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SECOND CHANCE

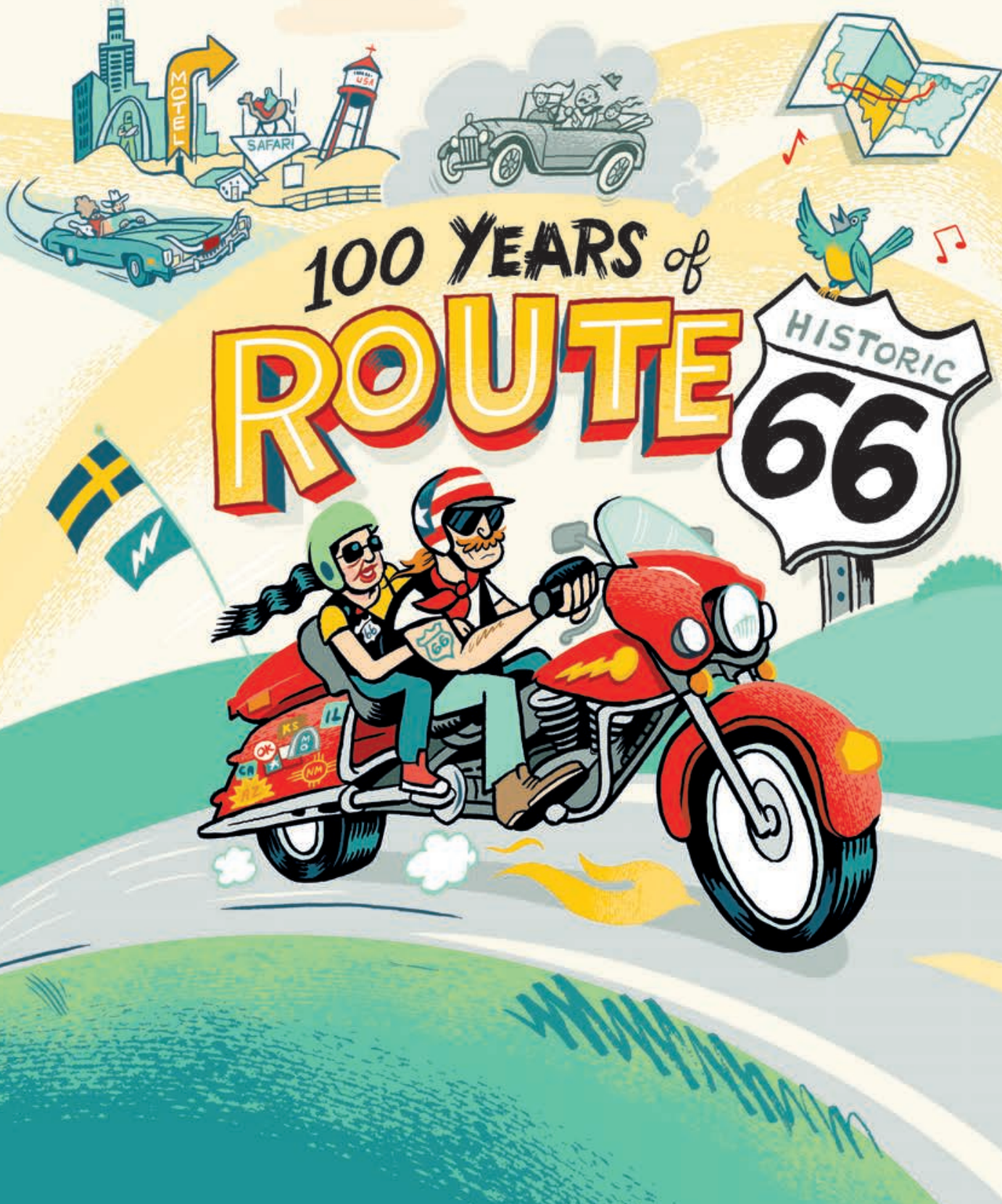
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November 2026



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06 Still Kicking

A surge of travelers are getting their kicks during the Route 66 centennial.

*By Jim McCarty, Samantha Bryant and Claire Stevens
Illustrations by Dan Zettwoch*

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

From Punch Lines to Peaceful Paddocks

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

*By Jessica M. Ridge
Photos by Anna Mazurek*

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Navigating Turbulence
By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

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.

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



JASON DAVID PAGE

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

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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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.”

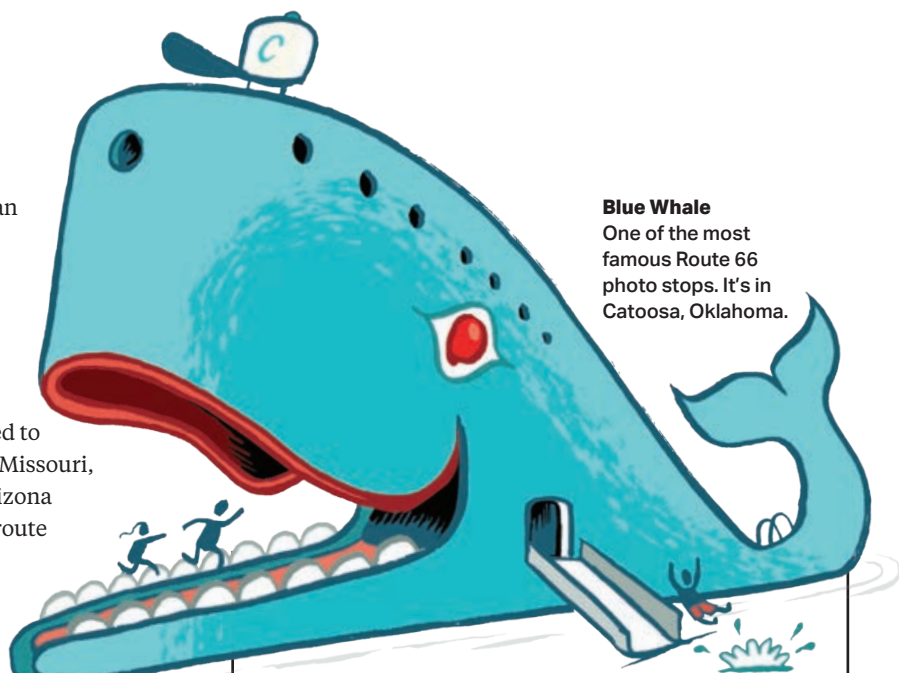
While Missouri can claim its birthplace, an Oklahoma man is known as the Father of Route 66. Cyrus Avery, a Tulsa realtor who owned a coal company, saw the need for a roadway from the Midwest to the West, connecting small towns and cities along the way. Appointed to the Joint Board on Interstate Highways 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.

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)

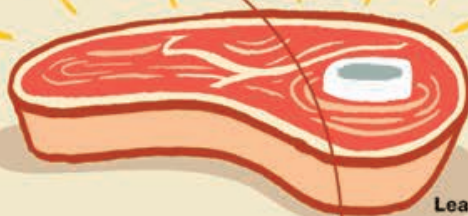
A surreal desert time capsule with a legendary Googie-style neon sign.



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

TEXAS

The Panhandle



The Big Texan Steak Ranch

Home to Amarillo's free 72-ounce steak—if you can finish it in an hour.

Midpoint Cafe

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

Leaning Tower of Texas

OK, it's a 75-foot water tower in Groom, but you gotta see it.

Conoco Tower Station and U-Drop Inn

The Shamrock spot is the inspiration for Ramone's House of Body Art in Cars.

Adrian

Amarillo

McLean

Groom

Shamrock



Cadillac Ranch

A graffiti-friendly line of buried Cadillacs outside Amarillo.



Devil's Rope Museum

In McLean, learn how barbed wire tamed the West.



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 thru-way 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’



Wigwam Motel

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

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.

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.

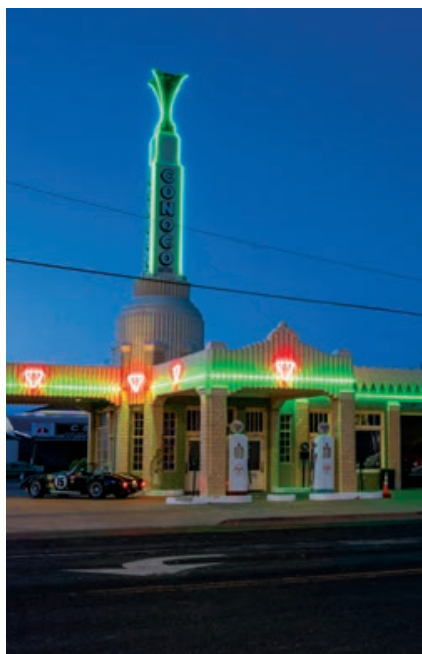
TCP Find this story on our website for a playlist of tunes that’ll get you kicking no matter your route.





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 Hermesmeier, 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



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

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.



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.

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, includ-

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

ing 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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FROM
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MANAGER

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Celebrating 89 Years of Powering Community

THIS NOVEMBER, FAYETTE Electric Cooperative proudly celebrates 89 years of service to the communities we call home. On November 3, 1937, local residents came together with a shared vision: to bring electric service to rural families whom larger power companies had overlooked.

At the time, many farms and ranches throughout Fayette County had no access to electricity. Families relied on kerosene lanterns, manual labor and daylight to accomplish everyday tasks. Investor-owned utilities often viewed rural electrification as unprofitable, leaving many communities without access to the benefits of electric power.

Everything began to change in 1937 when local leaders, including businessman George Adamcik

for a brighter future. Their determination ultimately led to the signing of Fayette EC's articles of incorporation November 3, 1937.

The following year, electricity began reaching homes in the area for the first time. By late October 1938, about 150 homes had been wired for service, and the first 50 miles of electric line were energized. For many families, electric lights and modern appliances transformed everyday life and created new opportunities for generations to come.

Today, FEC serves members across portions of seven counties and continues to invest in reliability, safety, technology and community-focused programs. While much has changed over the past 89 years, the values that inspired the cooperative's

founders remain the same: service, local leadership, accountability and commitment to community.

As we celebrate our 89th anniversary, we're also looking ahead to an exciting milestone. In 2027, Fayette EC will mark 90 years of powering communities, and we invite members to help us tell that story. Throughout the coming year, we will collect historical photographs, memories and stories that highlight the people, places and moments that shaped our cooperative.

Whether you have an old annual meeting photo, a story about receiving electricity for the first time, or memories of a longtime employee, director or community event, we would love to hear from you. Your story is part of our history.

As we prepare to celebrate 90 years of powering community in 2027, share your stories and photos with Tracy Denton at tracya@fayette.coop, and

help us preserve the moments and memories that have shaped Fayette Electric Cooperative over the years.

Eighty-nine years ago, local people came together to build something extraordinary. Today, that same cooperative spirit continues to power our future. ■



In 1937, locals came together to build something extraordinary. These charter members helped form Fayette Electric Cooperative and launched a legacy of service, reliability and community that continues nearly 90 years later. They include, from left: George Diers, C.M. Janda, H. C. Doan, L.A. Giese and Charles Friedrich.

and Fayette County Agent J.C. Yearly, helped organize a grassroots effort to bring electricity to rural residents. Working together with local farmers and community leaders, they formed what would become Fayette EC.

Building the cooperative required dedication, sacrifice and community support. During the Great Depression, prospective members were asked to contribute a \$5 membership fee, a significant investment at the time. Yet neighbors talked with neighbors, gathered in homes and shared a vision



SKYNESHER | GETTY IMAGES.COM

The Recipe for a Safe Kitchen

AS WE HEAD into a busy period of holiday hosting and cooking, there's one item that always should be on the menu: safety. Crowded kitchens and celebrations can elevate kitchen risks. Follow this recipe to make sure this year's holiday festivities contribute to happy memories and not a hazardous home.

Ingredients

Functioning smoke alarms
Working ground-fault circuit interrupters
Clean appliances
1 kitchen timer
1 healthy dose of vigilance

Directions

1. Smoke alarms should be installed in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home. For the best protection, smoke alarms should be interconnected so they all sound if one gets triggered.
2. Test the batteries in each smoke alarm every month, replace batteries at least once a year and replace each unit every 10 years.
3. GFCIs are electrical safety devices that trip electrical circuits when they detect ground faults, or leakage currents, that could shock or electrocute. Install GFCIs where electricity and water may come into contact, such as in the kitchen and bathrooms, and test GFCIs every month.
4. Prevent fires by making sure your oven and stovetop are clean and free of grease and dust. You also should clean the exhaust hood and duct over the stove regularly.
5. It's easy to forget about something that's cooking, especially when you're entertaining guests. Use a kitchen timer to ensure your dish doesn't become a fire hazard.
6. Closely supervise children in the kitchen, and keep younger children at least 3 feet away from cooking appliances. Don't cook if you're sleepy or under the influence of alcohol.
7. Enjoy! Being proactive about safety will give you peace of mind and allow you to enjoy this precious time with loved ones. ■

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
Web fayette.coop

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ABOUT FAYETTE EC

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

CONVENIENT PAYMENT OPTIONS

- Pay by Bank Draft
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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

Fayette EC provides *Texas Co-op Power* and 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





Coat Connection Returns To Help Local Children

AS TEMPERATURES BEGIN to drop, Fayette Electric Cooperative is once again inviting the community to help provide warmth and comfort to local children through its annual Coat Connection program.

Through November 30, community members can donate new or gently used coats, hats, gloves and other cold-weather items to help children in need throughout the area. Monetary donations are also accepted and will be used to purchase winter apparel for local youths.

Local businesses and organizations can also get involved by serving as a Coat Connection collection site or supporting the program in other ways. Businesses interested in helping are encouraged to contact Tracy Denton, director of marketing, communications and training, to learn more about partnership opportunities.

For many families, winter clothing can be a significant expense. The Coat Connection program helps ensure that children have access to essential cold-weather gear so they can stay warm while traveling to school, playing outdoors and participating in everyday activities during the winter months.

“One coat can make a tremendous difference in a child’s life,” Denton said. “This program is an opportunity for our members, employees and communities to come together and provide comfort, warmth and hope for local families.”

Donations may be dropped off at Fayette EC’s office, located at 2111 N. Von Minden Road in La Grange. Additional collection

locations may be announced throughout the campaign.

Children from infants through 12th grade are eligible to receive a coat through the program. Coat distribution will take place November 30 and will be available on a first-come, first-served basis while supplies last.

The program reflects the cooperative principle of Concern for Community, demonstrating how small acts of generosity can create a meaningful impact for local families.

Whether you donate a coat, purchase a pair of gloves or make a monetary contribution, every gift helps keep a child warm this winter.

To learn more about Coat Connection or to donate, visit fayette.coop/coat-connection or call (979) 968-3181.

How You Can Help

- ▶ Donate new or gently used coats, hats and gloves.
- ▶ Make a monetary contribution to support winter clothing purchases.
- ▶ Share information about the program with friends, neighbors, schools and local organizations.
- ▶ Encourage families with children from infants through 12th grade to participate in the coat distribution event.

Together, we can make a difference and help ensure every child stays warm this winter. ■

Inspire Hope This Holiday Season

THE HOLIDAYS ARE a time for family, friends and giving. If you're looking for ways to bring more meaning to your celebrations, these ideas are a great place to start.

Help out a neighbor. If you have a neighbor who needs help decorating, shopping or writing holiday cards, offer to lend a hand. This also is a great opportunity to get the whole family involved. Even young kids can pitch in to decorate—and help take the decorations down once the holidays are over.

Give gifts to teachers. Teachers work tirelessly during the school year, and the holidays are the perfect time to show your thanks. Give a gift card, custom stationery, or a personalized water bottle or tote bag. Don't forget to include a handwritten note from your child expressing why they appreciate their teacher.

Invite friends to a holiday dinner. Do you know any friends, acquaintances or co-workers who live far from family? If they aren't traveling home, invite them over for a holiday dinner. If they can't make it, consider cooking a larger portion than you'll need, freezing the leftovers and dropping them by the next day.

Donate to giving trees. What's a giving tree? You might find one displayed in a grocery store, library, school or community center. A giving tree is typically decorated with wish lists from kids in the area. Pick a wish list from the tree, purchase the gift and return it to the sponsoring organization.

Volunteer. Holiday-specific volunteer opportunities may include serving meals at a food bank or participating in a local toy drive. If you don't have the time to volunteer in person, you could sponsor a family instead. Many local organizations have holiday adopt-a-family programs, matching you with a family in need of basic necessities and gifts.

The holidays are a time filled with joy, but for some, they can be difficult. We hope that these tips inspire you to go out and make a difference in your neighbors' lives. ■



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EXPERIENCE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

**Electrical Safety
for Kids**

HOME SHOULD BE a place of comfort, familiarity and safety for you and your family. But safety requires education, especially with kids in the house.

Since November is Child Safety and Protection Month, here are some tips Fayette Electric Cooperative encourages you to share with your little ones.

Water and electricity are a dangerous mix—never touch, sit or stand in, or attempt to walk through water that's in contact with an appliance or powered toy.

Electronics and accessories must be handled with care. Always help younger children when they want to use an electronic device.

Plug unused outlets with outlet covers or install tamper-resistant outlets, which have a shutter system that only accepts electrical plugs.

Keep cords out of sight so children aren't tempted to play with them.

Repair or dispose of damaged electronics and cords.

Use ground-fault circuit interrupters to detect and prevent shocks anywhere water and electricity may meet, such as bathrooms, kitchens and basements. ■



TATIANA DYUBANOVA | GETTYIMAGES.COM



DRS PRODUCCES | GETTYIMAGES.COM

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. ■



Happy Thanksgiving

From Fayette
Electric Cooperative

"Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues but the parent of all others."
—*Marcus Tullius Cicero*

Our office will be closed Thursday–Friday, November 26–27, for the holiday. As always, crews will be on standby in the event of emergencies.

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at (979) 968-3181
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TEXAS DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Hurricane Preparedness Guidelines

Hurricane Season Is June 1–November 30

Preparedness Checklist

- ▶ **Make an evacuation plan.** Find activated evacuation routes at DriveTexas.org or by dialing 1-800-452-9292. Call 211 to find out if you live in an evacuation zone.
- ▶ **Sign up for emergency alerts.** Make sure your mobile device is enabled to receive Wireless Emergency Alerts.
- ▶ **Prepare an emergency supply kit.** Learn how to build an emergency kit at ready.gov/build-a-kit.
- ▶ **Review your home insurance policy.**
- ▶ **Register with the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry** at stear.tdem.texas.gov or by dialing 211 if you live in an evacuation zone and:
 - Have a disability or medical needs and do not have a car or other vehicle to use in an evacuation.
 - Have a disability or medical needs and do not have friends or family to help in an evacuation.

Information collected for STEAR is confidential.

Hurricane Preparedness Online Resources

Texas Division of Emergency Management: tdem.texas.gov
 Texas Department of State Health Services: texasready.gov
 American Red Cross: redcross.org
 U.S. Department of Homeland Security: ready.gov
 Office of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott: gov.texas.gov



DIVISIÓN DE ADMINISTRACIÓN DE EMERGENCIAS DE TEXAS

Preparación para huracanes

La temporada de huracanes es del 1 de junio al 30 de noviembre

Lista de verificación de preparación:

- ▶ **Haga un plan de evacuación.** Encuentre rutas de evacuación activadas en DriveTexas.org o marcando 1-800-452-9292. Llame al 211 para averiguar si usted vive en una zona de evacuación.
- ▶ **Regístrese para recibir alertas de emergencia.** Asegúrese de que su dispositivo móvil esté habilitado para recibir Alertas de emergencia inalámbricas.
- ▶ **Prepare un kit de emergencia.** Aprenda como construir un kit de emergencia en ready.gov/build-a-kit.
- ▶ **Revise su póliza de seguro de hogar.**
- ▶ **Regístrese con el Registro de Asistencia de Emergencia del Estado de Texas** en stear.tdem.texas.gov o marcando el 211 si vive en una zona de evacuación y:
 - Tiene una discapacidad o necesidades médicas y no tiene un auto u otro vehículo para usar en una evacuación.
 - Tiene una discapacidad o necesidades médicas y no tiene amigos o familiares para ayudar en una evacuación.

La información recolectada para STEAR es confidencial.

Recursos en línea para la preparación para huracanes

División de Administración de Emergencias de Texas: tdem.texas.gov
 Departamento de Servicios de Salud del Estado: texasready.gov
 Cruz Roja Americana: redcross.org
 Departamento de Seguridad Nacional de los Estados Unidos: ready.gov
 Oficina del Gobernador de Texas Greg Abbott: gov.texas.gov



FEC
 FAYETTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.
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COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT GRANT PROGRAM

Fayette Electric Cooperative's Community Reinvestment Grant Program puts unclaimed capital credits back to work—supporting projects that strengthen local communities and improve quality of life.

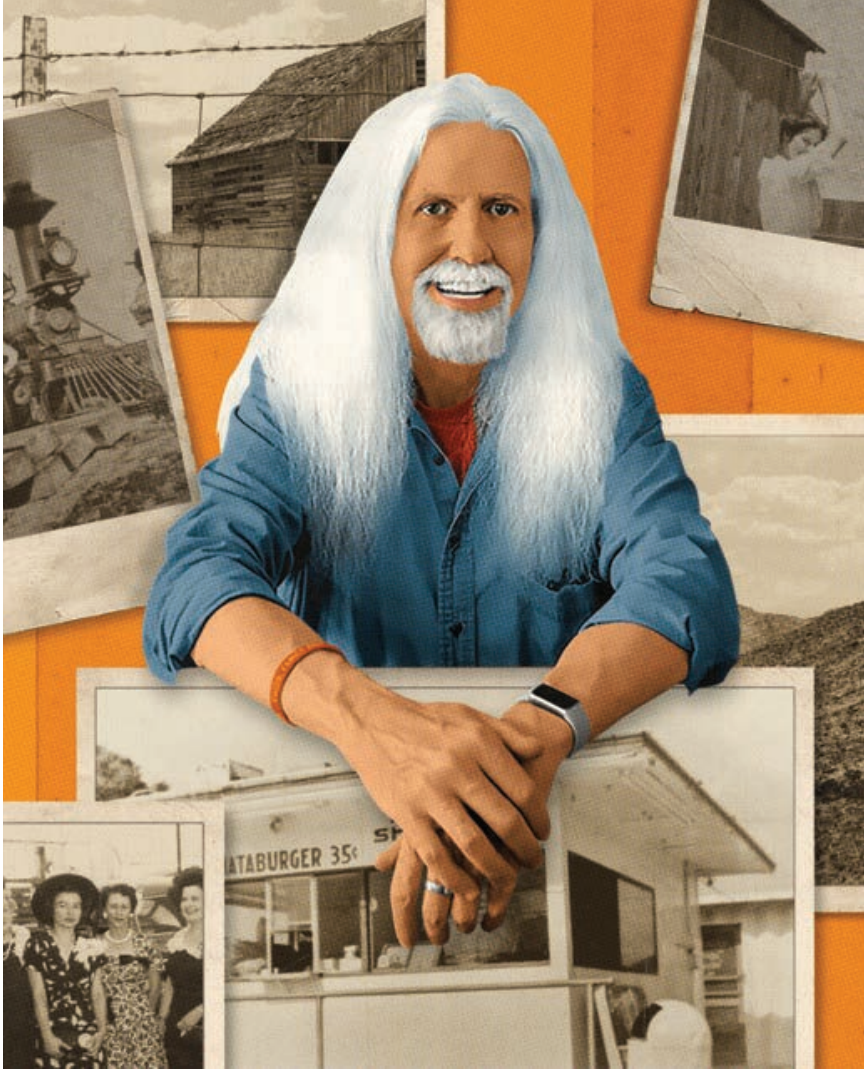
Funded by unclaimed capital credits—not electric rates—this program keeps dollars local where they make the greatest impact.

Public entities serving FEC communities are encouraged to apply for projects that deliver meaningful, measurable benefits.

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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. ■

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



RECIPES CONTINUED

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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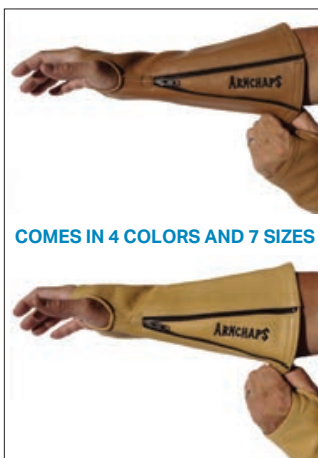
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

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 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.

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, giddingsstx.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, castrovilleconservation.society.org

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

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SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



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

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

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

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I certify that 50% of all my distribution copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.

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Karen Nejtek, Production Manager October 1, 2026

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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."



2



1



3



4

Upcoming Contests

IN THE GARDEN DUE NOV 10

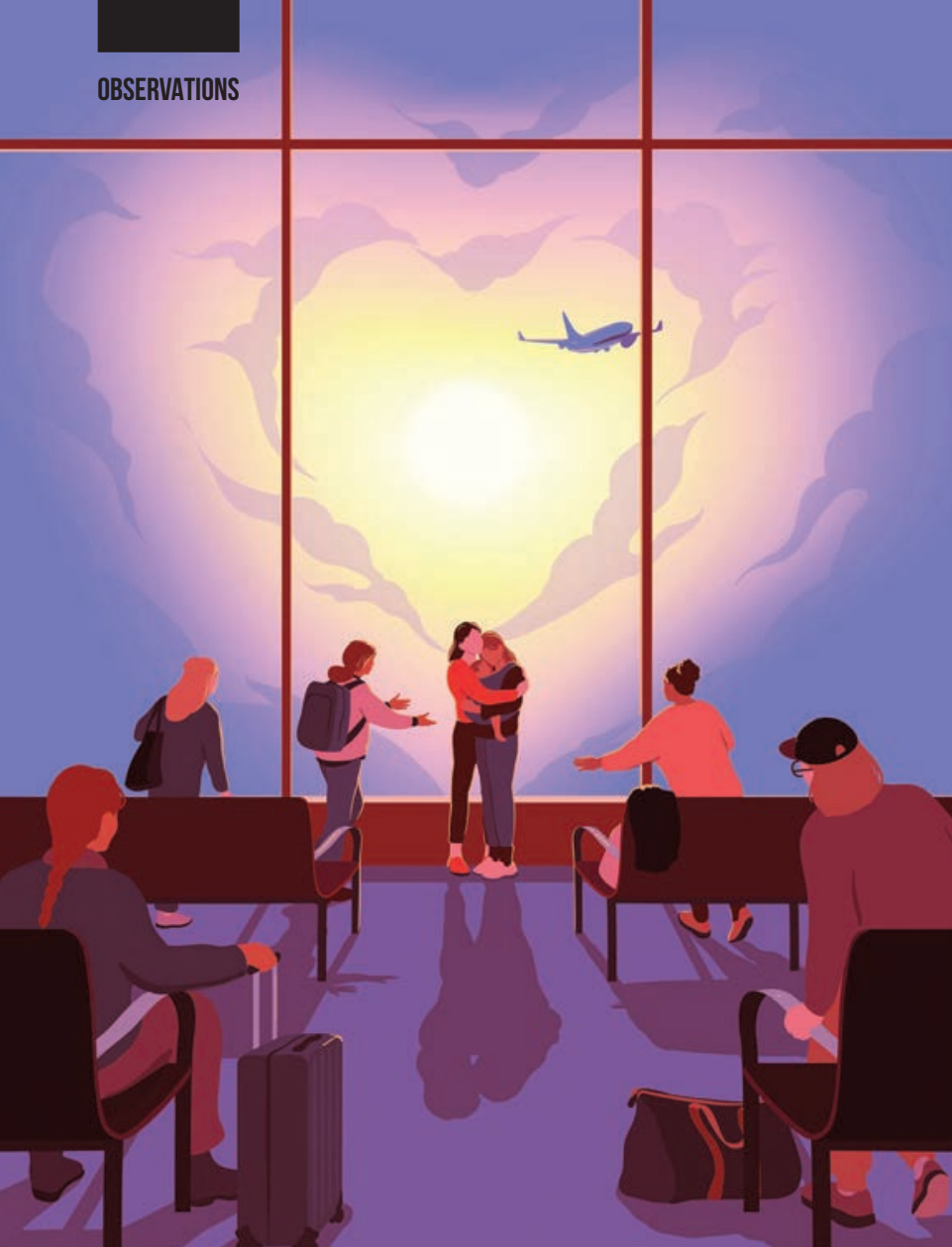
COUNTRY CHURCHES DUE DEC 10

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 as 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.

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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.

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