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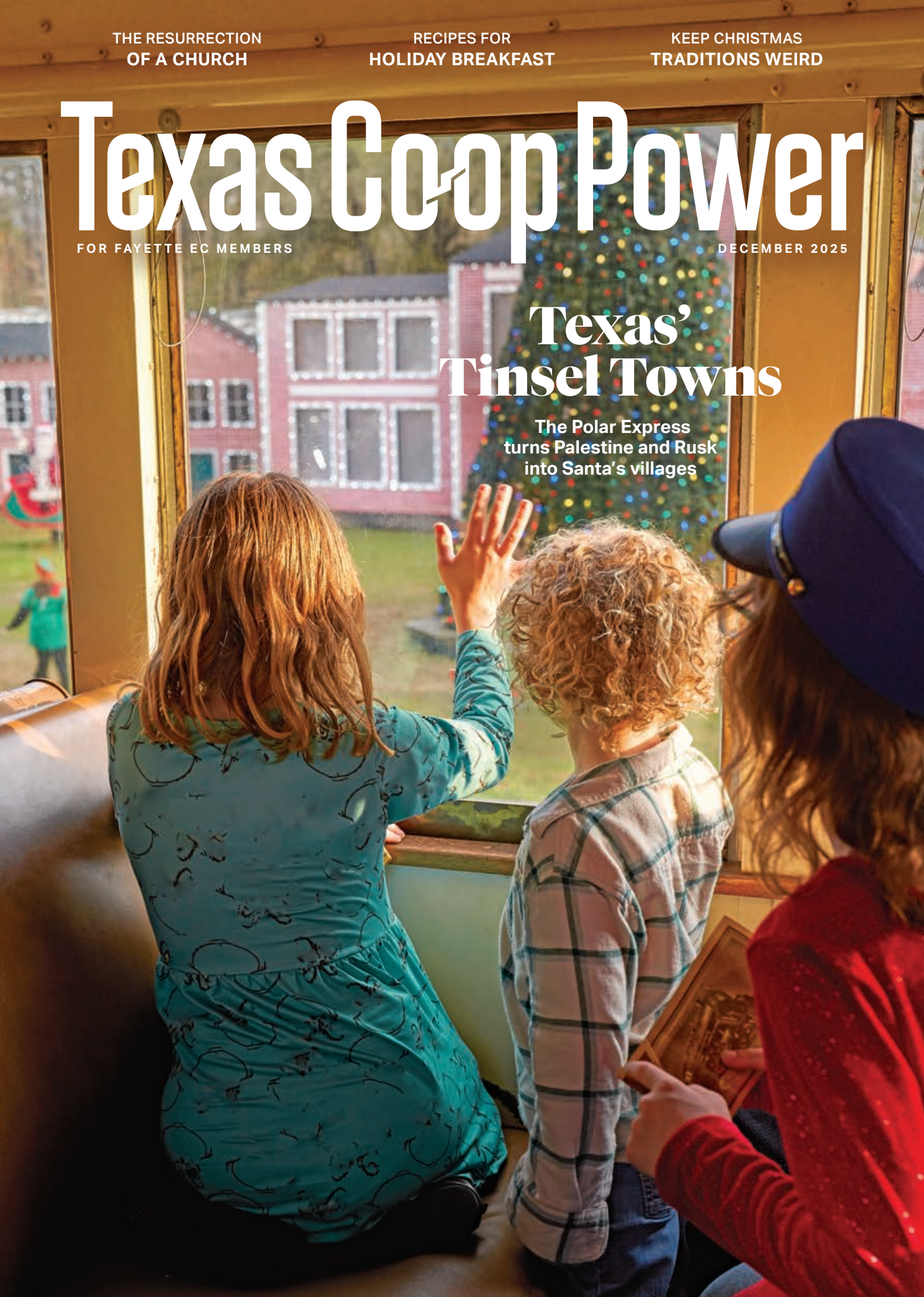
# Texas Coop Power

FOR FAYETTE EC MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2025

## Texas' Tinsel Towns

The Polar Express  
turns Palestine and Rusk  
into Santa's villages







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# December 2025



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Polar Express trains take riders on a magical journey from East Texas to the North Pole.

By Jan Adamson  
Photos by Dave Shafer

## The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition.

By Eileen Mattei  
Photos by Erich Schlegel

ON THE COVER  
From left, Remy and Rendon Unger and Kynlee Kampen hope to catch Santa's attention—for all the right reasons.  
Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE  
Friends of the Ruidosa Church carry out their rebuilding mission along the Rio Grande.  
Photo by Erich Schlegel

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# Live, From Austin ...



Lorne Michaels, from left, watches a sketch rehearsal featuring Madeline Kahn, Will Ferrell and Cheri Oteri.

**THE LEGACY OF LORNE MICHAELS**, best known as the creator and producer of the long-running TV show *Saturday Night Live*, is the focus of an exhibit at the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center in Austin.

On display are scripts, production notes, props and costumes from the iconic show that has changed pop culture since it went on the air in October 1975.

*Live from New York: The Lorne Michaels Collection* runs through March 20, 2026. Admission is free.



## For Heaven's Sake

The Hail Mary pass unofficially turns 50 this month, though the Notre Dame football team referred to desperation plays as Hail Marys as early as 1922.

But Roger Staubach's 45-yard heave that fell into the hands of receiver Drew Pearson for the Dallas Cowboys' game-winning touchdown over the Minnesota Vikings in the 1975 NFL playoffs made the name of a Catholic prayer into a signature play.

As Staubach, left, explained, "They asked me, 'What were you thinking about when you threw the ball?' I said, 'When I closed my eyes, I said a Hail Mary.'"

## TCP Contests and More

### \$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Mom's Favorites

### FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Gates

### RECOMMENDED READING

We think of Santa as bearing gifts. But do you know about the time he was naughty? Read *Naughty Santa* from December 2014 at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).



ENTER ONLINE

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Dear Santa,  
I would like ...

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

Here are some responses to our October prompt: **The best food I've ever had at a fair is ...**

Frito pie served in a chip bag, as God intended.

ROBIN THOMPSON PERRY  
VIA FACEBOOK

Fletcher's corny dog, State Fair of Texas—1953, 14 years old and new to Texas.

CAROL MERCER  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC  
FAIRVIEW

A burger between a split Krispy Kreme doughnut for the bun at the State Fair of Texas. Weirdly good.

KATHY WHITBY  
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC  
FLINT

Smoked turkey leg, Shakespearean festival, July 2021, Kalispell, Montana.

TED HENDRIX  
VIA FACEBOOK

Funnel cakes drizzled with chocolate sauce, topped with fresh strawberries and lots of whipped cream.

JANICE EHLERS  
GVEC  
SEGUIN

Gumbo at a seafood festival in south Louisiana.

WALT HUDSON  
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

## Catching Up With a Friend

“We just returned after five months outside of Texas, and I’m catching up on your magazine. Interesting stories: the missile silos, goats, flour, Frisbees and grapes.”

J. BAILEY  
BANDERA EC  
UTOPIA



ERICH SCHLEGEL

## Two Bits and a Bag of Chips

From 1956 to 1960, I worked at the G.F. Wacker variety store in Levelland [It's in the Bag, September 2025]. The Fritos chili pie was sold daily—with a Coke and candy bar, all for about 25 cents.

Genie Ballew  
Lamb County EC  
Levelland

## A State for Horses

I moved to Texas thinking it was a state for horses but was astonished to learn there are few places to ride but the roads and private property [Mounts in the Hills, September 2025]. In Washington I helped pack families and hunters into the Cascade wilderness, where we could ride for weeks.

While I admire the Texas Equestrian Trail Riders Association for all its work, I think our state forest service should support trail riders as other states have done, for example the rails-to-trails

projects in which the state pays to convert old railroad tracks into riding trails.

Loretta Bedford  
Deep East Texas EC  
San Augustine

I hope the article results in increased membership in TETRA since they do such awesome and necessary work. I'm not a horse rider, but I can appreciate the importance of maintaining equestrian trails to help keep people in contact with nature.

Elena Rivera  
Pedernales EC  
Austin

## Nature Erases

I did not know the story of the ghost town Eagle Springs [Ebb and Flow, September 2025]. The simple beauty of Martha Deering's final paragraph—"evening breeze shivers" and "whispering of voices"—took my breath away. Nature erases, and it reclaims.

Mark Troth  
Bluebonnet EC  
Chappell Hill



DAVE SHAEFER

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

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Austin, TX 78701

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

Texas Co-op Power

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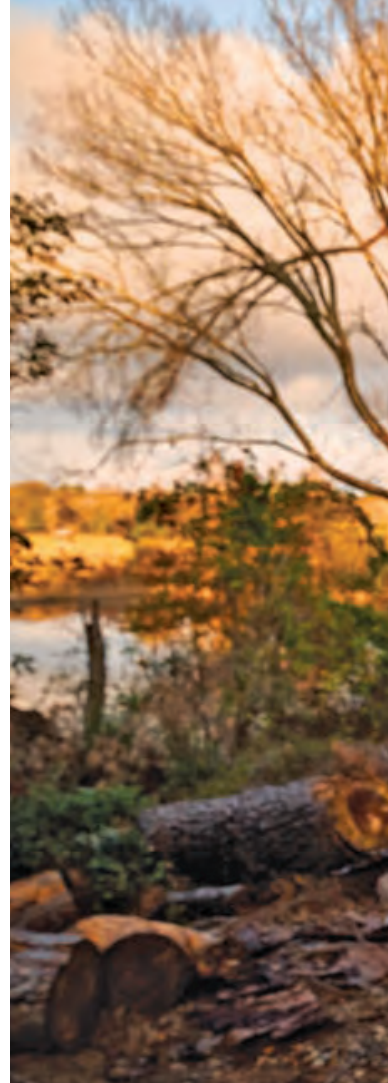




BY JAN ADAMSON • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

# *The More, the Merrier*

Polar Express trains take riders on a magical  
journey from East Texas to the North Pole







## *Shhh. Listen.*

It's a train whistle—low and long and lonely and romantic. It's a sound that for 150 years has permeated the Pineywoods town of Palestine.

But the whistle heard December 31, 1969, was thought to be the last. That day, Texas South-Eastern Railroad engine No. 22, a 70-ton diesel-electric locomotive, pulled into the station for the last time—the end of a century of regular freight and passenger service in Palestine.

But listen closely today along the 25-mile track between Palestine and Rusk, to the east, and you'll hear plenty of whistles and maybe even singing, laughter and bells. If you catch a glimpse into a passing train car, you'll see families in matching pajamas, dancing chefs and trays full of hot chocolate.

LEFT Santa doesn't always travel by sleigh—especially when he's in Texas.

ABOVE Remy and Rendon Unger take in the countryside on the way to the North Pole.

Ever since the Palestine-Rusk line reopened as a tourist railway called the Texas State Railroad on June 25, 1976, it has been building a corps of believers. Tens of thousands of them turn out each holiday season for the service's wildly popular Polar Express trips based on the film released in 2004 and the 1985 book by Chris Van Allsburg.

"With the popularity of the film, the Polar Express Train Ride has just grown and grown," says Amy Parady, president of the Texas State Railroad, which launched round-trip Christmas-themed excursions 20 years ago. "Many have made a tradition out of the event, so they come every year."

Like the Corley family from Magnolia.

"We meet new people and sit with different families," Kevin Corley says. "It's very interactive. We've never had a bad experience."

Long before it whisked families to the "North Pole," Palestine began its golden age after the Civil War when the International Railroad and the Houston and Great Northern Railroad opened a route between Hearne and Palestine. The transport of goods and passengers resulted in great wealth, allowing merchants and railroad executives to build massive mansions, especially in Palestine.

In 1881, when a prison was built in Rusk, the line was extended to the east. Shortly thereafter, the Palestine car shop was built to modify and repair freight cars. In 1971, not long after shipments of logging and mining equipment and passengers ceased, local banker Jack R. Stone, a member of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, and Rusk Mayor Emmett H. Whitehead led a campaign to reopen the railroad as a tourist attraction, and the Texas State Railroad was born.

A \$3 million appropriation went into refurbishing the rails, and Rusk and Palestine built support facilities such as campsites before the two depots were built. The line has been operated by private companies since 2007.

About half of the passenger cars are commuter coaches built in 1923 for other railroads; they're pulled by an assortment of vintage diesel- and steam-powered locomotives.

The railroad hosts a variety of excursions throughout the year. There's Rockin' the Rails, in which passengers attend a concert; the Rusk Turntable Run, which makes use of the 130-year-old, compressed air-powered railcar turntable in Maydelle; and Mother's Day and Father's Day trips. There are autumn- and Halloween-themed trains, dinner excursions, and trips that celebrate local beer and wine.





OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Kynlee Kampen with her silver sleigh bell. The Polar Express departs from the Palestine depot.

RIGHT Engine 30, at 100 years old, comes to life in the early morning before a day's excursions.

But far and away the most popular themed ride is the Polar Express.

"We always have multiple [marriage] proposals and engagements during every season, which is always special," Parady says. "We have had grown individuals who have never seen Santa before, and just to watch the grandparents and parents see the joy in the eyes of the children creates magic every year."

The cars are festooned inside with greenery and twinkling lights, and outside, along the route to the North Pole—did you know it's in Rusk?—Christmas decorations whiz past the windows.

Passengers are encouraged to bring a copy of the book or buy one at the depot, and once aboard, they're served hot chocolate and cookies by dancing chefs who act out various scenes. On arrival at the North Pole, passengers are greeted by Santa and his elves, who bestow the first gift of Christmas: a silver sleigh bell that can only be heard by believers. The chefs lead passengers in Christmas carols on the return trip.

But the experience changes each year. Employees gather to discuss and workshop new ideas and improvements.

An adults-only railcar has club chairs. There's an open-air car with bench seats, an observation dome car, and another with tables and sofas. There's even a car that can be booked for private parties. The cars have the feel of a long-ago time because of the original fixtures retained throughout.

It all makes for a special experience.

"We have a family that started coming the first year we did the Polar Express train ride, and their son was 4 years old," Parady says. "They have never missed a year, and now their son is 22 years old."

Logistically, Polar Express season requires careful orchestration. Within a six-week time frame in November and December, there are typically 105–110 round trips with as many as five trains running a day for 60,000–70,000 passengers. Reservations open in July at [texasstaterailroad.net](http://texasstaterailroad.net).

"We hire typically 150 additional team members just for our Polar season," Parady says. "It is quite a feat pulling this event off with the ridership we have in such a short time frame."

Performers on the Polar Express have a reputation for the joy and professionalism they bring to the job, making it no wonder that passengers return year after year—and get into the spirit.

"About 95% of our visitors always arrive in matching pajamas," Parady says. "We have had people plan their family



## On the Rails

The Texas State Railroad is a movie star, having been featured in more than 35 films, TV series, documentaries and commercials. Most recently, the train and the Palestine depot were part of the first episode of *1883*, the prequel to the *Yellowstone* series. The railroad also starred in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; *American Outlaws*; *The Great Debaters*; and *The Gambler Returns: The Luck of the Draw*.

reunions around our event. We have multigenerational attendees, meaning great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children all attending together. Families have become extremely creative with their attire, and many customize their pajamas or even make their own."

The Corley family has made the Polar Express a tradition. Kelly and Kevin Corley and their children, Piper and Carter, have been attending since 2015. "We read the book and watch the film," Kelly says. "It's such a joy to watch the kids' faces light up when they see the story play out in real life."

The Corleys prefer to take a late afternoon excursion so they can experience the sounds and smoke from the train during the daylight, and then, in the evening, they get to see the glowing Christmas lights and decorations on the return trip.

The family has dedicated a whole shelf in their home to train memorabilia. It's filled with cocoa mugs, golden train tickets and more than 20 silver bells.

"We pick out new pajamas every year," Carter says. "Me and Dad match, and Piper and Mom match."

That's an East Texas treasure worth believing in. Shhh. Just listen. ■







# The Dirt Church Down a Dirt Road

BY EILEEN MATTEI • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

## While a community rebuilds a historic West Texas church, it learns an ancient tradition

IT'S A BREEZY, overcast 80-degree day in Marfa as a dozen or so volunteers rotate jobs in a brick-making assembly line.

Billy Joe Moore, 12, has the hardest job. He hoists small buckets of clay, sand, straw and water into a gas-powered mixer, like those used for concrete. His mother, Erin Moore, says the homeschooling, beekeeping family from Fort Davis is here to learn about adobe-making by doing it, getting into it.

It's also for a great cause: These bricks will be used in the restoration of a historic church in a remote outpost, turning a former Catholic house of worship into a community center.

"It's so neat to hear about the history of the church and the culture of the region," Erin says. "Who wouldn't want to get involved in this?"

In the ghost town of Ruidosa, 90 minutes southwest of Marfa in far West Texas, the adobe El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús (Sacred Heart of Jesus Church) is awaiting resurrection.

Completed in 1916, the church fell victim to blowing sand and rain that wore away the adobe before and after the droughts of the 1950s dried up the Rio Grande and the small agricultural community. By 1960, the church and town had been abandoned.

Native salts eroded the foundation. Huia-che branches battered the northeast tower. Attempts to restore the church, which claims the largest traditional adobe arches in Texas, faltered until the nonprofit Friends of the Ruidosa Church acquired the title to the Texas Historic Landmark from Presidio County after it was given the deed from the Diocese of El Paso in 2019.

With ownership, the Friends began work to preserve as much of the original adobe as

possible, to restore structural strength and to repair the damage done over 110 years. That meant making sun-dried adobe blocks—thousands of them, one at a time, starting in 2021.

For more than 10,000 years, adobe has been used as a building material, favored because its high thermal mass absorbs heat during the day and releases it at night.

"In recent generations, adobe-making skills have been lost, since the knowledge is rarely written down," says Joey Benton. His Marfa design and restoration company, Silla, has completed restorations of adobe buildings at Fort Davis National Historic Site and Big Bend National Park.

During the Friends' May Adobe Day, kneeling men and women scoop Billy Joe's fresh adobe mix from tilted wheelbarrows with their bare hands and tamp it into wood forms.

OPPOSITE El Corazón Sagrado de la Iglesia de Jesús in the ghost town of Ruidosa on a September night.

BELOW From left, Terry Bishop, Martin Rivas and Claudio Nuñez load new adobe bricks onto pallets during a Friends of the Ruidosa Church workday.





"You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."



Others lift the forms off the freshly minted 10-by-18-by-3.5-inch blocks. They rinse off the forms in a large water trough and place them on black tarps, ready for the next batch.

The adobe blocks dry for a month in the sun, turned periodically like sunbathers so all

surfaces get exposed. Then the bricks are stacked and set aside. They'll eventually be used to rebuild the bell tower over the church's entrance.

"It's all about community, participating in a traditional activity," says Mike Green, a retired architect and chair of the Friends of the Ruidosa Church. "You see big smiles on their faces. That's their inner child connecting with making mud pies, getting on their hands and knees, and shaping adobe by hand."

"People long for authenticity in their lives and something visible to show at the end of a day of hard work. Adobe-making gives us a deep feeling of achievement."

Hilary Raney, a Marfa resident, mud enthusiast and gardener, spent her third Adobe Day, a mostly monthly event, providing a helping hand and moral support.

"I see new faces every time," she says. "Last month a man in his 80s, whose parents got married in the church, came to Adobe Day. He was so happy to see what we were doing."

Adobe-makers come from El Paso, Houston, New Mexico and, like Steve McKeon, from Oregon. After McKeon opened a restaurant and bar in Marfa, he decided to help make bricks. "Working bubbles out of a block by hand gives you a sense of accomplishment," he says.

The Friends pays the bills for the church, power for which is provided by Rio Grande Electric Cooperative. Co-op power keeps the mortar mixer turning and the diamond saw spinning as it cuts adobe into segments.

Funds from the nonprofit's Community Day fundraiser every November in Ruidosa help pay to transport blocks to the remote site and to bring in masonry specialists to install them. Grants from the Texas Historical Commission and the Summerlee Foundation cover the costs of a historic structure report that guides its preservation.

Conversations with earthen-structure professionals, architects and archaeologists set the stage for the site work.





OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A Friends of the Ruidosa Church work crew. Bishop carries a fresh brick.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT “The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques,” says retired architect Mike Green, who is leading the restoration. A view from the top of a hill looking south toward Mexico over the old church.

In 2023, Benton and his skilled crew began critical structural repairs to the church. They stabilized the foundation and installed scaffolding and support frames. They straightened a wall and saved the northeast tower from collapse by repairing adobe blocks and inserting new volunteer-made bricks as needed. In some areas the exterior was so worn that light was visible through the mortar joints.

Green praises Benton and archaeologist David Keller for their contributions to the preservation and restoration efforts.

“The earthen-structure community has no secrets or hidden techniques,” Green says. “We’re on the same journey: trying to restore and save adobes of the Southwest.”

Free for the asking, the adobe recipe mixes clay, sand, silt, chopped straw and water in proportions determined by the soil used. Clay comprises 15%–30% of the mix, acting as the binder, similar to cement’s role in concrete. The majority of the mix is sand and aggregate. Straw allows the adobe to dry more evenly by letting water get out of the block. The mortar



has the same mix as the block but with finer aggregate.

This classic frontier Catholic church, with its substantial bell towers, is a time capsule for the community, says Keller, who is a Friends co-founder and preservation specialist. The church is unique in that the exterior was never plastered—rare for adobe structures, even in arid climates.

Nevertheless, while the church is being restored with historical accuracy, “the integrity of the structure and preservation guidance trumps absolute historical fidelity,” Keller says. So the exterior will be plastered to keep it from deteriorating like it did over the last 100 years. The interior, originally plastered and whitewashed, will be restored to that state.

Green hopes the bell will be restored to the entrance tower next year. In three years, he foresees the restored church telling the rich history of the area as a community center for residents of Brewster and Presidio counties as well as Ojinaga, across the Rio Grande.

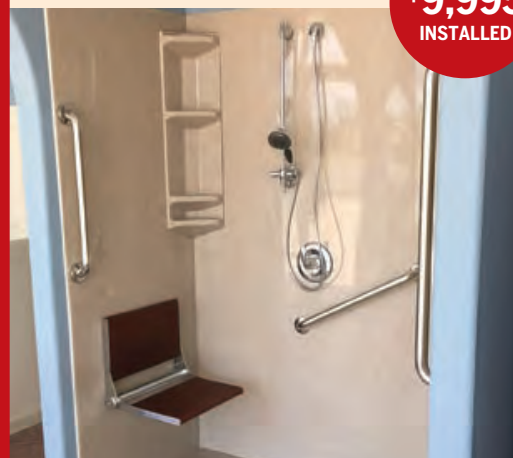
Hands molding clay into architecture have built their own adobe-loving community. At the same time, they have helped restore the heart of a last-century community down a dirt road along the river.

As Green drove around the area over the years, the building often caught his eye. Eventually, his passion for architecture and history prompted him to try to save the old church. Now, the restoration work goes beyond saving the physical structure.

“The church at Ruidosa is the most peaceful place I know,” Green says. “It is so remote, so quiet, so serene. It feels like good spirits are in the air.” ■



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- Bracelet: Fits wrists to 7  $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Earrings: 1 ctw with post backs

**Love Wins Tennis Bracelet (10  $\frac{3}{4}$  ctw) ~~\$399~~ \$39\* + S&P  
FREE stud earrings (1 ctw) with your purchase of the Love Wins Bracelet — a \$99 value!**

\*Special price only for customers using the offer code.

**1-800-333-2045**

**Your Offer Code: LWB367-02**



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MESSAGE  
FROM  
GENERAL  
MANAGER

DOUG  
LAMBERT

## The Season of Giving: Fayette Strong

**WITH THE HOLIDAY SEASON** upon us and cheer in the air, we're reminded that this truly is the season of giving. It's a time for gratitude, generosity and looking out for one another—and at Fayette Electric Cooperative, that's something we live by all year long.

You've likely heard us talk about Concern for Community. It's not just a slogan—it's a core principle that sets electric cooperatives like ours apart. We're not just here to keep the lights on (though we're always working hard to do that). We're here to make life better for the people we serve—our members, neighbors and friends across our service area.

Over the years, we've faced challenges together, and every time, our co-op family has stepped up. Whether it's lending a hand after a storm, supporting local nonprofits, or helping a neighbor in need, the spirit of generosity runs deep in our community—especially during the holidays.

At Fayette EC, we believe that supporting the communities we serve goes beyond providing reliable electricity—it's about showing up, lending a hand and making a difference. That's why our board of directors approved a volunteer time off policy, allowing each FEC employee to take up to eight hours of paid time annually to volunteer during the workday.

Whether it's helping at a local food pantry, mentoring students or assisting with community events, this policy reflects our deep-rooted belief that giving back is part of who we are. It's one more way we live out our commitment to Concern for Commu-

nity—not just during the holidays but all year long.

We're also proud to invest in our youth through programs like the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, when we send some of our brightest students to Washington, D.C., to experience democracy in action and dream big about their futures. That's giving in a powerful way—by nurturing tomorrow's leaders.

And because safety is a top priority, our team regularly visits schools and community events to teach folks of all ages how to stay safe around electricity. We believe knowledge is a gift—and we're honored to share it.

You'll also find our employees out in the community beyond work—coaching youth sports, volunteering at local events, serving on nonprofit boards and partnering with other organizations to keep our local economy strong. Because when you're part of a co-op, giving back isn't a requirement—it's just what you do.

We also understand that the holidays can be tough for some. If you need advice on saving energy, want to explore payment options or simply have questions—please don't hesitate to reach out. We're here for you.

At Fayette EC, Concern for Community isn't just a value—it's the heart of who we are. And during this season of giving, we're especially grateful to be part of such a caring, generous community.

All of us at Fayette EC wish you and your loved ones a joyful, safe and bright holiday season. ■



VLADIMIR VLADIMIROV | ISTOCK.COM





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## Restock Your Winter Emergency Kit

**WINTER STORMS CAN** cut power quickly despite the best efforts of your crews at Fayette Electric Cooperative. An emergency kit can reduce stress and keep your household safe until power is restored. It's a good idea to have one at the ready, and if you already keep one on hand, check it to replenish or update supplies.

### **Include these essentials in a weather-resistant bin:**

- ▶ Flashlights or headlamps for each person, plus extra batteries
- ▶ Portable phone chargers, a car charger and at least one fully charged power bank
- ▶ Extra blankets, warm clothing, hats and gloves stored together for quick access
- ▶ Three days of nonperishable food and bottled water, a manual can opener, and some ready-to-eat meals
- ▶ A first aid kit, essential prescription medicines and copies of critical medical information
- ▶ A battery-powered radio, whistle and small fire extinguisher

Also, if the power goes out in your home, keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to protect your food. Turn off or unplug electronics to avoid damage from surges when power returns. If you run a generator, keep it outdoors and well away from windows, vents and the garage.

Next, think about heat and pipes. Open cabinet doors under sinks to allow warm air to circulate around exposed plumbing. If a pipe freezes, use a hair dryer or warm towels—never an open flame—to thaw it.

Finally, plan for your family's medical needs. If someone relies on a powered medical device, call your co-op in advance to learn about backup power options and restoration priority. Share your plan with a neighbor or family member who can check in during a storm.

Review and refresh your kit twice a year. Replace expired food and medicine, recharge power banks and check batteries. Label containers and store them where everyone can reach them in the dark. ■

## Fayette Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

### **CONTACT US**

2111 N. Von Minden Rd.  
P.O. Box 490  
La Grange, TX 78945  
**Local** (979) 968-3181  
**Toll-Free** 1-866-968-3181  
**Email** [electric@fayette.coop](mailto:electric@fayette.coop)  
**Web** [fayette.coop](http://fayette.coop)

### **Your Board of Directors**

Joseph D. Kruppa, President  
Gale Lincke, Vice President  
James A. Anderle, Secretary-Treasurer  
David A. Stancik  
Clayton Wessels  
Scott Schultz  
Jonathan Treptow

**Your General Manager**  
Doug Lambert

For information and to report outages, please contact us.

## 24/7 Outage Hotline Numbers

**LOCAL**  
(979) 968-3181

**TOLL-FREE**  
1-866-968-3181

**TEXT "OUT"**  
1-844-971-1048

### **ABOUT FAYETTE EC**

FEC serves Austin, Bastrop, Colorado, Fayette, Lavaca, Lee and Washington counties.

### **CONVENIENT PAYMENT OPTIONS**

- Pay by Bank Draft
- Pay Online Using SmartHub
- Pay by Phone at 844-971-1048
- Pay in Person
- Pay by Credit Card Draft
- Pay by Mail

### **TEXAS CO-OP POWER**

Fayette EC provides *Texas Co-op Power* and [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com) to give you information about events, safety, special programs and other activities of your cooperative. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact the co-op office.

### **VISIT US ONLINE**

[fayette.coop](http://fayette.coop)





## Give the Gift of Efficiency

**YOU CAN TELL** it's the holiday season when you start seeing twinkling lights of every color, but this year, may all your gifts be green.

Green giving is thoughtful on many levels. The person receiving the gift can enjoy their present without sending the electric bill through the roof. And choosing a green gift can be easy too. Look for energy ratings on large appliances and TVs or select unplugged gifts—think renewable, reusable and recyclable.

Even something as small as packaging and wrapping can make a difference. Think about wrapping your gift in something that can be reused like a fabric bag or scarf to tie things up. Alternatively, reuse paper or ribbons you already have on hand.

Here are some green gadgets that would make great gifts.

**For decorators:** LED Christmas lights (\$15–\$35). These energy-efficient lights use up to 90% less energy than your old incandescent strands and have a significantly longer lifespan. They save on holiday electric bills and stay cool to the touch. For extra pizzazz, get smart light strips, which allow the recipient to choreograph their own light show right from their smartphone.

**For gardeners:** solar garden lights (\$15–\$50). Available in endless colors, styles and sizes, solar garden lights can be a lovely addition to your favorite green thumb's garden. These sun-powered accessories allow gardeners to illuminate their hard work without adding to their electric bill.

**For cooks:** countertop air fryer (\$40 and up). Especially great for the empty nester or those cooking for only one or two, air fryers use significantly less energy than a standard

oven. Great for getting veggies and proteins perfectly crisp, this kitchen addition will let them whip up tons of tasty and healthy dishes.

**For movie buffs or sports fans:** Energy Star-rated TV (prices vary). TVs are getting bigger and better. But before you give something that uses too much energy, look for the Energy Star label. It will offer the smallest impact possible on electric bills.

**For techies:** smart power strip (\$20–\$40). This technology is great for plugging in electronic gadgets. Not your average power strip, smart strips offer designated outlets that make it easy to power down certain devices to save energy while not affecting others plugged into the same strip.

**For homebodies:** electric blanket (\$30–\$80). If you have a friend or loved one who wants to spend the whole winter curled up on their couch, an electric blanket might just be the key to keeping warm while keeping heating costs down. Give the gift of comfort without turning up the thermostat.

**For the constantly connected:** solar cellphone charger (\$50–\$100). Help unplug energy-sucking chargers from the wall; solar chargers can be placed in a window to charge a cellphone anywhere the sun shines—or even clipped onto a backpack on a hike or walk.

While the wealth of modern devices available has undoubtedly brought benefits, the best way to give a green gift can be to look for one that doesn't require a plug at all. A good book, puzzle or board game can be a great gift that creates an opportunity for connection without a screen. ■



# Enjoying Your Christmas Dinner? Thank Your Electric Cooperative

A **SUCCESSFUL CHRISTMAS** celebration depends on steady electricity. It keeps your Christmas ham cold until it's time to pop it in the oven. It's ready when you are to bake pies and heat side dishes. And it keeps your family and visitors warm as you enjoy time together around the decorated tree, while twinkling lights outside make the celebration bright.

Think about how much you rely on electricity to make your holiday special: Refrigeration keeps food and eggnog safe. The oven and range cook the holiday feast. Slow cookers and warmers hold side dishes at serving temperature. Small appliances make prep faster and easier. Lights, fans and chargers keep guests comfortable and connected while the house is busy.

Fayette Electric Cooperative works year-round to maintain service. Crews prune trees, inspect poles and wires, and troubleshoot problems as quickly as possible. Our emergency response team is always on call, even on holidays. When storms cause outages, crews work long shifts to restore service.

**You can help Fayette EC help you by:**

- ▶ Reporting downed wires and staying clear of them
- ▶ Keeping driveways and gates clear so repair trucks can reach equipment
- ▶ Staggering heavy appliance use throughout the day so you don't overload a single circuit or transformer
- ▶ Signing up for outage alerts so you know what's happening and when crews are working

Electric service is part of the comfort and safety of your holiday festivities and decorations. As you give thanks before dinner, add a moment of gratitude for the teams that keep the Christmas lights on. ■



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## Merry Christmas

From Fayette Electric Cooperative

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." —Luke 2:14

Our office will be closed  
December 25–26 and  
January 1 for the holidays.



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## We're Live!

### Explore our Brand-New Website Today



## Connect, Learn and Be Empowered: Introducing Our New Website

FAYETTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE is excited to announce the launch of its brand-new website, designed with you, our valued member, in mind!

We heard your feedback and understand the need for a website that empowers you and simplifies your experience. This redesign is all about putting you at the center, making it easier to find the information and resources you need, connect with staff members, and maximize your membership benefits.

#### So, what's new?

- **Find what you need, fast.** No more endless searching. We've implemented a powerful search engine that allows you to quickly find the information you're looking for, be it membership details, upcoming events or helpful articles.
- **Explore a wealth of knowledge.** Dive into our enhanced resources. The site is brimming with curated articles, calculators and helpful videos to support you in achieving your energy goals.
- **Experience seamless use on any device.** Our website is fully responsive, ensuring a smooth experience whether you're using a desktop, tablet or smartphone.

#### Explore Today

Head over to [fayette.coop](http://fayette.coop) and explore the all-new website. We're confident it will become your go-to resource for everything energy-related.

Don't forget! We're here to support you. If you have any questions or need assistance navigating the new website, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at [electric@fayette.coop](mailto:electric@fayette.coop). ■

## 5 Ways To Keep Cozy

**WHEN YOU'RE FEELING** chilly at home, there are several budget-friendly ways you can stay comfortable without turning up the thermostat.

**Consider an electric blanket instead of turning up the heat.** An electric blanket can deliver quick warmth that a regular throw or blanket can't, and it can include a variety of features, such as timers and dual temperature settings (if your cuddle buddy prefers less heat).

**Try a pair of comfortable wool socks or house slippers to stay toasty.** Our feet play a critical role in regulating body temperature, so when your feet are warm, your body automatically feels warmer.

**Open all curtains, drapes and blinds in your home to let the sunshine in.**

Take advantage of and harness natural warmth on those winter days when the sun is shining.

**Use a humidifier.** Cold air doesn't hold water vapor like warm air, so by adding humidity inside your home, you can feel a little warmer.

**Place large area rugs in the rooms where you spend the most time.** Beyond adding visual appeal to your home, area rugs can also provide extra insulation and a warm surface for your feet on cold winter days. ■



DNITRI MARUTA | ISTOCK.COM





# Reporting Power Outages Just Got Easier

**DID YOU KNOW** YOU can now report a power outage with a simple text? Fayette Electric Cooperative is rolling out a game-changing feature that makes outage reporting faster, easier and more convenient than ever.

Just text “out” to 1-844-971-1048.

That’s right—if the lights go out, all you need to do is text the word “out” to 1-844-971-1048 from your mobile device. This new service is designed to streamline the reporting process and keep members informed during service interruptions.

Before you try it, make sure your mobile number is listed in SmartHub or call (979) 968-3181 to verify your enrollment. Only text “out” when you’re experiencing a real outage.

## Stay Connected With Text Alerts

If you’re signed up for SmartHub text alerts, you’ll be the first to know when your location experiences a power outage, and you’ll receive an update as soon as service is restored. It’s a quick, convenient way to stay informed and enjoy peace of mind—even when you’re away from home.

## Smart Set Up Tips

To use this feature, your mobile number must be linked to your FEC account or meter. If you have multiple accounts or meters tied to the same number, you’ll still need to report outages via SmartHub or by calling (979) 968-3181.

Already getting texts from 1-844-971-1048? You’re good to go! If you’ve opted out of FEC texts in the past or need help setting up, call a member services representative at (979) 968-3181, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

## Leading With Innovation

FEC is proud to be a leader in reliability and member-focused technology. This new texting feature is just the beginning—more convenient tools are on the horizon. Stay tuned!

For everything you need to know about outages, visit [fayette.coop/outage-center](http://fayette.coop/outage-center). ■

# 12 Days of Holiday Safety

- FOLLOW THIS HANDY** schedule to prepare your home for the season.
- Day 1: What’s that noise?** Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.
- Day 2: Shocker!** Before use, inspect all decorations and cords for damage.
- Day 3: Two’s company, three’s a crowd.** Do not overload outlets with too many decorations or devices.
- Day 4: Is it working?** Test ground-fault and arc-fault circuit interrupters.
- Day 5: Ouch!** Prevent falls by arranging cords safely along walls.
- Day 6: Kids eat the darnedest things.** Avoid placing lights, hooks and ornaments within reach of young children.
- Day 7: Thirsty?** Keep the Christmas tree stand full of water. A fresh tree poses less of a fire hazard than a dry tree.
- Day 8: Make a wish!** Blow out candles before leaving the house or going to bed.
- Day 9: Nice and warm.** Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from anything flammable.
- Day 10: Can’t touch this!** Install tamper-resistant receptacles to prevent kids from inserting objects into outlets.
- Day 11: Escape route.** Share your family’s fire escape plan with overnight guests.
- Day 12: Hot stuff!** Keep children away from cooking areas; use back burners and turn pot handles inward. ■





## FEC Charitable Fund Receives \$10K Grant

**THE FAYETTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** Charitable Donor Advised Fund is proud to announce the receipt of a generous grant from Second Chance Emporium in La Grange. The funding will bolster the fund's ongoing commitment to enriching the lives of children in the community through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

The contribution from Second Chance Emporium highlights a shared dedication to fostering early childhood literacy and community development. Through this partnership, the charitable fund continues to expand its reach and impact across Fayette County, ensuring that more children have access to the joy and educational value of books from an early age.

"We are honored to receive this grant from Second Chance Emporium. Their generosity helps us continue our mission of serving the children in our local communities and making a meaningful difference in their lives," said Tracy Denton, director of marketing, communications and training at FEC. "Every book delivered is a step toward building a stronger foundation for lifelong learning and success."

Imagination Library is a beloved program that mails a high-quality, age-appropriate book each month to children from birth to age 5, at no cost to families. These books are carefully selected to inspire imagination, curiosity and a love of reading. The program is currently available to children living in the following zip codes: 78941, 78945, 78949, 78956, 78959, 78962, 78963 and 77975.

The charitable fund's support of the Imagination Library reflects Fayette EC's broader commitment to community enrichment and educational opportunity. By investing in early literacy, the fund helps lay the groundwork for brighter futures and stronger communities.

Parents of children from birth to age 5 are encouraged to register by visiting [fayette.coop/dpil](http://fayette.coop/dpil). For questions about enrollment or donations, please contact Denton at (979) 968-3181 or [tracya@fayette.coop](mailto:tracya@fayette.coop). ■



# Youth Tour<sup>2026</sup>



**JUNE  
14-21  
2026**

## **150 TEXAS TEENS 7 DAYS IN D.C. 0 DOLLARS**

High school students: Get ready to pack your bags! You can join 2,000 teens from across the U.S. to make new friends and share experiences in Washington, D.C., all paid for by your electric co-op.

Museums. Memorials. Monuments. Memories. Friends. History. There's something for everyone on this trip of a lifetime!

**APPLY NOW!**

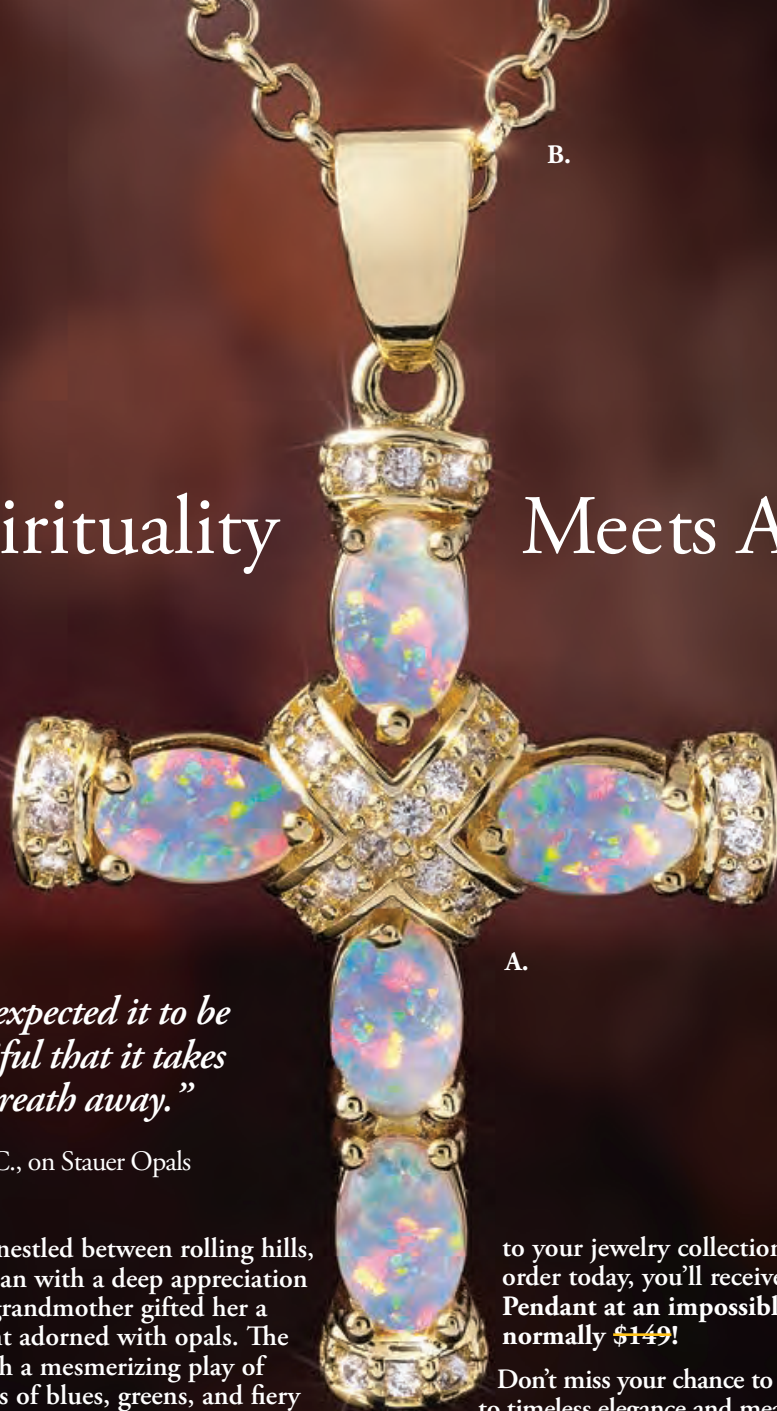
[fayette.coop/youth-tour](https://fayette.coop/youth-tour)

**SEE THE VIDEO**



**EXPERIENCE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME!**

# Spirituality Meets Artistry



*"I never expected it to be so beautiful that it takes your breath away."*

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals

In a quaint village, nestled between rolling hills, lived a young woman with a deep appreciation for gemstones. Her grandmother gifted her a delicate cross pendant adorned with opals. The opals shimmered with a mesmerizing play of colors, reflecting hues of blues, greens, and fiery oranges. Her grandmother shared the legend of the opals, believed to bring hope, purity, and luck to those who wore them.

Using this story as inspiration, Stauer brings you the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant**. With over 2 total carats of Kyocera lab-created opals set in .925 sterling silver encased in yellow gold, this pendant is a radiant celebration of beauty and craftsmanship. Each opal captivates with a kaleidoscopic dance of fiery oranges blending into oceanic blues, streaked with flashes of vibrant green that seem to come alive with every movement. The shimmering opals are skillfully arranged to create an enchanting, otherworldly glow, embodying the spirit of hope and harmony.

This breathtaking combination of color and craftsmanship is available as a limited availability of only 930 pieces, making it a rare and treasured addition

to your jewelry collection. Plus, when you order today, you'll receive the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant** at an impossible price of just \$59 normally ~~\$149~~!

Don't miss your chance to own this exclusive tribute to timeless elegance and meaningful symbolism.

## Jewelry Specifications:

- Pendant: 2 1/2 ctw. Kyocera lab opals and DiamondAura® accents. Yellow gold-finished .925 sterling silver setting
- Chain: 18" gold-clad .925 sterling silver chain

## Opal Spirit Cross Collection

- |                        |                        |       |                    |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| A. Pendant (2 1/2 ctw) | <del>\$149</del> \$59* | + S&P | <b>Save \$90</b>   |
| B. 18" Gold Clad Chain | \$59*                  | + S&P |                    |
| Pendant and Chain      | <del>\$208</del> \$79* | + S&P | <b>Best Offer!</b> |

\*Special price only for customers using the offer code.

# 1-800-333-2045

Your Insider Offer Code: OCR291-02

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Dept. OCR291-02, Burnsville, MN 55337  
[www.stauer.com](http://www.stauer.com)







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



# Turn of Fortune

A family's legacy far exceeds its pilfered buried treasure

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT NEUBECKER

**A LONG TIME AGO**, a woman tried to sell me her home, hinting at the prospect of gold treasure long hidden and lost within.

She told me her husband had died suddenly, and his last words to her were: "There's gold coins behind the wall in the bedroom closet." She was willing to split anything found.

I didn't bite on that strange sales pitch, but it reminded me of another similar case, even more interesting, up the country a ways.

In the little Texas town of San Diego, about an hour west of Corpus Christi, there once lived a Dr. Jose García. In 1933, he was the primary doctor in town and preferred to store his wealth in the form of gold coins. He hid it in a tight crawl

space beneath a trapdoor in his kitchen.

No one knew of this treasure except García and his daughter, Gloria. He told her the coins were hers to use, for taking care of her disabled brother later in life.

When the good doctor eventually died, Gloria asked her husband, Hector López, to find the coins. After Hector's repeated determined explorations into the tight crawl space—even with a metal detector—he couldn't find the coins.

Since García had suffered from dementia late in life, Gloria and Hector began thinking the gold coins had been the invention of an imaginative mind or a mind that forgot he had moved the coins.

Years later, Gloria and Hector sold the house. Then, more than 20 years after

that, a plumbing leak sprang up underneath it.

A plumber went through that old trapdoor the doctor had created almost 100 years before. While laying in a new line through the muddy soil, the plumber saw a flicker of something shiny.

He brushed away the mud and discovered a very old gold coin. He dug deeper and found a gold mine: some 500 coins in various sizes and denominations.

He was elated, of course, but he didn't alert the homeowner. He calmly asked his assistant to get him an empty coffee can and absconded with the coins—worth about \$500,000 at the time.

But the plumber didn't handle it well. He went around paying for things with gold coins within the little community. The gossip erupted immediately, and Hector and Gloria soon got word.

They sued the plumber, saying the coins belonged to Gloria.

The new homeowner, too, sued for ownership, but after a long legal battle, a jury in Duval County decided that the coins belonged to Gloria.

Next, something even more unexpected and beautiful happened: Gloria and Hector gave the coins to the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg.

As it turned out, the coins were a small part of Gloria and Hector López's wealth. They both graduated from the University of Texas in the 1940s, and then Hector earned a law degree and amassed a \$275 million portfolio while working in the oil and gas industry.

Since they had no children, the Lópezes left their fortune to the children of Texas in the form of the Hector and Gloria López Foundation, which provides college tuition—especially for Hispanic and first-generation students, known proudly as López Scholars. ■



# Holiday Breakfast

Be warned: Santa might stick around for these dishes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Making chilaquiles is a treasured tradition for my family. Chilaquiles are fried corn tortillas simmered in a creamy salsa verde and topped with eggs. Our girls love them; I love prepping everything in advance; and my husband loves a heaping plate of hearty goodness after the piles of wrapping paper.

## Chilaquiles Verdes

¼ cup vegetable oil, or more as needed  
12 corn tortillas, cut into 4 wedges each  
2 teaspoons salt, or more to taste  
4 cups salsa verde, plus more for serving  
1 cup heavy cream  
4 eggs  
Diced red onion  
Cilantro  
Queso fresco, crumbled

1. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat oil until shimmering. Add about a quarter of the tortilla wedges and cook, flipping once, until lightly brown and crisp.
2. Drain the freshly fried tortilla chips on a paper towel-lined baking sheet. Sprinkle lightly with salt. Repeat this process until all tortillas are fried, adding more oil as needed.
3. Drain oil and wipe skillet. Heat 4 cups salsa verde and heavy cream in the skillet over medium-high heat until warmed through. Add chips and gently stir to coat chips in sauce. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 2 minutes.
4. In another skillet, scramble or fry eggs to your preference.
5. Divide the chilaquiles between four plates and top with eggs. Sprinkle with red onion, cilantro and queso fresco. Serve with additional salsa verde.

SERVES 4

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifelifebake.com](http://sweetlifelifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Christmas Eve Rice Salad.





# Artichoke-Cheese Frittata

WILLIAM P. LOYD  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

I feel strongly that Christmas mornings should be laid-back, meaning coffee, family time, gifts and a delicious breakfast that was prepped in advance.

- 1 tablespoon (1/8 stick) butter, melted
- 6 green onions, diced
- 1/2 cup diced green bell pepper
- 5 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 3–4 slices bread, cubed, divided use
- 3/4 cup shredded cheese (cheddar, Monterey Jack, pepper jack or a combination works well), divided use
- 1 jar marinated artichoke hearts (12 ounces), drained and chopped into bite-size pieces, divided use
- 1 jar diced pimientos (4 ounces), drained, divided use

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 1 1/2-quart baking dish.
2. In a skillet over medium-high heat, cook butter, green onions and bell pepper, stirring occasionally until tender, about 2–3 minutes.
3. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, mustard, salt and onion powder.
4. In the prepared baking dish, layer half the bread, half the onion-pepper mixture, half the cheese, half the artichokes and half the pimientos. Pour half the egg mixture over first layer.
5. Repeat layering with the remaining bread, onion-pepper mixture, cheese,



\$500 WINNER

# Cranberry Orange White Chocolate Baked Oatmeal

MELISSA TURLEY  
BANDERA EC



Looking for a cozy Christmas breakfast to feed a crowd? This is it. Imagine a holiday buffet table filled with baked oatmeal, bacon, sausage, scrambled eggs and fruit. And invite me because I would drive for hours for this baked oatmeal. The oatmeal can be prepped the day before, refrigerated overnight and baked the next morning.

- 6 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup white chocolate chips
- 2 cups orange juice
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 4 eggs

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a large bowl or stand mixer, combine oats, sugar, baking powder, salt, dried cranberries and white chocolate chips.
3. In another bowl, whisk together orange juice, oil, vanilla and eggs.
4. While mixing on low, slowly add wet ingredients to dry ingredients until thoroughly mixed.
5. Pour into prepared pan and bake 35–40 minutes or until golden brown.

SERVES 10–12

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

MOM'S FAVORITES DUE DEC 10

Everything is better when it's made with love by Mom. What recipe do you remember your mother by? Send us your favorite for a shot at \$500 and a spot in our May issue.

UPCOMING: THE ART OF THE SANDWICH DUE JAN 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPES CONTINUED

artichokes, pimientos and egg mixture.

6. If making in advance, cover and refrigerate. Allow to come to room temperature before baking.

7. Bake 30–40 minutes, until eggs are set and frittata is firm.

SERVES 6

French Toast Bake  
With Caramel Banana  
Cream Topping

MARIAN EVONIUK  
PEDERNALES EC

Brioche coated in a creamy eggy mixture, baked until golden and topped with whipped cream, bananas and caramel is the only gift I want this holiday season.

FRENCH TOAST BAKE

- 6 eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup



- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 loaf brioche, sliced and cubed

TOPPING

- 2 cups heavy cream
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 large bananas, sliced
- Caramel sauce

1. FRENCH TOAST BAKE Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with butter or cooking spray and set aside.

2. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, 1 cup heavy cream, maple syrup, 1 teaspoon vanilla, lemon juice, cinnamon and salt. Add brioche and stir to coat. Pour into prepared baking dish.

3. Place baking dish on center rack of oven and bake 30–40 minutes, until mixture is set, puffy and light golden brown on top. Tent loosely with foil if top is browning too quickly. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.

4. TOPPING In a large bowl, combine 2 cups heavy cream, powdered sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Beat at medium-high until soft peaks form. Set aside.

5. To serve, cut the bake into squares and top with a large dollop of whipped cream, banana slices and a drizzle of caramel sauce.

SERVES 4–6

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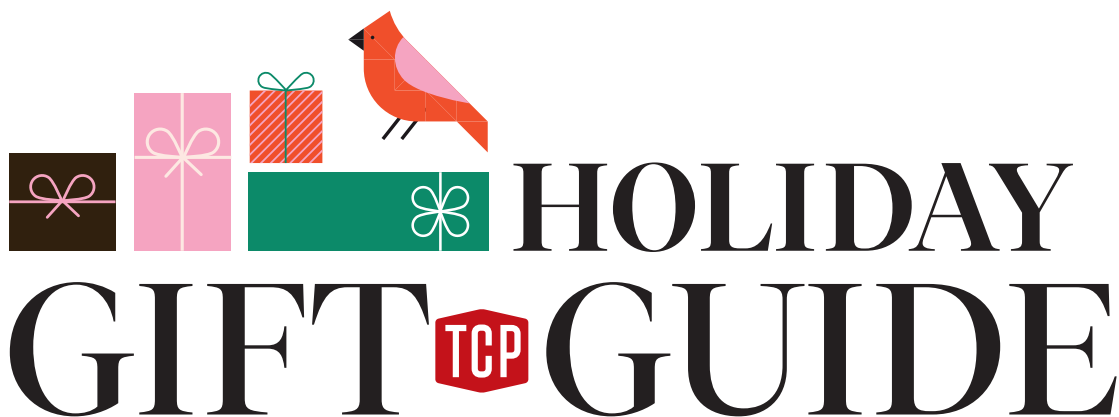
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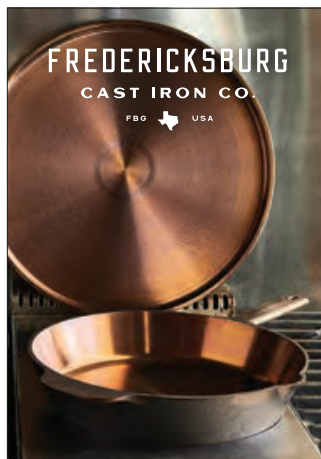
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## Slabs of Strudel

The oldest bakery in Texas came from humble beginnings

BY CHET GARNER

I **DIDN'T KNOW** what to expect from the oldest bakery in Texas, but it certainly wasn't a giant slab of cherry strudel bigger than a roof shingle. And yet that's exactly what I found at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels—along with a line out the door, a heavenly yeasty smell that could lead a blindfolded squirrel to town and a friendly cashier who was happy to explain the unfamiliar pastries laid out before me.

Founded in 1868, the bakery was started by a man named Edouard Naegelin who emigrated from eastern France, arriving in town with a sack of flour and less than a dollar in his pocket.

For more than 155 years, it has kept the town outside San Antonio well-supplied with loaves of fresh bread, cakes and an assortment of European cookies I could barely pronounce. Pfeffernüse, anyone? But the undeniable star of the show was their homemade strudel, coming in apple, cherry and peach with buttery layers so soft you could use it as a pillow.

Inside, the décor is a delightful cross between a German Alpine lodge and grandma's kitchen circa 1952. In the name of "research," I ordered almost everything: kolache (both fruit and sausage), cinnamon rolls, danishes, lebkuchen, springerle, and each flavor of strudel.

I sat at one of the small tables outside and proceeded to make every one of my fingers sticky with icing and every thread of my shirt dusted with powdered sugar. It was a badge of honor earned in a pastry-filled battle of the bulge. In the end, the strudel won, but it was worth it.

Whether you're a hungry local, a curious traveler or an overambitious pastry juggler, Naegelin's is here to welcome you with open arms just like it has for generations. ■

ABOVE Chet's eyes are bigger than his stomach at Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's Explorations 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.

## DECEMBER

7

**San Antonio Cowboy Christmas**, (210) 299-4499, [briscoemuseum.org](http://briscoemuseum.org)

**Waxahachie [7, 12-14] Bethlehem Revisited**, (469) 309-4040, [waxahachiecvb.com](http://waxahachiecvb.com)

**Port Lavaca [7, 12-14, 19-21, 26-28] Nativity Exhibit**, (361) 935-8032, [bit.ly/nativityexhibit](http://bit.ly/nativityexhibit)

9

**Lufkin The Texas Tenors: Deep in the Heart of Christmas**, (936) 633-5454, [angelinaarts.org](http://angelinaarts.org)

11

**El Paso Los Murales de Segundo Barrio**, (915) 533-0048, [tomlea.com](http://tomlea.com)

**Marshall [11, 19] Fireside Feast: Cooking Up History at Maplecroft**, (903) 935-3044, [visitstarrfamilyhome.com](http://visitstarrfamilyhome.com)

12

**Kyle [12-14] A Night in Bethlehem**, (512) 268-7044, [f-pc.org](http://f-pc.org)

**Smithville [12-14, 19-22] Dinah 4 Christmas**, (512) 304-0666, [dinah4.com](http://dinah4.com)

13

**Bastrop Historic Homes Tour**, (512) 303-0904, [bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com](http://bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com)

**Burnet Christmas on the Square**, (512) 756-4297, [burnetchamber.org](http://burnetchamber.org)

**Chappell Hill Teddy Bear Parade**, (979) 337-9910, [chappellhilltx.com](http://chappellhilltx.com)



**Kerrville Christmas Concert**, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

**Waxahachie [13-14] Historic Waxahachie Christmas Tour of Homes**, historicwaxahachie.com

**Corsicana CelloVoci**, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

**Richardson Rocky Mountain High Experience: A John Denver Christmas**, (972) 744-4650, eisemanncenter.com

**Levelland [19-21] Christmas Cash Classic**, (806) 786-8683, facebook.com/christmascashclassic

**Brenham Top of the World, A Carpenters Christmas**, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

**Fairfield Jingle All the Way**, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

**Grapevine The Nuttier Cracker**, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

**Eastland New Year's Eve Casino Night**, (254) 631-0437, eastlandcountymuseum.com

**Palestine Dash & Splash 5K**, (903) 729-3139, palestineymca.org

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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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**1** SCOTT BOWMAN  
PEDERNALES EC

"Young mini-Nubian goats enjoy breakfast in the barn."

**2** AMY BOGS  
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

"One of our calves got a little too excited about the new hay and wedged himself between two bales."

**3** KYLE BIGGERSTAFF  
LIGHTHOUSE EC

"Hayden Biggerstaff and Jude the cow dog finish pushing cattle to a new pasture at sunset in Crosby County."

**4** CAROLYN GULLY  
PEDERNALES EC

"My great-granddaughter, Leighton Gully, and her friend, Annabelle, take a break on the farm."



## Upcoming Contests

**GATES** DUE DEC 10

**CAUGHT NAPPING** DUE JAN 10

**MAKING A SPLASH** DUE FEB 10



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





## Our Kind of Weird

The best Christmas mornings include a one-of-a-kind family dish

BY SHANE TORNO  
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KACHIK

I SUPPOSE EVERY FAMILY has a favorite dish—a meal with special significance. In my family’s case, we had a special meal that my mom, the one who did the cooking in our house, didn’t care for. I wonder if this is common.

The meal was a breakfast dish known to us as biscuits and pudding. In my youth, I believed that this was unique to my family since everyone I ever asked about it had never heard of such a thing.

However, just recently I learned that the meal is actually known in the rural south as biscuits and chocolate gravy.

To be sure, the chocolate pudding we used was stove-cooked and served hot, so calling it chocolate gravy makes sense. My online research tells me that the dish has its origins in the Great Depression, when powdered cocoa

became readily available as a baking product. There are origin stories associated with Appalachia, the Tennessee Valley, western Oklahoma and Arkansas.

I have no idea how it could have come into contact with a German family settling in Dime Box in Central Texas and then relocating to deep South Texas.

Ignorant of any of this history, I enjoyed this breakfast whenever my father could convince my mom to get up early and prepare it.

A few tips if you decide to try this yourself on a cold morning. The biscuits need to be buttermilk with a consistent texture all the way through, not the canned biscuits that produce lots of flaky individual layers. Those flaky layers make eating the pudding-covered biscuits a messy and unappealing operation. Also, the meal is best when both the biscuits and the pudding are served hot.

Grab a couple (or three) biscuits and cut them in half so you have the biscuits lying open-faced. Add a pat of butter to each biscuit half and then douse with the pudding. As the butter melts under the hot pudding, it liquefies and seeps through the pudding to create some beautiful yellow puddles.

If you have a sweet tooth, this will beat the best biscuits and gravy meal you have ever had.

As I said, my mom didn’t care for the meal, possibly because it was passed down from my father’s family. Or maybe because she didn’t like getting up early to bake on Christmas morning. To her credit, she made them well (as did her mom, my dad’s mom and my Aunt Joy).

On those special mornings when they were available, we all made big plates of it while Mom stood back and ate her biscuit with jelly like a normal human. If you listened carefully above the racket of forks on plates, you might even hear her mutter something about a bunch of weirdos. ■



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