are meant to provide supplemental heat, not replace your home's heating system. If used incorrectly, space heaters can pose fire and burn risks. When using your portable heater, heed these rules:

Read and follow the manufacturer's warnings and the operation and care guidelines before using a space heater.

Space heaters need space. Keep them at least 3 feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, drapes and furniture.

Never use space heaters around unsupervised children or 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.

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His Latest Assist

A Longhorns basketball legend pays it forward by opening a gym of his own

BY BRANDON JENKINS
FOR REPORTING TEXAS

ONE OF THE MORE decorated basketball players in Texas Longhorns history hopes to change lives with the game that changed his.

T.J. Ford, a crafty passer who played eight seasons in the NBA after being named college basketball's national player of the year in 2003, opened a gym in the Houston suburb of Fresno in 2021 to work with young basketball players. The T.J. Ford Academy offers training for players at all levels—professional, college, high school and younger. The facility includes a full court with nine goals, on-the-floor training equipment and a room for strength and conditioning.

"For me, it is just living out my dream of what I envisioned for myself as a kid," Ford says. "Since the day I retired, I was always looking to get involved with youth sports to build facilities and provide opportunities for kids here in the Houston area."

Ford, 38, spent his professional career playing for the Milwaukee Bucks, Toronto Raptors, Indiana Pacers and San Antonio Spurs. He retired in 2012. In Texas, he is more known for his legendary career at the University of Texas, where he led the nation in assists as a freshman, was a consensus

MITCHELL LAYTON | GETTY IMAGES

"I am trying to give kids hope and an opportunity," says T.J. Ford, an All-American for the Longhorns 20 years ago.

All-American and took the Longhorns to their most recent Final Four appearance, in 2003.

Throughout his playing career, the point guard was known for his speed, basketball IQ and love of the game. Now he's becoming known for paving the way for the next potential Texas greats.

John Eurey, one of Ford's high school coaches, says it's a good fit for Ford.

"Looking back at me coaching him, T.J. was a good kid and what he is doing does not surprise me because he loved the game of basketball," Eurey says. "He is training a lot of kids there."

That includes one of the top prospects in the country. Chris Johnson, a 6-foot-5-inch guard from Missouri City, has been training with Ford since ninth grade. Since then, Johnson has committed to the University of Kansas over offers from many other big-name schools, including Kentucky, Texas A&M and UT.

"Just working and being with T.J. all the time translates to how I play on the court," Johnson says. "I see things as similar as he does, and it helps me in each game I play."

But Ford's gym is not just for elite recruits.

"I am trying to give kids hope and an opportunity, and it is not about me working with the best kids," Ford says. "If the kid is talented enough to where schools want him, then that is great. But we have a system that works for all kids."

Andrew Deutser is one of Ford's players who was underrecruited in high school. During his high school career at the Kinkaid School in Houston, Deutser followed somewhat in Ford's footsteps. In fall 2019, Deutser was given the chance to walk on to the Longhorns team. He credits one man for his successes in the game.

"T.J. was one of the first people to truly believe in my talent in high school," Deutser says. "He really improved who I was on the court and taught me to read the game. I definitely was prepared for my career at Texas because of him."

Ford's relationship with his players goes beyond basketball. He is just as tuned in with how his kids progress in life as much as what they do on the hardwood.

"He is like a second father to me," Johnson says. "He disciplines me and is there for me whenever I need him. It is all in good nature, and I love him for it."

Ford sees his work with youths as paying forward the positive impact that so many had on his career.

"Multiple people played this type of role. It takes a big village," Ford says. "When I was participating in youth sports from a young age, I was around some successful Black men. I feel like a lot of guys did not get that type of value of seeing successful Black men being able to provide for their families in different ways. That was on my mind."

Ford now plays the role of the Black mentor for others, including his son T.J. Ford Jr., who wants to continue the family legacy in the sport.

A senior at Ridge Point High School in Missouri City, Ford Jr. plays the same position his father did, and their close relationship through basketball is something the elder Ford is extremely proud of.

"Basketball has allowed me to have an amazing bond with my son," Ford says. "I get to spend a lot of time with my son, and we get to be in the gym and have that father-son and friend relationship."

The family lines do not end there. Ford, his brother Tim and their father, Leo, make up the "three-headed monster" that backs the T.J. Ford Academy. Each of them is dedicated to helping players achieve their goals.

"It is just how it was when I grew up because I am with my dad and my brother all the time talking basketball," Ford says. "Anytime you can see your parents or your family every day, that is the ultimate goal. So we are in the gym every day and are passionate enough to bring the energy to get the best out of kids."

Before opening the gym, Ford worked with several young players who've had success at all levels of the sport. Taz Sherman of Missouri City led West Virginia University in scoring last season. Danuel House is another Missouri City product who trains with Ford and plays for the Philadelphia 76ers.

Ford hopes to see his academy thrive for years to come.

"I want to just keep doing the right thing by being around good people and helping them," Ford says. "I want to have a branch of trees and limbs all over this world that shows that I have helped a lot of people have success." ■

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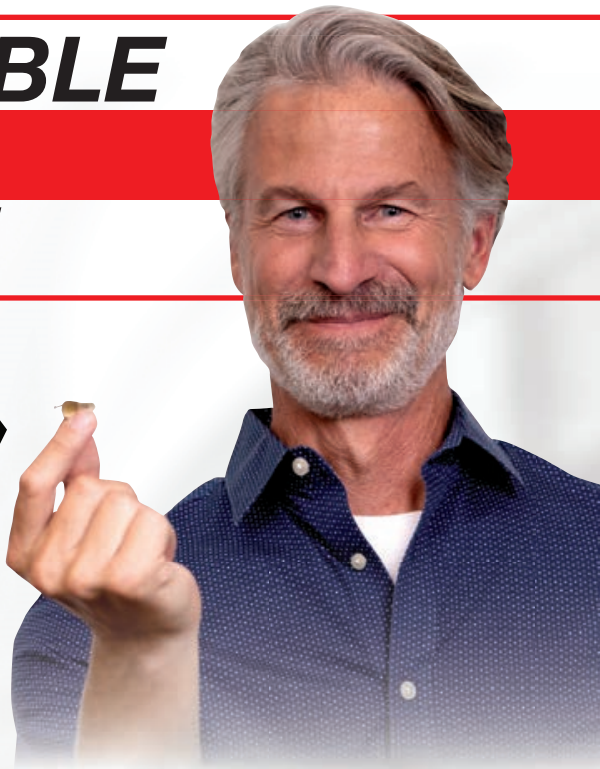

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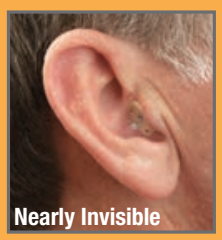

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Sacred Stone of the Southwest is on the Brink of Extinction

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

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

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

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

A Brief but Determined Texan

Samuel Walker's violent adventures became the stuff of legend

BY W.F. STRONG

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

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

Before he was a Ranger, Walker was part of the ill-fated Mier expedition, during which 176 Texian militiamen were captured by Mexico in 1843. Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna ordered them all shot, but cooler heads in the Mexican government prevailed, demanding one in every 10 killed instead. The Texans drew beans from a pot. Those who got one of the 17 black beans would be executed; those who drew white beans would live. Walker got a white bean.

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

There is a much-shared myth that while he was incarcerated, Walker was ordered to dig a hole for a flagpole and raise the Mexican flag. According to one version of the legend, he put a dime at the bottom of the hole and vowed to return one day, reclaim the coin and raise the Texas flag. Several years later, the story goes, he retrieved his dime when he returned with American forces.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finger Foods

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

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

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

Jalapeño Popper Bites

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

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

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

2. In a bowl, combine cream cheese, cheddar, chopped jalapeños, bacon, salt and cayenne until smooth and uniformly mixed.

3. Use two spoons or a small cookie scoop to divide mixture among phyllo shells. Place filled shells on a rimmed baking sheet and bake 10 minutes, until shells are crisp and filling is just starting to brown.

4. Let cool slightly and top each shell with a slice of pickled jalapeño. Serve warm.

MAKES 30 POPPERS

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

Cheesy Pepperoni Pizza Puffs

BEV KELLY
BANDERA EC

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

5 ounces (1 package) mini pepperoni rounds, divided use
2 cups flour
1 cup fresh shredded Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons Italian seasoning
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon sugar
½ teaspoon crushed red chile flakes
1½ cups whole milk
2 eggs, beaten
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 cups shredded four-cheese pizza blend
Marinara sauce, for serving

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

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

CONTINUED >

$500 WINNER

Texas Brisket Empanadas

ANN MCCOOL
TRI-COUNTY EC

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

MAKES 12–20 EMPANADAS

EMPANADAS
1 sheet puff pastry
1 tablespoon olive oil
⅓ cup finely chopped red onion
1 jalapeño pepper, finely chopped
1¼ cups finely chopped cooked brisket
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
2 tablespoons barbecue sauce
1 teaspoon hot sauce
½ cup finely grated sharp cheddar cheese
1 egg
1 tablespoon water

DIPPING SAUCE
⅔ cup sour cream
⅓ cup barbecue sauce
2 tablespoons hot sauce
Lime juice, to taste

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Serve empanadas warm with sauce on the side.

TCP *$500 Recipe Contest*

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

RECIPE PHOTOS: MEGAN MYERS. WINNER PHOTO: COURTESY ANN MCCOOL

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

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

MAKES ABOUT 4 DOZEN PIZZA PUFFS

Crispy Coconut Shrimp

VAN FULTON
PEDERNALES EC

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

1¼ cups shredded coconut
⅓ cup panko breadcrumbs
⅓ cup flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon sugar
¼ teaspoon pepper
2 eggs
1 pound raw jumbo shrimp, defrosted, peeled and deveined
Oil for frying
Chopped fresh cilantro, for garnish
Thai sweet chili sauce, for serving

1. In a shallow bowl, combine coconut and panko. In another shallow bowl, combine flour, salt, sugar and pepper. Beat eggs in a third bowl.

2. Pat shrimp dry with paper towels. Holding by the tail, dip shrimp first into the flour mixture, coating all sides. Then dip into the egg, let excess drip off and dip into the coconut mixture, pressing gently to adhere. Place coated shrimp on a baking sheet and repeat until all shrimp are coated.

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

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

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

MAKES ABOUT 20 SHRIMPS

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

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Fredericksburg

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TexasCoopPower.com/contests

COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Raw Deal

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

BY CHET GARNER

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

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

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

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

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

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

Know Before You Go

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

DECEMBER

08

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

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

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

09

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

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

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

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

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

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

10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11

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

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

13

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

14

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

15

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

MORE EVENTS >

Submit Your Event

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

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COURTESY JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ

Pick of the Month

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

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

DECEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

15

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

16

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

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

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

17

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18

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

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

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

22

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

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

31

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

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

JANUARY

01

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

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

Winter Wildlife

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

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1 MIKE PRESTIGIACOMO
BARTLETT EC
A thirsty fox.

2 FRANKI SALDIVAR
J-A-C EC
"I put a bird feeder out for the cardinals when it snowed, and they sure seemed to appreciate it."

3 RICK BLACKMORE
PEDERNALES EC
"A buck lounging in the snow during the winter storm of 2021."

4 GABRIELLE ETHINGTON
PENTEX ENERGY
A doe curiously walks up to a dove looking for food.

Upcoming Contests

DUE DEC 10 **Riding the River**
DUE JAN 10 **Taking Flight**
DUE FEB 10 **Dad**

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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

I'll Be Gone for Christmas

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

BY BABS RODRIGUEZ
ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN FALES

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

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

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

As we settled into a campsite, I realized that I had been so fixated on keeping the planning minimal that I had packed no chairs, no plates, no knife. I did bring salt and pepper, a big cake of lavender soap and one plastic fork. It was a few days after I'd hosted a Christmas event for 50 people; I was so tired I was stupid.

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

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

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

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

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

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