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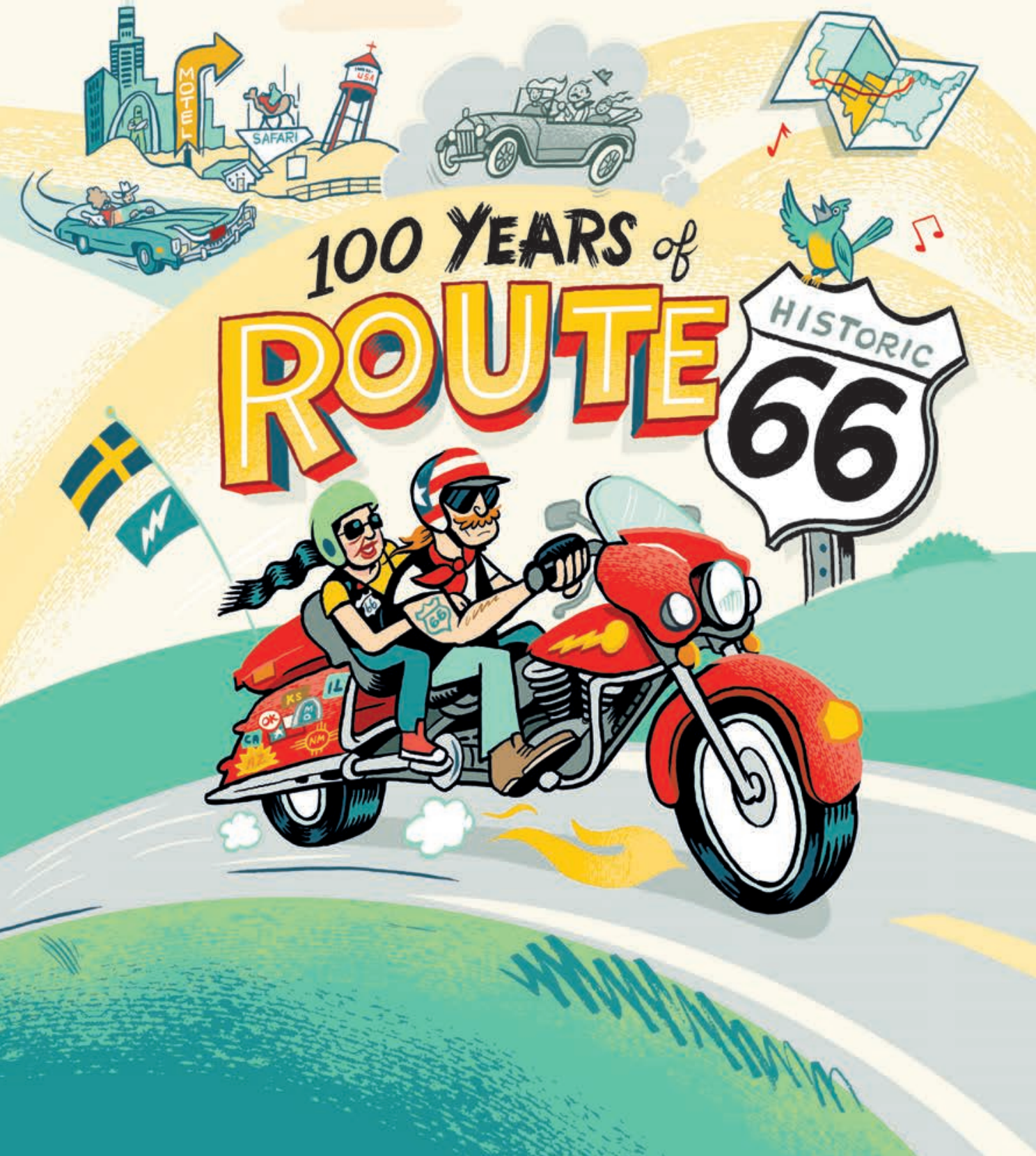
NOVEMBER 2026



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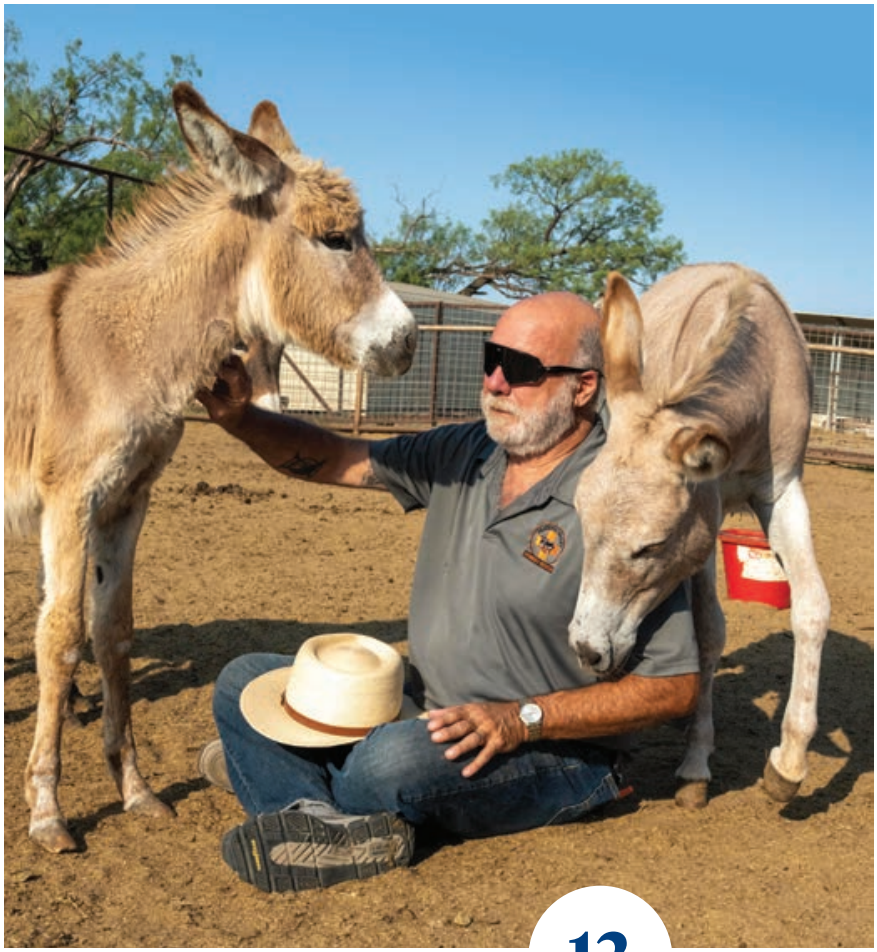
# November 2026



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Kind hearts and tranquil acres await donkeys in need of a second chance.

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*Photos by Anna Mazurek*

ON THE COVER
The Mother Road, which winds from Chicago to Los Angeles, takes in 178 miles of Texas.
*Illustration by Dan Zettwoch*
ABOVE
Mark Meyers with gentle friends at Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue outside San Angelo.
*Photo by Anna Mazurek*

# The Last Marine Reaches Safety

**JUAN JOSE VALDEZ** of San Antonio was the final Marine to get out of Saigon on April 30, 1975. He almost didn't make it.

Master Gunnery Sgt. Valdez, who had helped evacuate thousands, was thrown off balance and fell on the rear boarding ramp as the final helicopter lifted off during the fall of the South Vietnamese capital.

"I looked at the back of the helicopter door, and I noticed two hands hanging there," said Staff Sgt. Mike Sullivan, already onboard. Valdez was grabbed and pulled to safety.

Valdez later worked as a civilian employee on a Marine Corps base. He died February 15 at his home in Tucson, Arizona. He was 88.

## TCP *Contests and More*

**$500 RECIPE CONTEST**
Mac and Cheese

**FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS**
In the Garden

**RECOMMENDED READING**
Remember *Route 66*, the 1960s TV series that featured the Mother Road? One of our writers did in his May 2012 story *Getting My TV Kicks on 'Route 66.'*

ENTER ONLINE

## Bullish on Brahmans

Armel Keeran, right, became interested in Brahman cattle as a child on her father's ranch. After college she moved back to the ranch and became a passionate advocate for the humpbacked cattle.

Keeran, born 125 years ago this month in San Antonio, on November 15, 1901, became the first woman to raise the breed and had the largest Brahman herd in the U.S. at the time.

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

### It's not Thanksgiving dinner without . . .

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 responses to our September prompt: **When I was a kid . . .**

My brother and I would catch lightning bugs and bring them in the house and let them go in our rooms. It would drive our mom crazy.
JUDY KAY KRANTZ
CECA
LAKE LEON

We played outside all day long, rode our bikes and drank out of the water hose.
REBECCA BERRY
TAYLOR EC
ABILENE

I wanted to be an adult. Now, as an adult, I really wish I could be a kid again.
ARZOLA YOSHIMI
VIA FACEBOOK

We didn't ask if it was safe. We just did it and found out.
RUTH ORLOFF SCLAWY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC
ELKHART

Visit our website to see more responses.

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JASON DAVID PAGE

**SEPTEMBER 2026 TCP Kitchen**

"It is rare that I don't remove a page or get ideas from the recipes. The Sweet Potato Waffles are on my to-make list."

BARBARA MACHA
COSERV
HIGHLAND VILLAGE

## Old Favorites

As young'uns growing up in small-town Mabank in the 1950s, my mother made Peanut Butter, Crackers and Marshmallows [TCP Kitchen, August 2026] for her four young boys. My wife and I made them for our children. As grandparents of now-grown grandchildren, we made them but had to give them a special name—Pawpaw's Favorite Treats.

Glenn Hyde
Trinity Valley EC
Mabank

## Dining Defined

*It's About Time* [August 2026] is tops. A very informative, dawn-to-dark account.

It is common today in Texas to refer to the evening meal as dinner. But just like in Andy Adams' book *The Log of a Cowboy*, the Panhandle cowboys and farmers I know all call it supper. They call the noon meal dinner.

Rob Lee Roark
Lighthouse EC
Wichita Falls

## Most Inspired

Thank you for *Giant Footsteps* [June 2026], the wonderful article on Miss Opal Lee. It was one of your best—super inspired.

Martha Sanchez
Magic Valley EC
McAllen

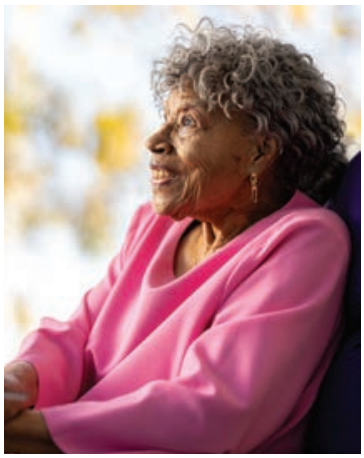
## Monthly Motivation

I am deeply amazed and engaged by your publication. It keeps me motivated and provides invaluable information on subjects I hold dear.

Your articles consistently inform me about the beautiful geographical sites across our state and offer wonderful opportunities to learn about gardening, healthy cooking and better eating habits.

Furthermore, the magazine helps me discover ways to volunteer my time and services within my community, fostering a spirit of continuous learning.

Linda Gray
Farmers EC
Sachse



ROBERT SEALE

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

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
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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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A surge of travelers are getting their kicks for the 100th birthday of Route 66

# STILL KICKING

BY JIM MCCARTY, SAMANTHA BRYANT AND CLAIRE STEVENS
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN ZETTWOCH

Brenda Hammit Bradley weaves between tables at the MidPoint Cafe, coffeepot in hand, laughing and talking with diners and, when there's a language barrier, gesturing and pointing.

When she reaches his table, Juan José Sillas Blanco from Spain, dressed in an AC/DC T-shirt, points at his 5-euro bill and then the wall, and Bradley knows what he means. She grabs tape and a stepladder so he can add it to the collection of currency and license plates from around the world lining the upper walls, creating a visual guest book.

For travelers making the journey down Route 66, the café in Adrian, west of Amarillo, is a respite from the road and an important mile-marker—1,139 miles, to be exact—halfway between Chicago and Los Angeles. Across the Panhandle, 178 of those miles are in Texas.

"I could have 10 different countries in here at the same time," Bradley says. "I'm grateful for all the business I get, but most of it comes from overseas—and that's a blast."

Blue Miller from England browses the café's gift shop. She has traveled the entirety of Route 66 nine times but says she's "done thousands of shorter trips" and has written two books about the Mother Road.

"In Europe, Route 66 is kind of an encapsulation of the America that people grew up with—it's the diners, it's the cars, it's the small towns," she said. "And everybody's looking for what they saw in the movies."

Scenes like this play out every day along the remains of the most famous highway in the world. It originally traversed eight states along 2,448 miles, stretching from downtown Chicago to a pier at the Pacific Ocean in Santa Monica, California. Its official name is Route 66, and it's been busier in 2026 than any year since it was decommissioned in 1985.

This year Route 66 fans from around the world have been looking for new kicks as the celebrated road turns 100 years old. Larger cities along the road, including Amarillo; Joliet, Illinois; and Springfield, Missouri, hosted big celebrations earlier in the year.

Springfield earned the honor of hosting the national kick-off event through a competitive process but also due to its status as the birthplace of Route 66. It was there in 1926 that a telegram was sent by John Woodruff, a Missouri businessman, to Washington, D.C., asking that the new road be named Route 66 (he claimed it sounded catchier than the alternative, Route 62). The idea for the road—officially commissioned November 11, 1926—didn't originate in Missouri, but its iconic name did.

In anticipation of the centennial, communities all along the route spruced up their landmarks, planned events, relit neon and geared up for a major influx of visitors this year.

"I struggle to make a specific prediction, and part of that is because it's really hard to track specific routes," says Rhys Martin, president of the Oklahoma Route 66 Association, "but I would be surprised if traffic didn't double just because of the attention and the people planning their trips."

Gary Daggett, who manages the MidPoint gift shop and is president of the Route 66 Association of Texas, has seen a big increase in traffic at the shop.

"I'd say at least three times the normal, and our numbers are showing that in our guest book, sales, everything," he says. "We've been very busy so far this year."

Daggett first traveled Route 66 when he was 20 and says he wants to see the route preserved for future generations to enjoy. He and his wife planned to make their 30th trip this year, and he says they have friends who they now consider family all along the route.

"It's the people that make Route 66," he says. "A lot of people come to find that out. It's one thing to see it, but once you stop at little restaurants like this and the mom-and-pop gift shops, you get to know the people."

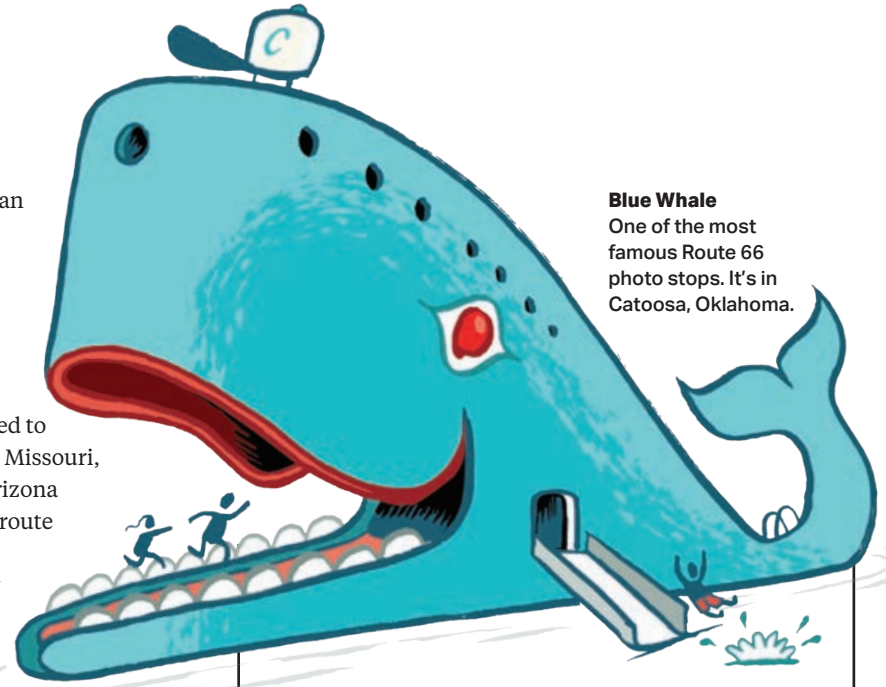
While Missouri can claim its birthplace, an Oklahoma man is known as the Father of Route 66. Cyrus Avery, a Tulsa realtor who owned a coal company, saw the need for a roadway from the Midwest to the West, connecting small towns and cities along the way. Appointed to the Joint Board on Interstate Highways in 1925, Avery managed to steer the route south from Illinois through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California instead of a more northern route through Las Vegas.

He also helped launch the U.S. Highway 66 Association in 1927 to encourage use of the new roadway. In the beginning, the route joined various existing state roads, with many of them still gravel. Besides paving the highway, the association's leaders also saw the need to encourage drivers to choose Route 66 over other transcontinental routes.

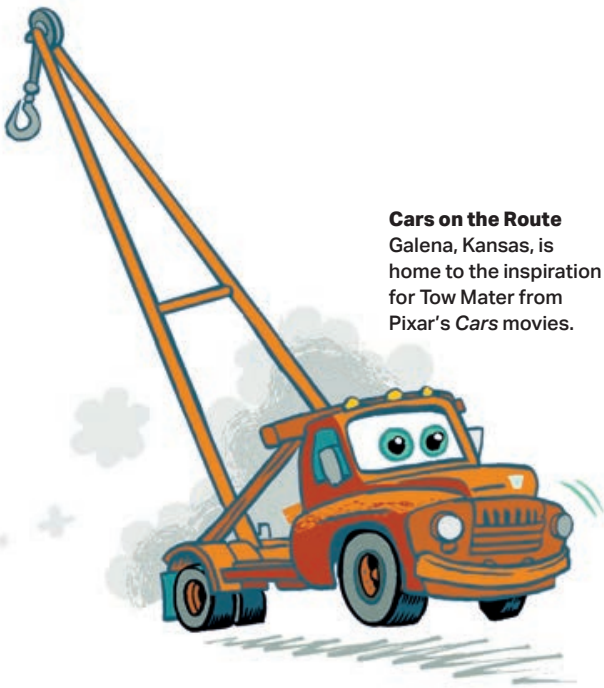
One of the first efforts to popularize the road was an epic footrace that followed Route 66 from its start in Santa Monica to Chicago, then on to New York City. The distance was 3,400 miles over just three months. It started with 275 runners, but 77 dropped out on the first day. Only 55 runners finished the race, with 20-year-old Andy Payne from Claremore, Oklahoma, the winner.

Through publicity like this, the nation learned of the new route, and traffic grew exponentially. Truckers favored its flat terrain, with elevations measured in hundreds of feet instead of thousands crossing the Rocky Mountains.

In the 1930s it became the road of migration as the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl displaced Midwesterners who sought a new life in California.



**Blue Whale**
One of the most famous Route 66 photo stops. It's in Catoosa, Oklahoma.



**Cars on the Route**
Galena, Kansas, is home to the inspiration for Tow Mater from Pixar's *Cars* movies.

## Don't Miss This!

*Stop at these spots in each state.*

**ILLINOIS: Gemini Giant (Wilmington)**
If you only stop once before leaving Illinois, make it here. The 30-foot-tall Muffler Man is one of Route 66's most iconic photo ops.

**MISSOURI: Meramec Caverns (Stanton)**
A road-trip classic since the 1930s. Billboards and barn roof signs for this cavern once lined the entire Mother Road, and the attraction still feels like pure Americana.

**KANSAS: Cars on the Route (Galena)**
Kansas has only 13 miles of Route 66, but this restored Kan-O-Tex gas station—home to the truck that inspired Tow Mater in *Cars*—is its standout.

**OKLAHOMA: Blue Whale (Catoosa)**
This 80-foot-long, smiling whale in a pond is one of the road's most beloved and quirky landmarks.

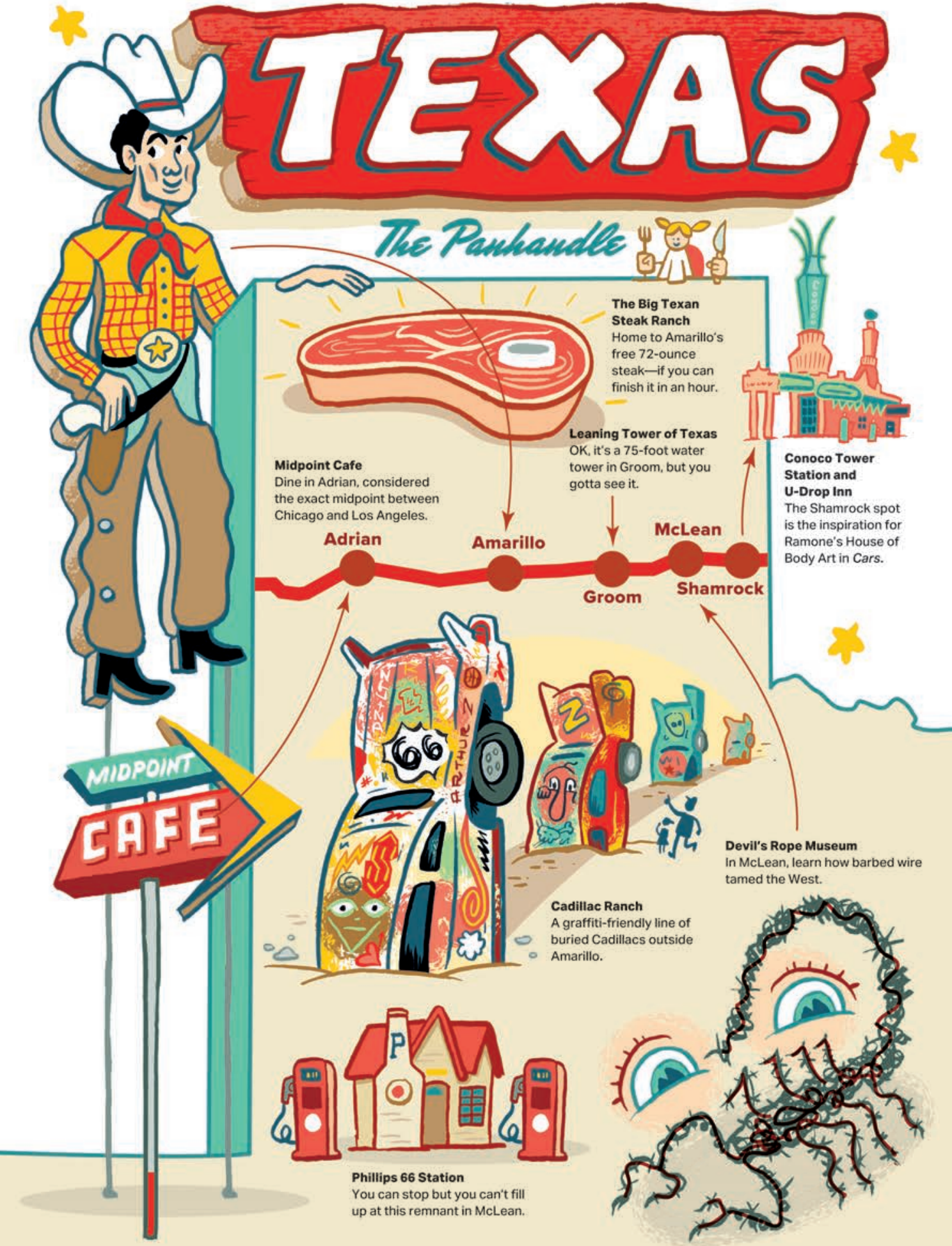
**NEW MEXICO: Blue Swallow Motel (Tucumcari)**
See beautifully preserved rooms and get a true 1940s motor court experience. Even if you don't stay, stop for the best neon on the entire route.

**ARIZONA: Petrified Forest National Park**
The only national park the Mother Road drives straight through—where classic roadside nostalgia meets staggering natural beauty.

**CALIFORNIA: Roy's Motel & Café (Amboy)**
A surreal desert time capsule with a legendary Googie-style neon sign.

# TEXAS

## The Panhandle




**The Big Texan Steak Ranch**
Home to Amarillo's free 72-ounce steak—if you can finish it in an hour.

**Leaning Tower of Texas**
OK, it's a 75-foot water tower in Groom, but you gotta see it.

**Midpoint Cafe**
Dine in Adrian, considered the exact midpoint between Chicago and Los Angeles.

**Conoco Tower Station and U-Drop Inn**
The Shamrock spot is the inspiration for Ramone's House of Body Art in *Cars*.

**Devil's Rope Museum**
In McLean, learn how barbed wire tamed the West.

**Cadillac Ranch**
A graffiti-friendly line of buried Cadillacs outside Amarillo.

**Phillips 66 Station**
You can stop but you can't fill up at this remnant in McLean.

When World War II gripped the nation, it became a strategic route for moving men and materials to support the war effort. This led to a major effort to rebuild the roadway for Fort Leonard Wood, an Army base in Missouri.

The highway was no match for the heavy trucks supplying the base, so a four-lane "superhighway" was planned with a deep cut near Devils Elbow that became the deepest highway excavation in the nation to date, and the four-lane, divided highway was the first of its kind. Ironically, it was completed in September 1945, the same month the war ended.

Other improvements included a reroute around a series of dangerous hairpin curves in western Arizona dubbed the Sidewinder. This 8-mile section has 191 curves with no guardrails and 12% grades.

By the 1950s, Route 66 was the thruway for a nation in love with the automobile. Cabins, motels, restaurants, roadhouses and all manner of highway kitsch sprang up to lure motorists off the pavement.

The road came to represent everything Americans hold near and dear: freedom, adventure, nostalgia and small-town values. Those themes were shared in the 1960s TV series *Route 66*, which helped fuel today's nostalgia for the road.

Championed in songs such as Bobby Troup's *(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66* and the Eagles' *Take It Easy*, immortalized by John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath,* and introduced to a new generation through Pixar's *Cars* movies, the Mother Road continues to fascinate those who prefer life in the slow lane.

**Wigwam Motel**
This historic landmark in San Bernardino, California, features 19 individual 30-foot-tall tipi-shaped concrete and wood cabins.

Folks like Dale and Lesley Finigan from Key West, Florida, who got in their RV and picked up the road in St. Louis. They stopped in Adrian for lunch.

"We both retired a couple of years ago, and it was on our bucket list of things to do," Dale says.

The road's demise came when the interstate highway system replaced it. Suddenly, small towns where Route 66 was the Main Street were bypassed, and many businesses couldn't survive as traffic moved away.

Mother Nature and the wrecking ball have taken their toll, but if you know where to look, you can still find the remains of the old route. Newer businesses, like the Devil's Rope Museum, have sprung from the ashes of those long-gone oases.

Travelers from California, Pennsylvania, Germany and Australia have signed the visitors log at the museum, which resides in what used to be a brassiere factory in McClean, east of Amarillo. Anita Day worked in the building when it was a factory and now works the front desk of the museum dedicated to barbed wire.

The museum's exhibits explain the history and role of barbed wire in conquering the West and include a collection of barbed wire sculptures and plenty of Route 66 memorabilia, including old newspaper clippings, road and business signs, and a re-creation of a classic café.

"When it opened, I thought 'Who would want to go?' " Day says. "Barbed wire is all you see along the highway. But here it is 35 years later." ■

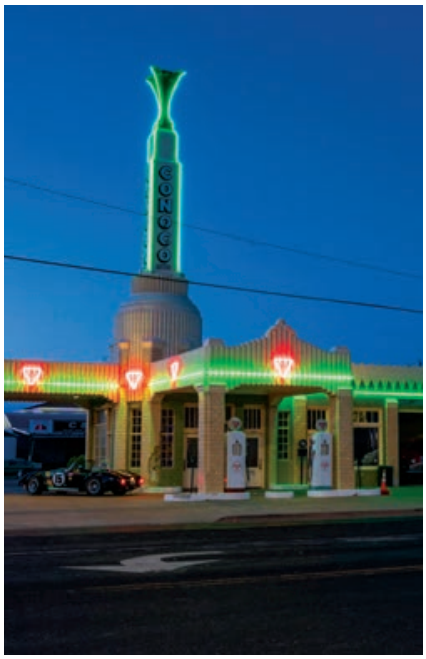
**Route 66 Start Sign**
The starting point was at Adams Street and Michigan Avenue in Chicago until the city declared it to be closer to Lake Michigan this summer.

**Gary's Gay Parita**
A replica of a 1930 Sinclair gas station near Paris Springs, Missouri.

TCP Find this story on our website for a playlist of tunes that'll get you kicking no matter your route.

# LONESTAR LANDMARKS

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ANNA MAZUREK




## SHAMROCK

One of the most iconic Mother Road landmarks is the art deco **Conoco Tower Station** and **U-Drop Inn Cafe**, near the Oklahoma border. The unique geometric design, topped with a four-sided obelisk tower adorned with a metal tulip, was the inspiration for Ramone's House of Body Art in Pixar's 2006 *Cars* movie.

According to lore, the building started as a dirt sketch drawn with a nail by owner John Nunn and was later built in 1936 for $23,000. The structure was divided into three parts: a gas station, retail space and café, dubbed the U-Drop Inn by an 8-year-old boy who won a naming contest.

Over the decades, the building was a Greyhound station, then a barbecue joint and now houses the chamber of commerce visitors center.

In 2002, the city embarked on a comprehensive restoration to return the National Register of Historic Places-listed building to its original glory with red and green LED lighting that switches on from dusk to sunrise. The café, revived in 2021 by local restaurateur Osbaldo De Leon, serves homemade banana bread sundaes and brisket smoked on-site.

"The U-Drop Inn represents more than a historic building," says Crystal Hermesmeyer, Shamrock chamber director. "It's the front porch of Shamrock."

## GROOM

In the early 1980s, Ralph Britten bought a 75-foot-tall water tower from a refinery for the truck stop he was building on Interstate 40 in Groom. The tower spent two years lying horizontal while construction was completed.

"Everybody was talking about how the water tower blew over," says Vince Britten, Ralph's youngest son, who helped paint the tower with the words "Britten USA."

When the Tower Fuel Stop opened and the tower stood upright, it stopped attracting attention. Realizing the advertising potential, Ralph decided to tilt the tower, anchoring two legs to concrete pillars attached to a buried beam to act as a kickstand for stability. Then, he cut

off the other two legs to dangle in the air. The newly created **Leaning Tower of Texas** attracted curious customers.

While a 1988 fire destroyed the truck stop, the tower remains and is repainted regularly by the family.

Ralph wanted to be buried under the water tower, which wasn't legal, so he compromised on a grave monument with a water tower in a local cemetery.

## AMARILLO

Five spray-painted Volkswagen Beetles buried nose-deep in the ground are a play on Amarillo's Cadillac Ranch, created in 1974. These colorful cars were planted near the town of Conway by Ricky Crutchfield in the late 1990s to attract people to his family's tourist stop.

After Crutchfield's death in 2022, the future of Slug Bug Ranch was uncertain. The property sold, and the cars were moved off-site in 2023.

In 2024, the Big Texan Steak Ranch bought and relocated the beloved bugs adjacent to Starlight Ranch, an outdoor entertainment venue in Amarillo. The new **Slug Bug Ranch**, featuring paved walkways, was unveiled June 14, 2024, during Amarillo's annual Texas Route 66 Festival. While the collection of nine bugs is the star, it also includes nine limousines, formerly used to transport guests to the Big Texan.

The outdoor art installation is maintained by volunteers and is open 365 days a year. Of course, spray painting is encouraged.

Kind hearts and tranquil San Angelo acres await donkeys in need of a second chance

# From Punch Lines to Peaceful Paddocks

BY JESSICA M. RIDGE • PHOTOS BY ANNA MAZUREK

On a sunny West Texas afternoon, a 1-year-old donkey with gray-brown fur nuzzles my thigh and gently nips at my jeans.

"That's how she says, 'Come pet me please,' " says Kim Elger, chief operating officer at Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue—one of the world's largest.

With a little help from Elger and general manager Jacob Caniglia, Mexia stands upright, which might seem unremarkable. But months earlier, a family in the Rio Grande Valley contacted the rescue to surrender the foal, which they'd found alone in the wild with hind legs made essentially useless by a toxin or vitamin deficiency.

Bereft, Mexia tried for months to rejoin her donkey family, which roamed just across the fenceline from where Mexia's human fosters cared for her. To donkeys, "family is everything," says Elger, a member of Concho Valley Electric Cooperative.

Once she got to Peaceful Valley, Mexia walked with the help of staff and a system of slings and straps until the rescue's chief veterinary tech had a game-changing idea. She customized a wheelchair intended for a Great Dane, adding bigger wheels and extenders to increase its height. "It's kind of a Frankenstein-type situation," Elger says.

The makeshift mobility aid enabled Mexia to rehabilitate her leg muscles to the extent that she hardly needs the device anymore, Caniglia says.

Stories as dramatic as Mexia's are atypical of most arrivals, he says. More often staff, which includes ranch hands, trainers and vet techs, welcomes donkeys to the facility outside San Angelo in a state of general ill health. The 172-acre ranch—PVDR's flagship facility and home to an average of 1,000 donkeys—serves as a stopover haven for abused, abandoned and neglected domestic donkeys. Once rescues are friendly toward humans and meet socialization milestones, including lifting each foot for a farrier, they graduate to one of Peaceful Valley's adoption centers across the U.S. or find respite in sanctuaries in Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas.

Patron saint of the punch line, donkeys get a second chance at Peaceful Valley—a reprieve from toiling under the burden of human misapprehensions and ignorance. "You've been told all your life that donkeys are stubborn," Elger says. "You call someone a jackass when they mess up—they're always the butt of the joke." It's a casual bit of cruelty and caricature the rescue works to dispel and amend.

Outcomes ordained by a lack of research ("donkeys are the forgotten equine," Elger says), conflation of donkey and horse care techniques, and ignorance of the animals' deep need for socialization and bonding converge at PVDR's intake facility, where arrivals receive vaccines, deworming, hoof trimming and a test for infectious equine anemia.

"They all come in needing something from us," Elger says. "There's no shortage of mistreated, abused or just neglected donkeys."

Peaceful Valley's off-site sanctuaries, which operate akin to grazing leases, each provide homes for 20–150 donkeys. That's also where the nonprofit rehomes burros (wild donkeys) from federal lands, where populations are closely managed.

"In the national parks, they're not protected," Caniglia says. "So we're their best bet. And so we take them out of that wide-open space—freedom—and we bring them here. And then we turn them out onto another wide-open space. That is meaningful to me."

Irrespective of a donkey's trajectory toward adoption or sanctuary, a baseline metric applies. "It's important that their first interaction at this facility, and then from every

OPPOSITE Donkeys in need of care get loving attention and 172 acres of ranchland at Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue.

TOP Mark Meyers, nuzzling with Calamity, started the rescue with his wife, Amy, as a backyard hobby more than 20 years ago.

ABOVE Misa rests in the nursery.

interaction on, is one of kindness," Elger says.

That ethos is evident to visitors who tour the rescue, alighting from golf carts at various enclosures and bays that dot the sprawling former dairy. Unfamiliar humans are regarded cautiously and quietly while tour guides introduce individual donkeys and share some of their idiosyncrasies, medical challenges and backstories. My guide recognizes one resident by his bray before we even pull up to greet him.

Several donkeys indulge my attempts to pet them, including Shasta, who basks beneath a tree that shades her pen. I also meet Casey, who was found running loose in a Kaufman County neighborhood in North Texas with a rope around his neck and a painfully damaged, unsalvageable hoof.

Despite that ordeal, Casey swiftly allowed PVDR staff to help him. "Usually it takes them a while, donkeys that are new to us and intake, to trust us and see what we're all about," Elger says. As soon as Casey arrived, he jumped into a trailer and allowed a farrier he'd never seen to lift and examine his injured leg and hoof, Caniglia says.

"Equine amputations are not typically a thing that you're going to do," Elger says. "But Casey, like Mexia, was such a sweetheart. He had such a will to live." After a two-month postoperative stint at a veterinary clinic and a few more weeks to heal and adjust, Casey scratched his ear with his new prosthetic, affirming his adaptation.

Casey and Mexia's sweetness and grit aren't uncommon among donkeys. Just widely unsung. And awe-inspiring.

"These animals are not what we've made them out to be," Elger says. "I had no idea that donkeys were so loyal. I had no idea that they were so social. I had no idea that they were so resilient.

"To be able to go from some of these situations that they come out of, where you would never blame them for not ever trusting a single even human-shaped object ever again, and they can bring themselves to a place where they open themselves up, and they can develop trust again … that they can make that choice."

Maybe that impulse is rooted in resilience. Or maybe it's a bit of grace donkeys extend to us, again and again. ■

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# Consider Efficiency When Shopping Deals

**SHOPPING "HOLIDAYS" LIKE** Black Friday and Cyber Monday are great opportunities to take advantage of incentives or deals on brand-new, energy-efficient appliances after your home hosts a plethora of friends and family for Thanksgiving. Knowing more about home appliances before the mayhem begins can be useful when looking to replace that old dishwasher.

Here are some quick tips and resources to learn more about energy-efficient appliances and ways you can save money and energy and to help you decide whether you need to purchase new equipment.

## Discounts and Coupons

Check out the Energy Star rebate finder tool at energystar.gov/rebate-finder. This tool allows consumers to find rebates and other incentives on Energy Star-rated appliances in their area simply by entering a ZIP code.

## Dishwashers

Dishwashers handle the dirty work in your kitchen, and older ones are notorious for using lots of water and electricity.

But there's good news! Energy Star dishwashers are required to use 3.2 gallons of water or less per cycle, rather than the 10 gallons most dishwashers used before 1994. When scanning those Black Friday deals, also consider features such as delay timers, which allow you to run your dishwasher during off-peak hours, lowering power costs and helping the grid.

## Refrigerators

Your old icebox could be doing you some damage in the energy department. Do you have door seal issues? You can do a quick test with a dollar bill. Just close your refrigerator door over a dollar bill so it's half in and half out of the refrigerator. If you can pull the bill out easily, the latch may need adjustment, the seal may need replacing or you may consider buying a new unit.

What about that extra refrigerator you never use or only use on the holidays? An old refrigerator could be costing you hundreds of dollars per year.

Recycling your old fridge not only saves money, it also ensures that the refrigerants and other components are removed and properly recycled. Your local utilities may even offer a rebate for recycling old appliances. If you're using your second refrigerator only during the holidays or for special events, unplug it when it's not needed.

Also, although fancy LED screens, ice makers and water dispensers seem like fantastic features now, be aware that they do use more energy. Nevertheless, manufacturers are required to keep up with government appliance standards, which have continually tightened since 1994. Refrigerators made in 2014 onward will save Americans more than $21 billion by 2043.

## Washers and Dryers

Energy Star washers clean clothes using 35% less water and 20% less energy than standard clothes washers. Energy Star clothes dryers include features such as a moisture sensor that will shut off your dryer automatically when clothes are dry. This not only saves energy but also saves the wear and tear on your clothes caused by overdrying.

Stackable machines are a great solution for homes or apartments that are tight on space, and front-load washers use less water than top-loading models.

# Beware of Holiday Scams

**YOU'RE MAKING YOUR** holiday to-do list and checking it twice, so be sure protecting yourself and loved ones from online scammers is on that list.

Every year, thousands of people fall victim to holiday scams, robbing them of hard-earned money and personal information. Common scams include not delivering items you paid for, misrepresenting items on an auction site or having you pay with prepaid gift cards.

Follow these tips from the FBI to ensure you shop safely and smartly online this holiday season.

Follow best practices when it comes to cybersecurity. Don't click any suspicious links or attachments in emails, on websites or on social media. Phishing scams get you to click on links and give up personal information like your name, password and bank account number. In some cases, you may unknowingly download malware to your device.

Know who you're buying from. If you're purchasing from a company for the first time, do your research and check reviews. Check each website's URL to make sure it's legitimate and secure by looking for the "https" in the web address. If it doesn't have this, don't enter your information on that site.

Be wary of sellers who post an auction item or advertisement as if they reside in the U.S. but then respond to questions by stating they are out of the country on business or because of a family emergency.

Be careful how you pay. Never wire money directly to a seller. Also, don't pay for items with prepaid gift cards. In these scams, a seller will ask you to send them a gift card number and PIN. Instead of completing the promised transaction, the scammer will steal the funds, and you'll never receive your item.

Use a credit card when shopping online and check your statement regularly. If you see a suspicious transaction, contact your credit card company to dispute the charge.

Monitor the shipping process. Always get tracking numbers for items you buy online so you can make sure they have been shipped and follow the delivery process.

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# Check CO Alarms Before Winter

**IT'S STARTING TO** cool off outside, and you're keeping your windows and doors closed to keep out the chill. As we move into heating season, it's a perfect time to ensure the carbon monoxide detectors in your house are working properly. If you don't have any, it's time to install them.

Carbon monoxide is a potential byproduct of burning fossil fuels, including gas and oil. It's colorless and odorless, but it's very toxic and can cause everything from dizziness to death.

Stay safe this winter by taking a few precautions.

Install a carbon monoxide alarm outside of every bedroom and on every level of your house.

Replace batteries in the alarm at least twice a year. While you're at it, change the batteries in your smoke alarms, too.

If you notice any warning signs that carbon monoxide is at harmful levels in your home—the air is stuffy and stale; condensation appears on windows; burner flames turn yellow; pilot lights flutter or extinguish—turn appliances off and open the windows. If you suspect a leak, call a natural gas contractor to inspect the equipment.

Properly maintain your furnace, boiler vents and chimneys.

# IT'S THE LAW: MOVE OVER OR SLOW DOWN

**Lineworkers dedicate long hours to ensuring affordable and reliable electric power.**

**The "move over/slow down" law reminds us to do our part to keep our utility workers safe.**

PHOTO: CHRIS BURROWS | TEC

**Look for flashing lights.**

When you see a utility vehicle on the side of the road with its amber lights flashing, move over a lane. When you move over, you're giving workers the room they need to safely complete their work.

**Slower is safer.**

If you do not have an extra lane to move into, the law requires you to slow down 20 mph below the posted speed limit. A slower-moving vehicle is a safer vehicle.

And keep in mind, significant fines give this law teeth.

**Your electric cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.**

JASON DAVID PAGE

Sneak Peek

# Texas Co-op Power

**DECEMBER**

## Tamalada Tradition

In kitchens across Texas, it's tamale season

## Happy Christmas

Meet the man who still hand-makes toys, in a Panhandle town with a fitting name

**JANUARY**

## 50-Year Road Trip

Randy Mallory's photography career took him to every corner of Texas

## Grave Concern

Meet the folks restoring natural beauty at historical cemeteries

### TCP *Upcoming Contests*

**FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTO CONTEST**

**COUNTRY CHURCHES** DUE DEC 10

**REPETITION** DUE JAN 10

**$500 RECIPE CONTEST**

**SALSA** DUE DEC 10

**C'MON OVER** DUE JAN 10

ENTER ONLINE

# GENERATOR SAFETY

**Portable generators are a godsend during a prolonged power outage—just be sure to use extreme caution while operating them.**

**Generators can be very dangerous if used improperly. Be sure to understand and follow all safety instructions.**

Never try to power the house by plugging the generator into a wall outlet. This dangerous practice, known as "backfeeding," reverses the electricity flow and sends it out of your house, endangering electric workers and your neighbors. If you must connect the generator to the house wiring, have a qualified electrician do it.

Plug appliances directly into the generator or use an extension cord that is rated (in watts or amps) at least equal to the sum of the connected appliance loads. Check that the entire cord is free of damage and that the plug has all its prongs.

Keep the generator dry and do not use it indoors, in a garage, near open doors or windows, or in rainy or wet conditions.

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# Sticky Situation

They turned an uninvited bee swarm into a teaching opportunity—and a thriving buzz-ness

BY PATTI PFEIFFER • PHOTOS BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

**WHEN A SWARM** of honeybees went looking for a new home in 2019, they landed on a problematic location: the loading dock of the Ozarka water bottling facility near Hawkins. What started as a nuisance for employees at the massive East Texas facility quickly became a safety issue.

A bee consultant suggested trapping and relocating the bees far away, but Cheryl Conaway, a quality manager at the plant, wanted to rehome the hive somewhere on the facility's 3,000 pesticide-free acres. The bottling plant's grounds provided endless possibilities.

Conaway, a former substitute teacher at Hawkins High School, was familiar with FFA and came up with a novel idea benefiting the bees, students and Ozarka. "I felt bees could be considered livestock and thought this would be a great project for our local students," Conaway says.

She contacted Matt Byrd, director of the agriculture program at Hawkins Independent School District, and asked if he and his students would be interested in the challenge of relocating and caring for the pesky pollinators.

Although he was then clueless about bees, hives and honey production, Byrd's interest was piqued. "It was certainly something new and different," he says. "I had no experience, but I did know the importance of bees and thought it would be a unique opportunity. And it sounded like a good partnership."

Once the decision was made, Byrd recruited four FFA members to become beekeepers: Brook Goddard, Jessica Henneous, Rachel Parish and Mackenzie Rutherford. Excited with their new project, the girls worked diligently and daily—even through summer. They took required Ozarka courses to gain contractor status at the plant, and a bee expert taught them how to set up swarm traps and how to build hives and do honey extraction, production and bottling.

Eventually the swarm was trapped and transferred to a former 50-acre hayfield landscaped with wildflowers. The girls placed their hand-built hives among the flowery fields. "It was a wild idea, but it worked," Byrd says.

It not only worked but was highly successful. Initially, the girls' dedication paid off handsomely when they entered their apiculture project, complete with the hives they constructed, in the Houston Livestock Show in 2019. Among nearly 500 entries, it won the reserve championship in showmanship.

The program's success got even sweeter as their apiary caught the attention of other ag program directors. Demand was so high that Byrd helped write the first beekeeping and honey production curriculum for the Texas Education Agency. After the program was assessed and approved, ag programs throughout Texas began offering beekeeping.

All the while, the girls were busy harvesting, processing and bottling their honey for retail sale, labeled under the name 4G—as in four girls. Locals heard about the honey, and sales took off. Ozarka offered to market 4G Honey, and word got out—way out.

NBC's *The Today Show* sent a TV crew to Hawkins to interview participants. The segment ended with Conaway, on behalf of Nestlé, then Ozarka's parent company, presenting each of the girls with a $5,000 college scholarship and an additional $10,000 grant to fund the school's program.

Demand for 4G Honey suddenly surged. "We immediately started getting calls and orders from all over the country, and it overwhelmed staff," Byrd says. "For three days solid we boxed and mailed honey to 42 states."

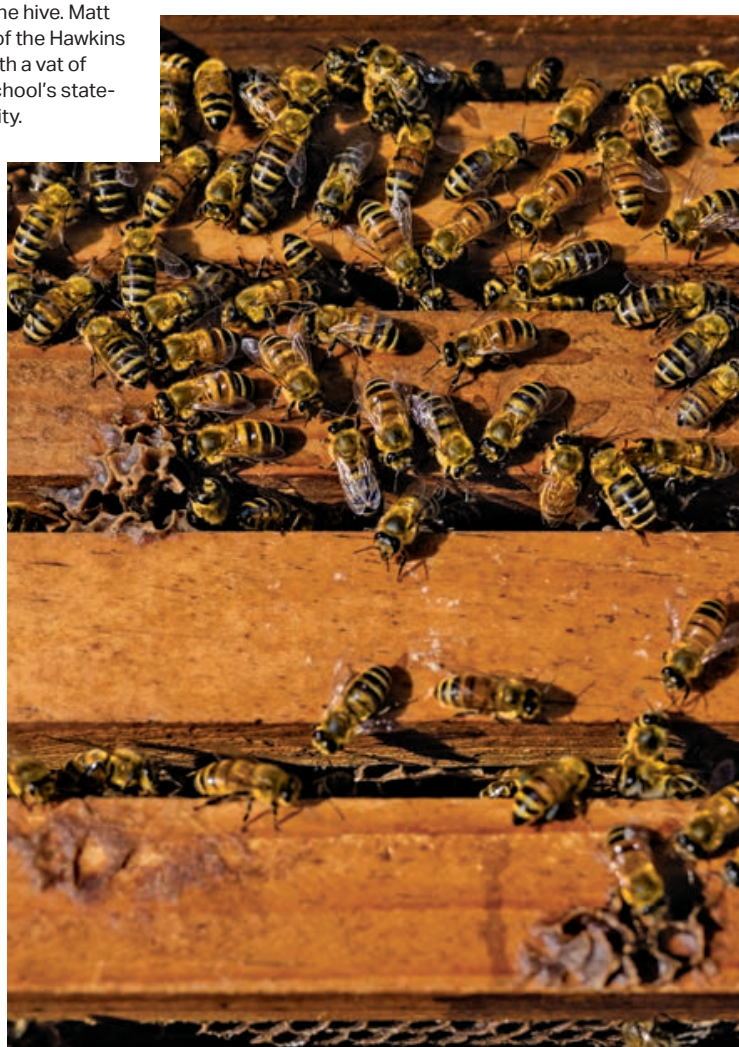
In 2021, Hawkins ISD voters approved an $11 million-plus bond package that included construction funding for a multimillion-dollar ag facility complete with a food-grade, state-of-the-art lab for processing, filtering and bottling 4G Honey. Every year, proceeds not only are poured back into apiculture but fund scholarships for the "bee kids," as Byrd calls them.

The four girls have long since graduated high school, but their apiaries continue to be successful, seven years later. And Rutherford used her beekeeping knowledge to establish hives at her family's farm, which increased watermelon production.

"When it all began, we had no idea anyone would know or care what we were doing, and how it would blow up," Byrd says. "The program has benefited this school district and others, Texas students, the community, and agriculture too."

TCP Watch the video on our website to get to know the FFA girls at Hawkins High School who pioneered the beekeeping program and business.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
Hawkins FFA students Emilie Kennedy, left, and Lue Berry use smoke to calm bees before checking the hive. Bees outside the hive. Matt Byrd, director of the Hawkins ag program, with a vat of honey in the school's state-of-the-art facility.



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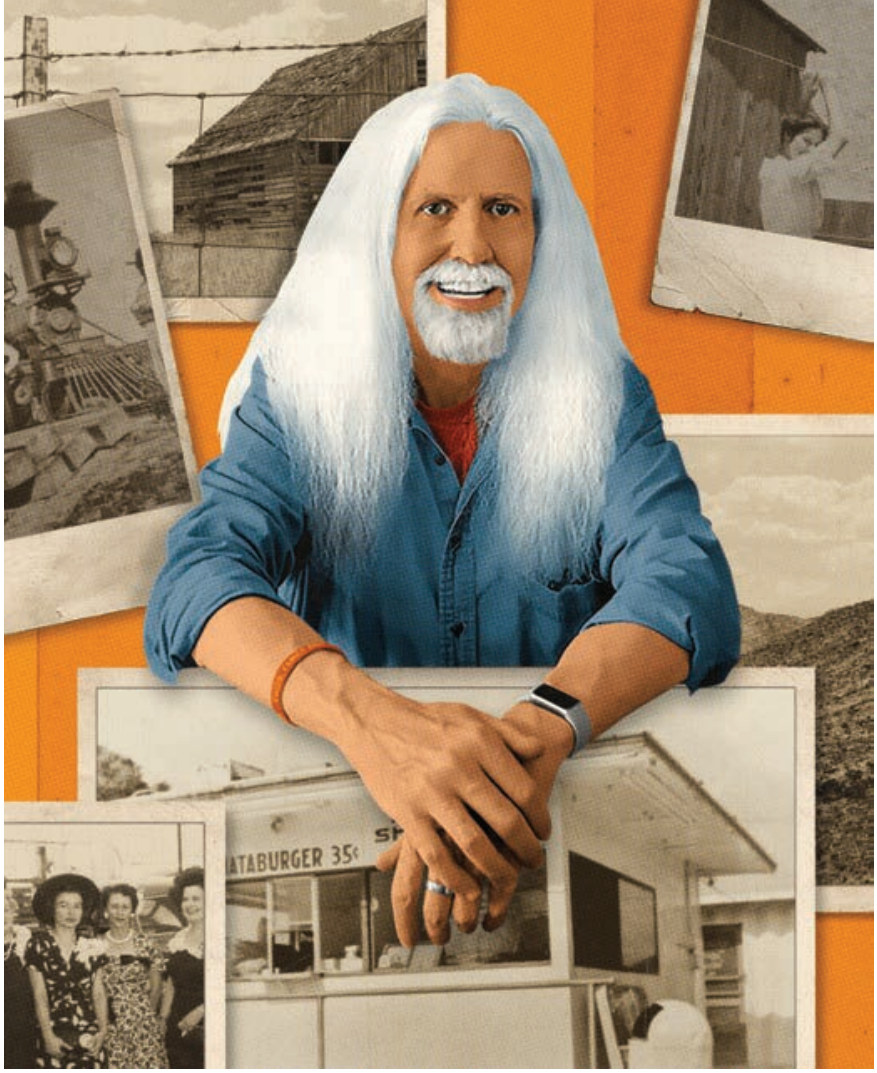


TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.

# Faces and Places

And a big helping of gratitude power the viral wonder Traces of Texas

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR CALLERY

**EVERY HOLIDAY SEASON** I thank someone for a great gift to Texas. This time I'd like to thank Jac Darsnek, the much-loved creator and editor of the Traces of Texas Facebook page that has accrued more than 1 million followers since 2010.

Texas has always been more than a place. It's a memory, a voice, a photograph tucked into a drawer, a story shared across a kitchen table.

Darsnek didn't start out with a plan but simply an instinct, sharpened by experience, that Texans liked talking about Texas. By late 2012, something clicked. Not because of flashy trends or algorithms but because Darsnek leaned into history and let it speak for itself.

His breakthrough moment was publishing a black-and-white photo of the original Whataburger in Corpus Christi, which went viral.

Photographs became the heartbeat. The images, most of them taken long before color film was common, carry a gravity that modern photos often lack. These aren't stylized shots posed to impress; they're family photographs, photos of musicians before fame, pilots before they were legends, farmers before nostalgia softened the edges of real life. This was Texas unfiltered.

What's remarkable is not just the photos—acquired from the Portal to Texas History, the University of Texas at Arlington's Special Collections archive and other sources—but what happens after they're posted. The comments section becomes a living classroom, a town square, a reunion hall.

After a photo taken at Dyess Air Force Base in the 1950s was posted, readers identified the exact model of the cash register, the type of flight suit the pilots wore, even the materials that would later replace them. Darsnek said Texas has an astonishing depth of collective knowledge and a generosity and passion for sharing it.

That generosity mirrors Darsnek's own. Gratitude underpins Traces of Texas like cultural bedrock. Every contributor is thanked. Every artifact is treated as precious. Darsnek once shared that if someone takes time from their "one granted life" to send in a photo or a story, the least he can do is acknowledge it and thank them most sincerely. That attitude may be the secret ingredient.

Then there are the people. Centenarians. War veterans. Farmers. River guides. Storytellers like Mel Dart, who flew 35 missions over Europe in World War II and said he was "too dumb to be scared." Or Dorothy McQuary Callaway, born on a farm near Thorndale. Darsnek walked the property with her when she was 99, and she showed him an old well, saying she had pumped "a kajillion gallons of water out of that thing."

Sometimes, Traces of Texas reconnects people. Once, after the devastating 2013 explosion in West, a family photo was found and returned to its owners after being posted on the page.

Traces of Texas is a reminder that Texas is a community and that our stories and photographs are worth preserving, sharing and honoring. Traces of Texas is our shared digital archive. That is a wonderful gift. And Texas is better for it. ■

PORTRAIT: COURTESY JAK DARSNEK. HISTORIC PHOTOS: COURTESY UNT LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

# Cranberry Harvest

Sip and bake your way through the holidays with this traditional fruit

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

When I hosted my first Thanksgiving, I found myself with leftover cranberries I had trouble getting through. This holiday season, we're not letting any cranberry escape our holiday table. I'm transforming cranberries into a delicious agua fresca that can be enjoyed throughout the holiday season. It's tart, sweet and ideal for a crowd.

## Cranberry Agua Fresca

**1 bag fresh or frozen cranberries (12 ounces), plus more to garnish**
**10 cups water**
**1½ cups sugar**
**Juice of 1 lime**
**Lime slices, to garnish**

**COOK'S TIP** The agua fresca can be made up to two days in advance and stored in the fridge. Stir before serving.

**1.** To a stockpot, add cranberries, water and sugar. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer on low until all cranberries have popped and softened and all sugar is dissolved, about 10 minutes.

**2.** Remove from heat and allow to cool. In batches, add cranberries and liquid to a blender and blend until smooth.

**3.** Strain into a punch bowl or pitcher. Stir in lime juice, add ice, and garnish with additional cranberries and lime slices as desired.

SERVES 10

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for a Cranberry Mezcal Paloma.

## Cranberry Pecan Cornbread Muffins

NANCY DENNIS
BARTLETT EC

These corn muffins, warm from the oven and buttered, are heavenly! The combination of cornmeal, cranberries and pecans works for your Thanksgiving, Christmas or brunch table. The key to this recipe is to not overmix. I enjoyed these tender muffins with a cup of coffee and served the rest with dinner.

**1 cup cornmeal**
**1 cup flour**
**1 teaspoon baking powder**
**½ teaspoon baking soda**
**¼ teaspoon salt**
**½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted and slightly cooled**
**2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
**⅓ cup light brown sugar**
**2 large eggs, room temperature**
**1 cup buttermilk, room temperature**
**⅓ cup dried sweetened cranberries**
**⅓ cup chopped pecans**

**1.** Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line a 12-count muffin pan with liners or coat with cooking spray.

**2.** In a large bowl, whisk together cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

**3.** In a medium bowl, whisk together butter, oil and brown sugar until completely smooth. Whisk in eggs and buttermilk until combined.

**4.** Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and whisk until combined. Fold in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

$500 WINNER

## Cranberry Nut Pie

BONNIE KOLIBA
FARMERS EC

Koliba buys an extra bag of fresh cranberries when they're in season. She freezes them just to make this pie throughout the year, and I'll be doing the same. I absolutely loved this pie for its ease and sweet and tart flavors. It's a recipe you'll get to know well.

**2 cups fresh cranberries**
**½ cup chopped walnuts**
**1½ cups sugar, divided use**
**1 cup flour, sifted**
**2 eggs, lightly beaten**
**¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, melted**
**2 teaspoons almond extract**
**Sweetened whipped cream, for serving**

**1.** Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat a 10-inch pie dish with cooking spray.

**2.** In a large bowl, combine cranberries, walnuts and ½ cup sugar. Spread into prepared pie dish.

**3.** In the same bowl, combine the remaining 1 cup sugar, flour, eggs, butter and almond extract. Stir well. The batter will be thick. Spoon batter over cranberry mixture in pie dish.

**4.** Bake 40–50 minutes. Allow to cool completely on a wire rack and serve with whipped cream.

SERVES 6

### TCP *$500 Recipe Contest*

**MAC AND CHEESE** DUE NOV 10
What makes your ooey-gooey noodle dishes stand out from the crowd? Enter our contest. The best from Co-op Country will be featured in April, and the winner gets a load of cheddar: $500.
**UPCOMING: SALSA** DUE DEC 10

ENTER ONLINE

RECIPE PHOTOS: JASON DAVID PAGE. WINNER PHOTO: COURTESY BONNIE KOLIBA

cranberries and pecans just until combined; avoid overmixing.

**5.** Spoon batter into muffin pan, filling each cup all the way to the top. Bake 5 minutes, then reduce heat to 350 degrees. Continue baking another 10–15 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

**6.** Allow to cool in pan 5 minutes before serving. Store leftovers up to 1 week in an airtight container at room temperature or in the fridge. Leftovers can also be stored frozen up to 3 months.

MAKES 1 DOZEN MUFFINS

## Cranberry Kuchen

SHELLEY FAHRENTHOLD
SAN BERNARD EC

This hearty, tart and comforting *kuchen*, German for cake, is meant to be enjoyed with a steaming cup of coffee. The batter is fairly thick, so be sure to grease your pan well. Fresh or frozen cranberries can

be used. Serve warm with a scoop of ice cream for a delightful fall treat.

CAKE

**¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, room temperature**
**1 cup sugar**
**1 egg, lightly beaten**
**½ cup plus 2 tablespoons milk**
**2 cups flour**
**1 teaspoon baking powder**
**½ teaspoon salt**
**2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries**

TOPPING

**½ cup sugar**
**1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
**¼ cup flour**
**¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, room temperature**

**1.** CAKE Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat an 8-by-8-inch pan with cooking spray.

**2.** In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar. Stir in egg and milk. Slowly stir in flour, baking powder and salt. The batter will be stiff.

**3.** Fold in cranberries. Spread batter into prepared pan.

**4.** TOPPING In a bowl, mix sugar, cinnamon, flour and butter with a fork until crumbly.

**5.** Sprinkle topping evenly over batter. Bake 30–40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 8


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COURTESY CHET GARNER

# How To Defeat a Creek

Rusk's historic footbridge is the longest of its kind in the U.S.

BY CHET GARNER

**THERE ARE MANY** enormous bridges in Texas built to carry trains, trucks and oversized loads of every kind. Then there's the historic Rusk Footbridge, a narrow wooden walkway stretching 546 feet and built for something much humbler: helping folks get to town without getting their boots wet.

But what this East Texas marvel lacks in load bearing, it makes up for in length by being the longest wooden footbridge in the U.S. As soon as I heard about it, I had to cross it.

The bridge reaches far beneath a canopy of shade trees in Rusk, just off the Cherokee County Square and across a tributary to One Eye Creek, which must have its own interesting history. With every step, the span emanated a satisfying old-wood creak, the kind that makes you instinctively walk lighter, as if the bridge can feel your weight (and your thoughts).

The bridge was originally built in 1861 because residents on the east side of the creek were frequently cut off from life on the square every time it rained. Most Texans know the phrase "the good Lord willing and the creek don't rise" because every time the creek rose, they were at its mercy. But with this footbridge, they mastered the perils of nature.

Crossing the bridge today isn't exactly an adrenaline sport, although 546 feet is longer than I expected. And reaching the other side doesn't really take visitors anywhere of note, leaving everyone to simply turn around and hike back. But that's the charm.

It's not height or horsepower, it's longevity and the fact that this bridge has been carrying East Texans since the Civil War. By the time I reached the other side, I felt like I'd crossed more than a creek bottom. I'd crossed into the everyday history that holds small towns together, one plank at a time.

ABOVE Chet knew he had to walk across the 546-foot Rusk Footbridge soon as he heard about it.

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

## *Know Before You Go*

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

## NOVEMBER

### 7

**Hillsboro Municipal Airport—Open House/Fly-In,** (254) 337-7051, hillsborotx.org

**Pipe Creek Turkey Shoot,** (830) 535-6611, castlelakeranchvfd.org

### 12

**Goldthwaite *The Stones Are Speaking* Film Screening and Talk by Director Olive Talley,** (325) 648-2750, legacyplaza.org

### 14

**Grapevine Candlelight Tour of Homes,** (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

**Mason Mason County Wild Game Dinner,** (325) 347-5758, masontx.org

**Smithville Smithville Garden Club Tour of Homes,** (512) 237-2313, facebook.com/smithvillegardenclub

### 19

**Corsicana Tree Lighting,** (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

**Denton Homeless Veteran Stand Down,** (817) 255-7150, bit.ly/veteranstanddown

**Brackettville [21–Jan. 3] Legends at Las Moras,** (210) 863-2355, legendsatlasmoras.com

### 21

**Bluff Dale The Front Porch Christmas Market,** (817) 946-0141, facebook.com/thefrontporchbluffdale

**Henderson A Very Merry Market,** (903) 521-3992, thechurchatlakecherokee.com

**Kerrville** **Holiday Lighted Parade,** (830) 257-7300, kerrvilletx.gov

**Luling** **Candy Land—Christmas Arts & Crafts Show,** (830) 875-0123, lulingcc.org

**Grapevine** **[21–22] North Central Ballet Presents *Nutcracker—Short and Sweet,*** (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

22 **Giddings** **Sip & Shop Christmas Market,** (979) 542-3455, giddingstx.com

27 **Fort Worth** **[27–28] Home for the Holidays,** (817) 665-6000, fwsymphony.org

28 **Mason** **Light Up Our Town—A Hometown Christmas,** (325) 347-5758, business.masontx.org

29 **Mineola** **Toys for Tots Dance,** (972) 979-2672, etsrda.com

## DECEMBER

5 **Bertram** **Country Christmas,** (512) 882-2992, bertramchamber.com

**Castroville** **Candlelight Home Tour,** (830) 708-5680, castrovilleconservationsociety.org

**Fairfield** **Christmas on the Square and Parade,** (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

### TCP *Submit Your Event*

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

## Hit the Road

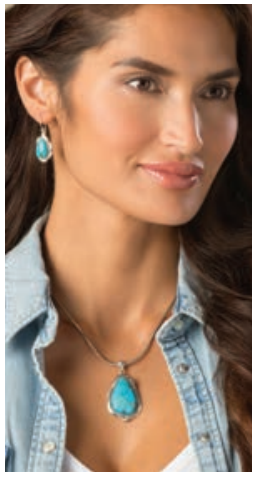
### Event Calendar

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

TCP *Plan now*

**TexasCoopPower.com/events**

# Sacred Stone of the Southwest is on the Brink of Extinction



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

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

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our ***Sedona Turquoise Collection***. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork.

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# Ride the Rails

All aboard! Not to derail the conversation, but these Texans love to blow off steam by riding the rails. Let's get back on track. Have your tickets ready; this train's leaving the station.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

**1** BOB NORRIS
PEDERNALES EC
A freight train crosses New Mexico.

**2** STEFAN GREENE
HEART OF TEXAS EC
"Departure from San Antonio as the train is backed up for its return to McGregor."

**3** ANN ANTHONY
MIDSOUTH EC
"When my grandson, Buchanan Anthony, was 3 years old, he enjoyed his first train ride on the Texas State Railroad in Rusk."

**4** JOHN MCLAIN
TRINITY VALLEY EC
"Union Pacific's Big Boy No. 4014 makes its way west in East Texas."

## *Upcoming Contests*

**IN THE GARDEN** DUE NOV 10
**COUNTRY CHURCHES** DUE DEC 10
**REPETITION** DUE JAN 10

ENTER ONLINE

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Ride the Rails photos from readers.

# Navigating Turbulence

It only takes one person to ease life's baggage when all seems lost

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE MOLLON

**THE AIRPORT CONCOURSE** stretched ahead for what seemed like miles. Everywhere, throngs of strangers scurried like ants, oblivious to me and our fellow travelers. Most stared at their phones.

After a long walk, I arrived at Gate 81 and leaned against a column to catch my breath. And people watch.

Near the waiting area, four men stood in a circle, chatting and laughing. Over in a seat, an older man scribbled in a notebook. A few chairs away, a slim woman wearing glasses charged her phone. Across from her, a little girl played on a phone while her weary mother stared into space.

A young woman hurrying past caught my eye. Strapped to her chest was a baby, swaddled tightly. As I discreetly watched, the mother strode over to an airline agent. They talked briefly, then the young mother burst into tears. So did the baby.

"This airport is horrible!" she wailed. "What am I going to do?"

My heart sank as her cries turned into gut-wrenching sobs. She had missed her flight.

Tears streamed down her face, and fear shone in her eyes. "Oh, that poor, poor woman," I thought.

Seconds later, the slender woman I'd noticed before leaped up from her chair, left her belongings behind and beelined for the mother. Without hesitation, she wrapped her arms around her in a fierce hug and held the young woman as she continued to cry. Then the woman cupped the mother's face in her hands and looked into her eyes. "It's going to be OK," the woman said calmly. "It's going to be *O-K*."

Soon a second woman hurried up and embraced the mother too. Another woman appeared and put some bills in the mother's hand. "This isn't much, but it's all I have," she said. "I hope it helps."

More and more women stepped up, each gifting their own salves of cash. It was if they were draping a communal blanket of love, warmth and protection.

Teary-eyed and deeply touched, I stood there, wanting to help, yet a little afraid and unsure of what to do. "You know what to do," a small voice told me.

Digging into my purse, I pulled out a white bank envelope with one last $20 bill folded inside. I walked over to the mother and tucked my envelope into her hand, which by then clutched a fistful of bills. "Here," I said, "you can use this envelope for your money." I gave her a quick hug and then hurried to board my plane.

On the flight, I searched for the slender woman but couldn't find her. To this day, I'll always wish I could have thanked her for her brave act of compassion.

That morning in a busy airport, she empowered one young mother with hope. And she showed strangers like me how kindness can ripple out and impact the world in the best kind of way. ■

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### The 2026-P Morgan Silver Dollar Reverse Proof

Struck in 2026 especially for America's 250th anniversary this Morgan features the classic Liberty and eagle designs collectors know and love, enhanced with a stunning Reverse Proof finish. What exactly is Reverse Proof? Think of it as the Morgan design turned inside out. Instead of the traditional mirror-like background with frosted details, the fields appear frosted while Liberty, the eagle and other design elements shine with brilliant, mirror-like surfaces. The result is dramatic contrast that makes this historic design practically jump off the coin.

### Two Firsts for America's 250th

For the first time, the Morgan Dollar bears a special 1776 – 2026 dual date commemorating the Semiquincentennial. It also carries a one-year-only "Liberty Bell 250" privy mark, adding another unmistakable connection to this once-in-a-generation American celebration. Each coin was struck at the U.S. Mint's historic Philadelphia facility, the nation's "Mother Mint," using carefully prepared planchets, polished dies, and multiple strikes to achieve its distinctive Reverse Proof appearance.

### The Morgan Design You Know in 99.9% Silver

Look closely and you'll find the familiar artistry that made the Morgan legendary: Liberty wearing her cap, floral crown, and "LIBERTY" inscription, surrounded by 13 stars and the classic mottoes. Turn it over and the majestic eagle returns with wings spread clutching arrows and an olive branch. The difference? This modern Morgan is struck in highly pure 99.9% fine silver, giving collectors a contemporary interpretation of one of America's most recognizable silver dollar designs.

### Only 250,000 Authorized

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If you're a longtime Morgan collector, a silver enthusiast or simply appreciate owning tangible pieces of American history, the 2026-P Morgan Silver Dollar Reverse Proof deserves a place in your collection. Supplies are extremely limited. Reserve yours before this modern Morgan becomes one you wish you hadn't missed.

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