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January 2026



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Every town in Texas has a story to tell, if you just stop and listen.

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ON THE COVER

The signs pointing the way to local treasures are everywhere if you pay attention.

Illustration by Elly Walton

ABOVE

From left, Austin Rees, Jolie Cox and Hannah Thetford represent United Cooperative Services at the U.S. Capitol during the 2025 Youth Tour.

Photo by Samantha Bryant | TEC



New Braunfels physician Clay Buchanan in the caber toss at the Scottish Gathering and Highland Games in Salado.



TCP *Contests and More*

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST
The Art of the Sandwich

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
Caught Napping

RECOMMENDED READING

Twenty years ago we looked into the artifacts at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin, including the scrawled words in a reporter's notebook that launched the Watergate investigation. Download the January 2006 issue at TexasCoopPower.com.



ENTER ONLINE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I would love to have dinner with ...

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 November prompt: **Changing our clocks twice a year is ...**

Something my dogs just never understand.

JULEY WELCH
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
FAIRVIEW

An opportunity for me to see the beautiful sunlight an extra hour in the spring and sleep an extra hour in the fall.

CONSUELO M. PEREZ
MEDINA EC
ZAPATA COUNTY

A great reminder to change the batteries in your fire detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.

CATHY MARTEL
SAM HOUSTON EC
LIVINGSTON

About as useless as a screen door on a submarine.

CODY HOOPER
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
FAIRVIEW

Visit our website to see more responses.

Strongly Scottish

THE OBSERVATIONS ESSAY on Page 34, *Fortune Knocks*, sent us down a rabbit hole about Scots and Scottish traditions, where we learned that Highland games are a hallmark of Scottish gatherings, as are kilts, bagpipes and dancing.

One of the oldest and largest gatherings in Texas takes place every November in Salado, between Waco and Austin. The competitions tend to involve heaving heavy objects, including something called a caber, which looks very much like a power pole. Contestants hold the caber, which can be up to 22 feet long and 200 pounds, upright from the bottom and flip it forward. The goal is for it to land upright then fall forward.

For the record, electric cooperatives prefer their poles remain upright and lodged firmly in the ground.

120,085

The number of steps logged by Layton Shadle of Victoria, right, a delegate of Victoria Electric Cooperative, during his eight-day Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., last June. That's between 50 and 60 miles.



OCTOBER 2025 On the Dots

“Memories of traveling in the 1950s: My brothers and I took naps but wanted to be awakened to see the polka-dot house in Buna.”

LINDA BELL
CECA
COMANCHE



RAUL ARIAS

Good Food, Good Cause

Frito pies have been the gourmet dish of choice in countless Texas stadiums and arenas—chili and chips served on chilly nights by Rotarians, band parents and electric co-op members to raise money for countless important community projects [*It’s in the Bag*, September 2025].

Ken Roselle
Wise EC
Decatur

Yodeler’s Lore

My dad, born in 1925, and his siblings grew up listening to Jimmie Rodgers [*The Fast Track*, July 2025]. In the ’60s, my siblings and I listened to his music on the record player. *T for Texas* comes to mind when I think about those Saturdays and the yodeling we would try to mimic.

Kathy Parker
Pedernales EC
Dripping Springs

My heart sank when the author mentions Cash, Haggard and Tubb and not one mention of Jim Reeves. Reeves was born and raised in Texas. His name carries weight as well.

Carol Racey
Deep East Texas EC
Joaquin

A Tea for Texas

As I told my husband about the interesting *History in a Box* [August 2025], he informed me that he’d visited that very museum years ago. I then immediately remembered the souvenir box that he brought me filled with teas similar to those destroyed.

The information included with the box had the story of the Robinson Half Chest, though it failed to mention the Texas connection.

Ann Fincannon
Pedernales EC
Marble Falls



COURTESY RODGERS FAMILY LEGACY

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

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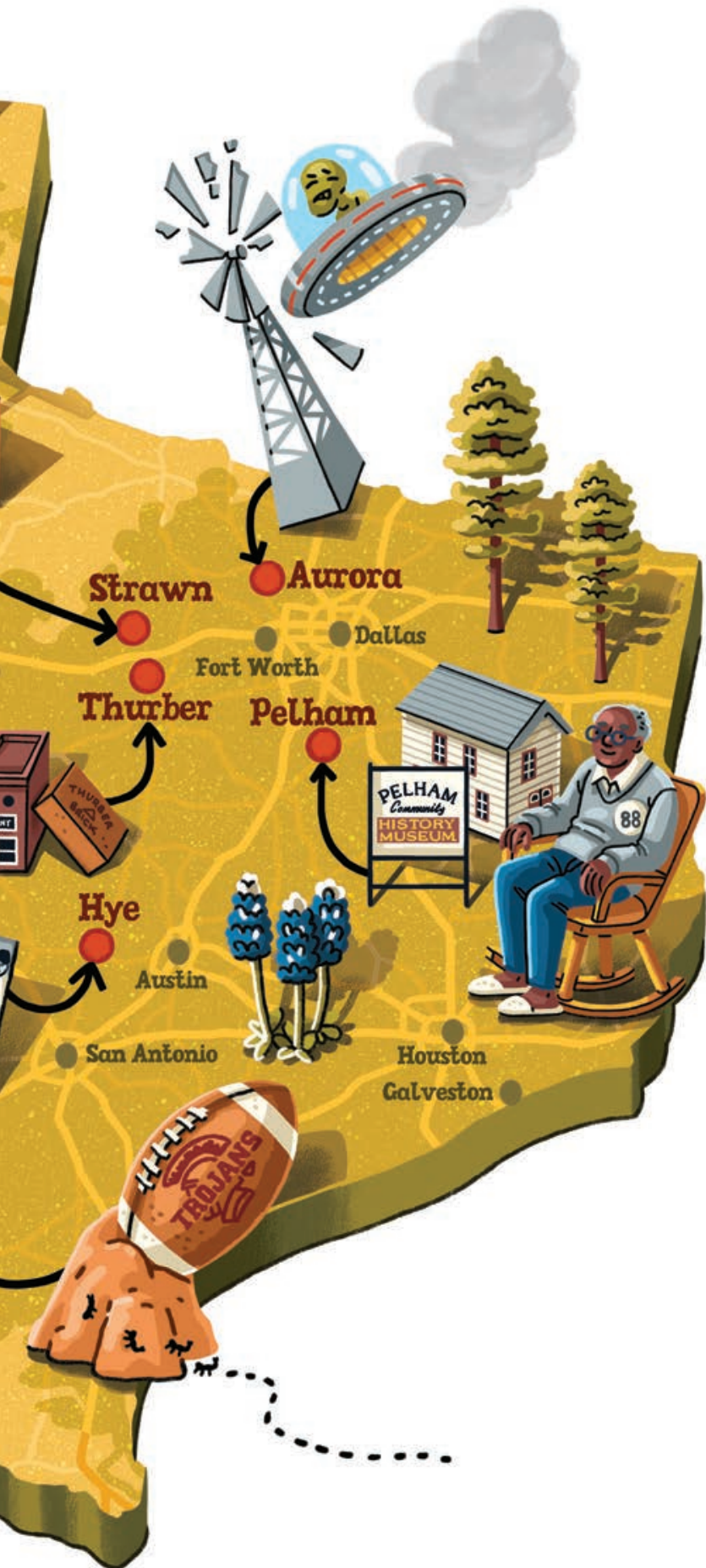


BY CARLTON STOWERS
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLY WALTON

Every town in Texas has a story to tell, if you just stop and listen

Even lifelong Texans haven't heard of many of these towns. They are hidden along isolated country roads, mostly forgotten, without stoplights, traffic jams or shopping malls. Truth be told, they have precious little reason for "being" aside from the fact that those who call them home wouldn't trade for all the big-city comforts you might offer. And they each have stories to tell—colorful, poignant and fascinating.

The following are a few of the favorite stops I've made over the years while wandering the state's back roads in search of yet another tale to tell.



Pelham
 Navarro County
 Population 35

A FORMER FREEDMEN COMMUNITY

WHEN I MET HIM in 2012, 88-year-old Alfred Martin, the self-appointed town historian, lived across FM 744 from what was once the school he attended as a boy. Aside from the time he spent as a flight line crew member for the legendary Tuskegee Airmen during World War II, this was Martin’s home.

He could recall when the state’s last remaining all-Black community boasted a grocery, dry goods store, church, post office and a population of more than 300. Pelham even had an amateur baseball team that brought home a state championship.

Asked the current ages of his neighbors, Martin smiled and began pointing in the direction of their houses and counting: “Let’s see ... 88, 93, 85 ...” Pelham, he admitted, wasn’t likely to make it much longer.

When the Emancipation Proclamation freed the nation’s slaves following the Civil War, each Black man in town was given 200 acres to call his own. Fields were cleared and tilled, cotton and grain planted, and new lives thrived.

Now, however, the community’s well-tended cemetery is the resting place of the majority of past Pelham residents. The aging memorabilia and family histories housed in the school-turned-museum keep alive the memories of better days.

Hye
Blanco County
Population 100

THE ALL-BROTHERS BASEBALL TEAM

INSIDE THE COMBINED Hye General Store and Post Office, a fading black-and-white photo hangs proudly behind the checkout counter. Nine Deike brothers, dressed in spanking new baseball uniforms, smiling for the camera.

It was snapped during the Depression doldrums when leisure time was as scarce as spending money. An endless routine of work awaited on the farms and at the cotton gin. Only on Sundays did the residents take time off to watch their baseball team play rivals from nearby rural communities.

It was called town ball, and it was generally played on makeshift diamonds carved from pastureland. The preacher would even cut his sermon short so members of his congregation wouldn't miss the first pitch.

Only Hye, 60 miles west of Austin, could field nine players from the same family. Fourteen-year-old Victor was the youngest; brother Edwin, 34, was the oldest. That's not to say they weren't occasionally joined by nonfamily members. Regularly, a lanky first baseman named Lyndon Baines Johnson would drive over from nearby Johnson City.

In 1935, a traveling salesman learned about the Deike brothers and hit on a can't-miss promotional idea. If he could find another all-family team, his Corpus Christi-based Nueces Coffee Co. would promote an exhibition game deciding the All-Brothers Baseball Championship.

Indeed, an opponent was found in Waukegan, Illinois. There, the Stanczak clan had 10 brothers on the same team.

The game would be played in Wichita, Kansas. Provided with their first uniforms and travel expenses, the Deikes made the 14-day trip to Kansas in two Model A Fords. The Stanczaks arrived by bus.

Alas, a perfect ending to the Hye brothers' story wasn't to be. Though they took an early 3-0 lead, the more talented Waukegan team eventually won 11-5. Today, it is their picture on display in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

Still, for the Texas farm boys, it was a time that would long be remembered. A special time, right up there with the day President Johnson came back for a visit to stand in front of Levi Deike's post office and swear in Lawrence O'Brien as the new U.S. postmaster general.



Thurber
Erath County
Population 48

WHEN EVEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN

IN THE LATE 1800S, Thurber was the most populous town between Fort Worth and El Paso, boasting 10,000 residents. Today, travelers hurrying along Interstate 20 see only a solitary smokestack standing watch over its history.

The only reason to stop is for the home cooking served at Andrea Bennett's red brick Smokestack Restaurant. Inside, the walls are lined with photographs from another time, back when her restaurant was the local mercantile and the townspeople were mining 3,000 tons of bituminous coal and firing 80,000 bricks daily.

Workers and their families came to live in the small frame houses provided by the Texas & Pacific Coal Co. There was a school, a 650-seat opera house, general store, fire station, churches, a weekly newspaper, library, hotel, and a human-made lake for fishing and swimming.

The Thurber baseball team, made up of miners, won the 1896 Texas amateur championship. Each summer a traveling circus came to town.

Thurber bricks were used to build the Galveston seawall and pave many of Fort Worth's early streets. Its coal kept the trains running and homes heated.

Though the exact date isn't official, Thurber died in 1936. The oil boom was the killer, its black gold replacing coal as the nation's favored fuel. The mines began closing, and workers scattered in search of new jobs. The frame houses they had called home were sold off for \$40 each to anyone willing to haul them away.

Now all that remains are the ghost stories, the nostalgic pictures on Bennett's restaurant walls and the nearby 100-year-old town doctor's house where she lives.



WHEN HOSS WAS JUST A COLT

IT IS TRADITION, you know, for small towns to alert passersby to the fact they were once home to somebody famous. Billboards are the favored tool. Even little Abbott had one to remind travelers that it was country music legend Willie Nelson's hometown until, hoping to regain a sense of privacy, he set fire to the sign late one boozy night.

To my dismay the Panhandle community of O'Donnell, just south of Lubbock, had not gotten around to any side-of-the-road celebration of its favorite son.

Back in the *Bonanza* heyday, *TV Guide* expressed interest in learning how this cotton crop way-stop had groomed famed actor Dan Blocker to become the good ol' boy Hoss Cartwright on the popular TV show. I hit the road.

And the townspeople were ever so obliging. Seemed almost everyone I bumped into went to school with Blocker, played football with him, fought with or dated him. Even those who didn't know him firsthand insisted they were faithful viewers of his portrayal of Hoss every Sunday.

Yet friend and farmer Wayne Carroll admitted Blocker's TV role puzzled him. "It's kind of hard to picture Dan on the Ponderosa," he said. "Farming and ranching never interested him. He was the guy we all went to for help with our lessons, always studying or reading a book."

His mother, Mary, agreed: "One Christmas we got him a horse and saddle, but he really wasn't interested. After a while, we sold the horse."

When her son didn't have his nose in a book, he worked weekends at his dad's Blocker Grocery & Market. On Friday

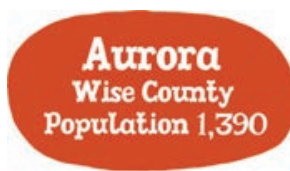
nights, he was a standout lineman and kicker for the O'Donnell Eagles. The only kid in town who could lift the rear end of a '47 Plymouth, his strength and size (already 6 feet tall and 200 pounds by age 13) earned him a scholarship to play for what was then Sul Ross State College in Alpine.

Once Blocker earned his degree, his life's goal was to become a teacher. He did teach for a time in high schools in New Mexico. But then Hollywood and the fictional Ponderosa beckoned.

Rest assured, Blocker never forgot his roots and came to visit regularly. At the height of his acting career, he even made an appearance at the annual O'Donnell Rodeo. "Biggest crowd we ever had," recalls boyhood pal Bobby Clark.

With the exception of cotton crops, I learned that conversation is O'Donnell's main byproduct. And the easiest way for a stranger to be assured a generous helping of the latter is to bring up the name Dan Blocker.

"There was once some talk about a billboard," Clark says, "but the more we thought about it, the more convinced we were that Dan wouldn't care much for the idea."



LONG BEFORE ROSWELL

THE STORY WAS right there on the front page of *The Dallas Morning News* in April 1897, so it had to be true, right?

S. E. Haydon, the paper's longtime correspondent, had written of an "airship" that flew over the North Texas community of Aurora before crashing into Judge Proctor's windmill and exploding. Aluminum-like debris, Haydon wrote, was scattered everywhere, destroying the judge's water tank and ruining his prized flower garden.

Bear in mind, this report was filed a decade before the Wright brothers got their rickety plane off the ground at Kitty Hawk and predated, by half a century, that famous Roswell, New Mexico, report of the ranchland UFO crash that became the gold standard of otherworldly tales.

And the Aurora story got even better. The child-sized pilot of the craft had been killed in the crash, and kind citizens of the community saw to it that he was given a proper burial in the nearby cemetery the following day. The grave was marked by a large rock featuring a quickly sketched image of "a cigar-shaped ship with three circular windows."

Today a historical marker stands at the entrance to the cemetery, recalling the event.

Is the recounting true or false? People have been asking for over a century. Some say Haydon had a habit of telling whoppers when there was no real news to report and he just invented the spaceman's visit.

But as late as 1973, an aviation journalist named Bill Case visited the community and tracked down a 98-year-old local who recalled visiting the crash site as a child, even viewing the "torn-up body" of the spacecraft's pilot.

At the time, the makeshift headstone was still in place. Case even took a picture of it. But soon after his article was published, the marker vanished. Today, no one in Aurora is certain of the exact location of the infamous grave.

Legendary investigative reporter Jim Marrs, who spent his career researching the strange and spooky, says he was, for years, "undecided" on the matter. In time, however, he found the story compelling enough to produce a full-length documentary on the alleged crash.

"What ultimately got me off-center on the matter," he says, "was seeing the actual edition of the paper in which Haydon's story was published. It wasn't even the lead story that day. Among numerous accounts of strange sightings was one from nearby Stephenville, headlined The Great Aerial Wanderer. In all, the newspaper published 16 stories about UFO sightings that day, from as far south as Austin and north into Oklahoma."

Something, he was convinced, really did happen in Aurora.



Strawn
Palo Pinto County
Population 540

MAGIC AT MARY'S CAFE

NEITHER A FOOD CRITIC nor avowed foodie, fine dining and haute cuisine are foreign to my vocabulary. That said, it is my humble opinion that the Michelin Guide folks have missed a bet. Or maybe they just have something against chicken-fried steak.

In the tiny hamlet of Strawn, just 90 minutes southwest of Dallas, is the mother church of the popular comfort food. At Mary's Cafe every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas, the service station-turned-eatery is jam-packed. The gravel parking lot is filled with traveling biker clubs, church groups or a busload of young athletes in search of a post-game meal.

Owner Mary Tretter estimates that over 90% of her customers are from out of town, arriving from as far away as New Mexico, Colorado and Georgia. Some come wearing the Mary's Cafe T-shirts they purchased on a previous visit.

And while the menu is lengthy and varied, it is the king-sized chicken-fried steak with a bowl of cream gravy and a mound of french fries that is most often requested. Annually, Tretter orders over 48,000 pounds of cutlets that are pounded, floured and cooked into her signature dish.

But don't bother asking for the recipe. It is so heavily guarded that she requires her 30 employees to sign a non-disclosure agreement before stepping into her kitchen. All she will admit is that her chicken-fried steaks are cooked on a flat-iron griddle rather than heavily battered and actually fried.



Tretter was 14 when she started working there as a waitress and dishwasher. The place was known as the Polka Dot then and was struggling mightily. The local bank, preparing to take it over, asked Tretter if she might be interested in buying it. At the time she was neither business savvy nor much of a cook but bought the little 89-seat restaurant. That was in 1986.

She changed the name, hired a staff and went to work. In her fourth decade of ownership, seating capacity is 300—and getting a table isn’t without a little wait.

And Tretter gives “hands-on” new meaning. She takes Wednesdays off to spend time with her grandkids. The rest of the week she’s in the kitchen cooking or out on the floor, greeting customers and taking orders.

“Our goal,” she says, “is simple: Fill the plate with good food, make it look nice and keep the customers happy. If they leave here hungry, it’s their fault.”



FLEETING VICTORY

I’VE ALWAYS LOVED the scene in the movie *The Big Chill* when a reporter explains that he’d just been assigned to do a feature on a blind baton twirler. When asked where in the world such story ideas come from, he shrugs and answers, “Just good investigative reporting.”

Personally, I prefer the magic of dumb luck.

To wit: I was awaiting a flight home from Houston, reading the sports section of the local paper, when a small item caught my eye. Asherton High School, it noted, had just won its first basketball game in years. The final sentence added that the same school’s football team currently owned the nation’s longest losing streak.

Two things immediately occurred to me. First, I had to figure out where Asherton was. Second, what publication would be interested in a story on such a historically hapless team?

The editor of *Parade* magazine bit, and I was soon off to deep South Texas. By the time I arrived, the Trojans had lost 40 football games in a row. A few years earlier, they had endured an entire season without scoring a single point.

Yet what I found was light-years from what I’d expected. A migrant worker community, it was virtually deserted since most families had not yet returned home from following the northern harvests.

The school was in disrepair, jagged cracks in its old brick walls, the 500-seat stadium in worse shape. There was little grass and a huge ant bed spread across the 50-yard line. The scoreboard was a hand-me-down, donated by neighboring Carrizo Springs. A 24-year-old teacher, Terry Harlin, who never played the game, had agreed to coach since no one else wanted the job. School officials agreed to add \$600 to his salary for the extra work.

Thus, the story was not one of laughable ineptness but, rather, a courageous quest against impossible odds.

Readers took the plight of the Trojans to heart. Envelopes bearing small donations began arriving from across the nation. A Houston sporting goods company donated shoulder pads and helmets. Inmates of a Georgia prison adopted Asherton as “their team.”

And in the first game of the 1972 season, Asherton won, defeating rival Crystal City 12-6. A film crew, dispatched from a Houston TV station, was there to record the historic event.

The cheers, however, didn’t last. In 1999 the Texas Education Agency ordered Asherton High to close, citing its troubled history of financial insolvency. The students bade their old school goodbye and enrolled in the nearby Carrizo Springs Independent School District.



THERE ARE ENDLESS other nifty towns, like Study Butte, home of the last one-room school in Texas; Luckenbach, where legendary owner-mayor Hondo Crouch held court; Terlingua and its annual chili cook-off; and Cisco, where Conrad Hilton bought his first hotel and Santa Claus robbed the bank.

Get out your map. ■



SAMANTHA BRYANT | TTEC

**Youth Tour sends teens to Washington, D.C.,
where bonds form and horizons expand**

SITES *and* INSIGHTS

BY CLAIRE STEVENS

On the drive from her home outside Kerrville to a hotel in Austin, high school junior Ella Robbins had butterflies. She was excited about her upcoming adventure, for sure.

“But I was mostly nervous,” Robbins says. “I didn’t know anybody, and I was really nervous about what people were going to think of me and just self-conscious.”

The nerves lingered as she arrived and checked in June 15, 2025, for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C. Everyone was friendly, Robbins recalls, though some teens kept to themselves, scrolling on their phones. But the 143 strangers were all about to board the same flight to the nation’s capital, where everything would change.

In D.C., Robbins marveled at the towering stained-glass windows of the National Cathedral and felt awe when she

looked out from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and saw the reflection of the Washington Monument. But what really changed her trip was the second day, when she found herself in a bus seat across from Sierra Nickel of Uvalde.

“As soon as I started talking to her, it was really great,” Robbins says. She can’t quite remember what they talked about in that first conversation where they clicked so easily, maybe Taylor Swift—who else?—but the two became fast friends. Robbins soon found herself getting lost in the excitement and packed schedule of the trip, frequently with Nickel at her side.

“I kind of stopped worrying about what people were thinking of me,” Robbins says.

For 60 years, electric cooperatives across Texas have sent high school students to Washington for this all-expenses-paid

week of sightseeing and learning. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience in which little moments—like that one on the bus—lead to unexpected memories and friendships.

With growing confidence, Robbins, sent by Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, and her new friend, sent by Medina Electric Cooperative, explored the monuments and memorials of the National Mall, museums and Capitol Hill. At the Capitol, Robbins was able to do what she'd come here for.

In U.S. Rep. August Pfluger's office, Robbins got a peek into the day-to-day functions of a congressional office.

She wanted to ask about the process of applying for disability insurance and legislation relating to service dogs. The topic was close to her heart—her father is blind and uses a guide dog. She was concerned about his difficulty securing resources and the hostility he sometimes faces when bringing his dog into public spaces. At the Capitol, she shared her ideas with one of Pfluger's aides.

"He was actually interested in having a conversation, and that was really nice. I was informing him of some

OPPOSITE Students representing five electric cooperatives at the National Mall on their first day in Washington, D.C. Fifty-eight Texas co-ops sent teens on Youth Tour.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Texas students participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Ella Robbins from Heart of Texas EC holds up her Youth Tour challenge coin, which students were awarded for going above and beyond.



CLAIRE STEVENS | TEC



SAMANTHA BRYANT | TEC

things, and he was telling me more about the legislative side," Robbins says. "He says they try and pass lots and lots of bills, and occasionally they'll just get one or two. It's just a very difficult process. I didn't realize."

That was one learning opportunity among many. Some students sat down with and heard from survivors at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Participants had the opportunity to obtain a library card at the Library of Congress, visited George Washington's home at Mount Vernon and danced together in front of the White House.

On the last day in D.C., they toured Arlington National Cemetery, where they witnessed a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"That was one of the reasons I wanted to go, was to honor our fallen soldiers who didn't get recognized," says James Bell of Aspermont, one of four Texas students selected to lay the wreath. "My great-grandparents were buried at the Arlington cemetery, so that was awesome, to have that much of an honor to do that where they're buried."

The cemetery requires silence at the tomb, a memorial for fallen U.S. soldiers whose remains have not been identified. In a solemn ceremony, Bell and the three other students stepped in sync with one of the tomb's guards before placing a wreath of red and white flowers in front of the marble monument.

"Laying the wreath was amazing," says Bell, who was sponsored by Big Country Electric Cooperative. Watching Bell was his brother, Jack, who had gone on the tour two years before, and his uncle, a retired Army chief warrant officer, both of whom unexpectedly showed up at the ceremony. "It was a really big surprise."

By the time the teens boarded the flight home, the early nerves were nowhere to be seen. No longer strangers, they left with unexpected bonds that span the state.

"My favorite part—it sounds cliché—it's the people," says Eli Felcman, a delegate from Concho Valley Electric Cooperative. "I met lifelong friends." ■

Ready To Hit the Road?

For more information on Youth Tour and how you can apply, contact your electric cooperative.



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— Gene H.

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- Monthly rates as low as \$3.49.
- Coverage is also available for your spouse and other family members.
- Benefits will NEVER be canceled or reduced for the life of the policy if premiums are paid on time.

Policy Form #SRTCV/SRTCVR13 or R17, or #SRTCV90MA in MA

\$30,000 Children's Life Insurance

- Rates are based on your children's or grandchildren's present age and never increase for any reason.
- Monthly rates as low as \$2.17.
- Benefits will NEVER be reduced or canceled if premiums are paid on time.
- Give your children a financial head start right now. Your policy builds CASH VALUE for your family's needs.

Policy Form #GWL2001 or GWLA001

(Offer may vary, \$100,000 coverage not available in all states.)

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MESSAGE FROM
CEO/
GENERAL
MANAGER
RHETT REID

Reflecting on Progress, Planning for the Future

AS WE BEGIN another year, I want to express gratitude for you, the members of Rusk County Electric Cooperative, for your continued trust and support. Our cooperative was built on the promise of people coming together to improve the quality of life in their communities, and that promise still guides everything we do today.

Each decision—whether it’s about delivering reliable electricity, innovating for the future or advocating for smart energy policies—comes back to one simple question: How will this benefit you, our member?

The past year has been marked by meaningful progress, both in strengthening our local system and in working at the national level to influence energy policies that directly affect reliability and affordability.

Over the past year, electric co-ops across the country came together for advocacy efforts on the Environmental Protection Agency’s power plant rule. As originally written, the rule would have forced a rapid shift away from always-available power generation resources, threatening the accessibility of a diverse fuel supply that ensures reliability.

Renewable energy sources are an essential and growing part of our energy future, but we also know that the demand for electricity is rising rapidly, and natural gas, coal and nuclear remain essential for ensuring power is available around the clock.

As we collaborated and engaged with policymakers alongside other cooperatives, we pressed for a

more balanced approach to generating power—one that supports clean energy innovation while still recognizing the role of traditional resources.

Modernizing federal permitting to strengthen the grid and meet growing demand is another area we’re working on. This year, electric co-ops helped move the needle on permitting reform, advocating for policies that make the process faster, more predictable and more efficient.

Achievements like these are not just wins in Austin and Washington—they’re wins for Rusk County EC members like you.

In addition to advocacy efforts, we’re proactively preparing for the future by investing in technologies and programs that improve service. With advanced monitoring systems, we’re better equipped to identify issues before they cause problems.

As we look ahead to a new year, I see challenges and opportunities on the horizon. The energy industry is undergoing significant change driven by rising demand for electricity, new tools and technologies, and federal energy policies.

I’m confident that with the dedication of RCEC employees and the continued support of our members, we are well-positioned to adapt and meet challenges head-on. Through it all, our promise to you remains steadfast: reliable power for today—and tomorrow. ■



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SAVE THE DATE

Rusk County EC 89th Annual Meeting

Thursday, April 30
Rusk County Expo Center

OKSANA SAZHNEVA | ISTOCK.COM



Rusk County EC Offers Scholarships

RUSK COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE will offer scholarships to 2026 high school graduates who live in the co-op's service area and whose immediate family is a member of the co-op.

Scholarship applications must be postmarked no later than March 6.

For details or a scholarship application, see your high school counselor or visit our website, rcelectric.org, where you'll find the application on the scholarship page: Select Community and then Scholarships from the drop-down menu. ■

Rusk County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

CONTACT US

P.O. Box 1169
Henderson, TX 75653-1169
Phone (903) 657-4571
Email info@rcelectric.org
Web rcelectric.org

CEO/General Manager

Rhett L. Reid

Board of Directors

Jay Innerarity, President
Emily Whitworth, Vice President
Richard "Trey" Hacker, Secretary-Treasurer
Tony Cavaliere, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer
Sam Allison
Kenneth Keeling
Michael Pinnell

24/7

For information and to report outages, please call us.

Outage Hotline Numbers

LOCAL
(903) 657-4571

TOLL-FREE
1-855-945-3520

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Henderson

(903) 657-4571

3162 State Highway 43 E.

Hours: Monday–Thursday, 7 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

Carthage

(903) 693-2198

325A W. Sabine, Suite 1

Hours: Monday–Thursday, 7 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and 1–5 p.m.

Lakeport

(903) 643-9181

8989 FM 349

Hours: Monday–Thursday, 7 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and 1–5 p.m.

BILL PAYMENT OPTIONS

- Online with SmartHub or Pay Now
- By automatic bank draft
- By mail to P.O. Box 1169, Henderson, TX 75653
- In person at any of our offices
- Night deposit box at all office locations
- By phone at 1-855-945-3520. Please have your RCEC account number available.

VISIT US ONLINE

rcelectric.org



Check us out at
TexasCoopPower.com/rcec

Your Rights as a Consumer-Member

RUSK COUNTY Electric Cooperative is a member-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperative organized under IRS code 501(c)(12). The cooperative is governed by a democratically elected board of directors.

Cooperative Offices and Business Hours

Mailing Address:

Rusk County Electric Cooperative
P.O. Box 1169
Henderson, TX 75653-1169

Physical Locations

Henderson Main Office

3162 State Highway 43 E.
Henderson, TX 75652
(903) 657-4571
Monday–Thursday
7 a.m.–5:30 p.m.
Closed Friday

Carthage Branch Office

325 W. Sabine St., Suite 1
Carthage, TX 75633
(903) 693-2198
Monday–Thursday
7 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and 1–5 p.m.
Closed Friday

Lakeport Branch Office

8989 FM 349
Longview, TX 75603
(903) 643-9181
Monday–Thursday
7 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and 1–5 p.m.
Closed Friday

Night depositories are at all three locations for payments after business hours.

Outages may be reported toll-free at 1-855-945-3520 and through the SmartHub app.

Rate and Service Information

You may request copies, at a reasonable cost to reproduce, of any portion of the co-op's rate and service tariffs and rules.

Credit and Deposit Policy

The cooperative may require you to establish credit, but such establishment of credit shall not relieve you from complying with rules for prompt payment of bills. The deposit shall not exceed one-fourth of the estimated annual electric billing.

Additional deposit may be requested if the consumer's actual billings for the past 12 months are at least twice the initial deposit and a disconnection notice has been issued for the account within the previous 12 months.

An additional deposit must be requested in writing, and service may be disconnected if payment is not made within 10 days of the request.

When you have paid bills for service for 24 consecutive billings without having service disconnected for nonpayment of bills and without having more than two occasions in which a bill was delinquent, the cooperative will automatically apply your deposit as a credit to your account, provided that your account is current.

A. Subject to these rules, you will not be required to pay a deposit if:

1. You have been a customer of any utility for electric service within the last two years and are not delinquent in payment of any such account; and
2. During the last 12 consecutive months of service, you did not have more than one occasion in which a bill for such utility service was paid after becoming delinquent; and
3. You never had service disconnected for nonpayment.
4. Upon applying for permanent residential service, you are 65 years of age or older and do not have an outstanding account balance with RCEC or any other utility that accrued within the last two years.
5. You sign up for prepaid billing.

B. In lieu of a cash deposit, you may provide one of the following:

1. A letter of credit history from your previous utility

Credit history shall be applied equally for a reasonable period of time to a spouse or former spouse who shared the electric service. Credit history maintained by one will be applied equally to the other, without modification or additional qualifications not required of the other.

2. A satisfactory letter of payment guarantee

The letter of guarantee will be returned and/or voided after 24 consecutive billings if your service has not been disconnected for nonpayment or if you have not been delinquent more than twice.

Alternate Payment Plans

Upon request and qualification, these alter-

nate payment plans are available: bank draft, credit card payment and check payment by phone through SecurePay, deferred payment plan, average billing, or Retire Ease. Payments may also be made 24/7 through the cooperative's website, rcelectric.org, or through the SmartHub app.

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance may be available from your local branch of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs or the Public Utility Commission of Texas. If you're having trouble making payment for electric service, the following agencies may be able to help.

Gregg County

- Community Action, (903) 758-5674, get-cap.org
- Social Services, (903) 237-2623
- Longview Community Ministries (for Longview residents only), (903) 753-3561
- Area Agency on Aging (for ages 60 and older), 1-800-442-8845
- East Texas Veterans Resource Center, (903) 291-1155

Nacogdoches County

- Area Agency on Aging (for ages 60 and older), 1-800-442-8845
- Salvation Army, (936) 569-9871

Panola County

- Tri-County Community Action, (903) 693-2752
- Area Agency on Aging (for ages 60 and older), 1-800-442-8845
- Mission Carthage, (903) 693-4673
- East Texas Veterans Resource Center, (903) 291-1155

Rusk County

- Community Action, (903) 758-5674, get-cap.org
- Area Agency on Aging (for ages 60 and older), 1-800-442-8845
- East Texas Veterans Resource Center, (903) 291-1155

Shelby County

- Area Agency on Aging (for ages 60 and older), 1-800-442-8845
- Tri-County Community Action, (936) 598-6315
- Helping Hands Outreach Center, (936) 598-4990

Meter Reading

If you would like information regarding the proper method of reading your electric meter, the cooperative will provide full instructions upon request.

Meter Testing

You may request a test of your electric meter if you believe that the meter is not accurately reflecting your actual electric consumption. This test will be made at no charge to you, provided that the meter has not been tested during the previous four years. In the event that you request more than one test within four years and the meter is within accuracy standards, you will be billed for the test.

Service and Billing Disputes

A. A member may file a complaint in writing with the cooperative. The cooperative shall promptly make a suitable investigation and advise the complainant of the results thereof within 21 days.

B. In the event the complainant is dissatisfied with the cooperative's response, the member may request a supervisory review.

1. If the cooperative is unable to provide a supervisory review immediately following the request, then arrangements for the review shall be made for the earliest possible date.

2. Service shall not be disconnected before the completion of the review. If the member chooses not to participate in a review then the cooperative may disconnect service, provided proper notice has been issued under the disconnect procedures of this tariff.

3. The results of the supervisory review must be provided in writing to the member within 10 days of the completion of the review, if so requested.

4. Members who are dissatisfied with the supervisory review must be informed of their right to file a complaint with the commission.

You have the right to file a complaint with the Public Utility Commission of Texas, Office of Consumer Protection, P.O. Box 13326, Austin, TX 78711-3326; phone (512) 936-7120 or 1-888-782-8477; fax (512) 936-7003; email customer@puc.state.tx.us; puc.state.tx.us; TTY (512) 936-7136; or Relay Texas (toll free) 1-800-735-2989.

C. Upon receipt of a complaint from the commission on behalf of a member, the cooperative shall make a suitable investiga-

tion and advise the commission in writing of the results thereof within 21 days after the complaint is forwarded to the cooperative.

Outstanding Bills

Under the tariffs of this cooperative, you have 16 days from the date of issuance of the bill until the bill becomes delinquent. If the bill is not paid within 26 days, power may be disconnected.

Termination of Service

A. Your service may be disconnected after proper notice for the following reasons, and the cooperative will either mail or email a notice of termination at least 10 days before the date of disconnection.

1. Failure to pay an outstanding bill within 26 days of issuance.

2. Failure to meet the terms of a deferred payment plan.

3. Use of service that interferes with the service of others or the use of nonstandard equipment. RCEC will attempt to notify you of the problem and allow you a reasonable opportunity to correct the situation.

4. Failure to comply with deposit and guarantee arrangements.

If you are seriously ill or will become more seriously ill as a result of termination of service, you must have an appropriate health official contact the cooperative concerning your condition within 16 days of the issuance of the bill and furnish written verification within 26 days of the issuance of the bill. The cooperative will then refrain from termination of service for 63 days from the issuance of the bill, unless a lesser period is agreed upon. If you make a request to avoid termination under this provision, you must enter into a deferred payment plan.

B. Your service may be disconnected without notice for the following reasons:

1. Where a known dangerous condition exists for as long as the condition exists.

2. Where service is connected without authorization of the cooperative.

3. Tampering with the cooperative's meter or equipment, or bypassing the same.

Service Reconnection

If your service is disconnected for reasons listed above, you may reestablish service when all outstanding bills and appropriate fees are paid and when a deposit or other evidence of payment guarantee is provided to RCEC.

Statement of Nondiscrimination

This institution is an equal-opportunity provider and employer.

Spanish: Esta institución es un proveedor de servicios con igualdad de oportunidades.

If you wish to file a civil rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html or at any USDA office, or call 1-866-632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter by mail to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410; by fax (202) 690-7442; or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Special Services

Members with physical disabilities and their caregivers who need assistance to be informed of these rights can contact the cooperative at the numbers listed in Item 1. For the hearing-impaired to contact the Public Utility Commission, the teletype (TTY) number is (512) 936-7136.

Communication With Members

The primary mode of communication with RCEC members is through the local pages of *Texas Co-op Power*. However, supplemental information is available through the cooperative's website at rcelectric.org, Facebook and the SmartHub app.

Annual Meeting

The cooperative's annual meeting is held each spring. Notice will be provided through *Texas Co-op Power*. All members are encouraged to attend. ■



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Oil: Make sure the oil is at the proper level.

Visibility: Inspect all exterior lights, defrosters (windshield and rear window) and wipers. Install winter wiper blades.

Be Prepared

The National Safety Council recommends having these items in your car for winter driving:

- ▶ Properly inflated spare tire, wheel wrench and tripod jack
- ▶ Shovel
- ▶ Jumper cables
- ▶ Tow and tire chains
- ▶ Bag of cat litter for better tire traction
- ▶ Tool kit
- ▶ Reflective vest in case you need to walk to get help
- ▶ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ▶ Reflective triangles or flares
- ▶ Compass
- ▶ First-aid kit
- ▶ Windshield washer fluid
- ▶ Ice scraper and snow brush
- ▶ Matches in a waterproof container

Prep Your Car for Cold Weather

AS TEMPERATURES DROP, ensure your vehicle—and you—are equipped to handle the roads.

Even in Texas, severe winter weather can strike at any time, bringing ice, sleet and snow. Driving in such conditions is ill-advised at best and could be downright dangerous. Check the weather before venturing out, and if the roads are unsafe, consider postponing your travel.

Follow these tips to stay safe while driving this winter.

Check Your Car

It's important to have a mechanic check the condition of the following vehicle systems before winter, when you could be heading out on treacherous roads.

Brakes: These should provide even and balanced braking. Also check that the brake fluid is at the proper level.

Engine-cooling system: Ensure a 50/50 mixture of anti-freeze and water in the cooling system at the proper level.

Electrical system: Check the ignition system, and make sure the battery is fully charged and connections are clean. Verify that the alternator belt is in good condition with proper tension.

Exhaust system: Have a professional inspect the exhaust for leaks and that all connections, clamps and hangers are snug.

Tires: Check for proper tread depth and signs of damage or uneven wear. Inflate to recommended levels.

- ▶ Scissors and string or cord
- ▶ Car charger for your cellphone
- ▶ Nonperishable, high-energy foods like unsalted nuts, dried fruits and hard candy
- ▶ Warm clothing

Winter Driving Tips

- ▶ Never warm up a vehicle in an enclosed area, such as a garage.
- ▶ Do not use cruise control in wintry conditions.
- ▶ Drive slowly.
- ▶ Look and steer in the direction you want to go.
- ▶ If visibility is severely limited due to a whiteout, pull off the road until conditions improve.
- ▶ Keep at least half a tank of fuel in your vehicle at all times.
- ▶ Accelerate and decelerate slowly.
- ▶ Increase following distance to 8–10 seconds.
- ▶ Know your brakes. Whether you have antilock brakes or not, keep the heel of your foot on the floor and use the ball of your foot to apply firm, steady pressure on the brake pedal.
- ▶ If possible, don't stop when going uphill.
- ▶ Signal distress with a brightly colored cloth tied to the antenna or in a rolled-up window. ■

Substations Perform a Powerful Role

The electrical system depends on devices behind fences

ELECTRICAL SUBSTATIONS ARE vital to delivering power to our community's homes and businesses. The complex array of equipment serves as transit points in this system, with the ability to raise ("step up") and lower ("step down") voltage.

High voltage helps speed power across long distances on transmission lines. However, if electricity enters your home at too high a level, electronics could be damaged, as happens with lightning strikes.

That's why, as power gets closer to its final destination, substations reduce it to a safe and constant voltage level.

Several types of substations are found between power plants and homes. Each contains different equipment, including transformers, lightning arrestors, circuit breakers and insulators.

Initially, step-up substations at power plants increase electricity's voltage to various levels (between 115 and 765 kilovolts) so it can be shipped through high-voltage transmission lines. Once electricity nears its destination, transmission substations typically reduce the voltage to between 23 and 69 kV.

From there, the power moves through smaller transmission facilities to electric co-op distribution systems. Distribution substation transformers then slash the voltage even lower, typically to 12,500 volts.

At this point, the distribution lines you see running up and down rural roads and across fields bring power to you. To make that energy safe for household use, a pole-mount transformer (the round object resembling a small gray garbage can located near the top of a utility pole outside your residence) or a padmount transformer (the gray boxes dotting your neighborhood) cuts the voltage once more, to between 120 and 240 volts.

Remember, the voltage entering and exiting substations far exceeds anything you'll find at home. Substation fences protect you and the equipment housed within and help ensure that your co-op can continue providing you with a safe, reliable and affordable supply of power. ■



CHRISTINE KOHLER | ISTOCK.COM




MEGAN MYERS

Kickin' Chicken Spaghetti

- 1 pound uncooked spaghetti**
- 3 cups shredded chicken**
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
(10.5 ounces)**
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
(10.5 ounces)**
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese**
- 1 orange bell pepper, diced**
- 1 jar diced pimiento peppers
(4 ounces)**
- 2 cans diced green chiles
(4 ounces each)**
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt**
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- 1 cup shredded pepper jack cheese**

1. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch casserole dish. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Boil spaghetti until it's al dente. Drain noodles and pour into a large bowl.
2. Mix in shredded chicken, soups, cheddar, bell pepper, pimientos, green chiles, seasoned salt and cayenne.
3. Pour into prepared casserole dish. Sprinkle on pepper jack. Bake 45 minutes, until bubbly.

SERVES 8

 Find this and more delicious recipes online at [TexasCoopPower.com](https://www.texascoopower.com).



RINA MSKAYA | ISTOCK.COM

Stay Safe and Warm During a Winter Storm

PAST WINTERS HAVE shown us how a polar vortex can bring high winds, subzero temperatures and ice to many parts of the country, even those not accustomed to winter weather. This severe weather can cause hazardous road conditions, downed power lines and extended power outages. That's why it's important to prepare well before a winter storm hits.

Winter storms are deceptive killers because most deaths are indirectly related to the storm itself. Many hazards can remain after the storm has passed, and in cases of particularly severe weather, you may be in for a prolonged outage as utility crews work to get the lights back on.

Rusk County Electric Cooperative works hard to maintain and restore power and offers these tips for staying warm during a winter power outage.

Be sure to have a storm preparedness kit ready before a storm strikes to help get you and your family through a power outage. This kit should include bottled water, nonperishable food, blankets, warm clothing, a first-aid kit, flashlight, radio, extra batteries, toiletries and essential medications.

Stay inside and dress warmly. If you must go outside, use caution and treat all downed and sagging lines as if they're energized. Downed power lines could be submerged in snow

and ice, making them difficult to see. Stay away, warn others to stay away and immediately contact Rusk County EC.

Be aware of the temperature in your home. Infants and older adults are more susceptible to the cold. You may want to stay with friends or relatives or go to a shelter if you can't keep your home warm enough.

Close off unoccupied rooms and place draft blocks at the bottom of doors to minimize cold air entering the house. Cover windows at night.

When the power is restored, there may be a power surge. To protect your circuits and appliances, switch off lights and unplug appliances. Leave one light switched on as a quick indicator that the power is restored.

If you're using an alternative heating source during a power outage, be sure to know how to use it safely and gather supplies for it beforehand. You should have enough supplies in your preparedness kit to last up to a week.

If you're using a generator during an outage, it should be outdoors and well-ventilated. The carbon monoxide released by a generator can be deadly. ■

Easy Steps to Greater Efficiency

A TYPICAL AMERICAN FAMILY spends nearly \$2,000 per year on their home energy bills, according to the Department of Energy. Much of that money, however, may be wasted through leaky windows or ducts, old appliances, or inefficient heating and cooling systems.

Where To Start

Improving the envelope of your home is a good place to start getting that money back. Seasonal temperature changes and wind vibrations can loosen up even a tight home. Doors and windows may not close tightly, and ductwork can spring leaks. By installing weatherstripping and caulking around windows and doors, you can keep cool air inside during warm months and prevent chilly air from penetrating the indoors during colder months.

Sealing gaps around pipes, dryer vents, fans and outlets also helps seal the envelope and creates greater efficiency.

Replacing incandescent light bulbs with LED bulbs can make a big difference in home efficiency and is a quick way to cut your energy bill. Known for their longevity and efficiency, LEDs have an estimated lifespan of 10,000–20,000 hours compared to 1,000 hours of a typical incandescent.

Wrapping Up Savings

Installing a blanket around your water heater could reduce standby heat losses by 25%–45% and save you 7%–16% in water heating costs. For about \$30, you can purchase a precut jacket or blanket and install it in an hour.

Given that a large portion of your monthly energy bill goes toward heating and cooling your home, it makes sense to ensure your home's heating, ventilation and air conditioning system is performing at an optimal level. Changing or cleaning your filter extends the life of your HVAC system and saves you money.

Air filters prevent dust and allergens from clogging the system. Dirty filters can increase operating costs by 15% and result in the need for costly duct cleaning or replacement. Many HVAC professionals recommend changing or cleaning filters monthly. ■



ANDREYPOPOV | ISTOCK.COM

How Old Are Your Wires?

OUR HOMES ARE a lot like us. They age just like we do, and like us, some signs of aging can be seen and some cannot. Just as we need to get regular checkups, our homes also require periodic inspections.

Electrical problems can cause fires and serious or fatal electric shocks. You should take electrical issues seriously and take action immediately.

When it comes to the electrical system in our homes, it's important to contact a qualified electrician if you experience any of the following:

- ▶ Circuits trip or fuses blow frequently
- ▶ You get a shock when you touch an electronic or outlet
- ▶ Outlets are warm to the touch
- ▶ Appliances shut off when you turn on a light
- ▶ Lights flicker
- ▶ A burning smell or popping or sizzling sound is coming from electronics

Those symptoms are associated with the following problems.

Electric overload: If you have an older home, it may not be up to the electric demands of today's appliances. If the electric system in your home becomes overloaded, it can cause shocks or a fire. You may need an electrician to update your wiring or your electric service.

Short circuits: A short circuit occurs when electricity leaks out of the path wires set for it. This often happens when insulation deteriorates or is damaged. A short circuit can cause an electric arc, which could start a fire.

Ground fault: In a ground fault, electricity is not leaking aimlessly. It is headed places, and that place is the ground. Electricity will get to the ground the quickest way possible, even if that means traveling through a human body. An electrician can install ground-fault circuit interrupters, which prevent these situations.

A qualified electrician can tell you more about electric hazards and provide solutions specific to your home. ■



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 — E. B., Stone Mountain, GA

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When Two Hearts Join

Discover the enchanting allure of our Two Heart Necklace, where love's symphony unfolds in timeless elegance. Inspired by that moment, when it all clicks and you realize you have found the one... and where two become one, this exquisite piece captures the essence of two hearts entwined in a dance of destiny. Crafted with precision and passion and encased in 14k gold, it embodies the essence of your enduring love, echoing the sentiments of Shakespeare's sonnets and the romances of Jane Austen. Our client's favorite, it is now priced at its lowest ever even as gold reaches a record high, awarding it a stellar 4.9-star rating in reviews making it the Gift of the Year. Embrace the magic of shared dreams and whispered promises with the Two Heart Necklace, a treasure to cherish for generations to come.



your perfect match. Embrace the romance and elegance of a bygone era with our Two Heart Necklace, a treasure to cherish for a lifetime.

Falling in love costs nothing but the value is priceless. Showing your love with this two hearts set costs next to nothing and the feeling you will get when wearing it or giving it to your love will certainly be priceless.

Two Hearts Collection

A. Bracelet (13 3/4 ctw)	\$299	\$39* + S&P	Save \$260
B. Necklace (2 1/8 ctw)	\$199	\$39* + S&P	Save \$160
C. Earrings (4 1/4 ctw)	\$229	\$39* + S&P	Save \$190
Necklace, Bracelet & Earrings	\$727	\$79* + S&P	Save \$648

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

1-800-333-2045
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Let this necklace be your own love story, a testament to the beauty of companionship and the joy of finding

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Doctoring Reality

Frontier physicians relied on confidence more than credentials

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

BECOMING A DOCTOR was a lot simpler in frontier times, when you didn't have to go to school for a long time or even know much about medicine. You could just call yourself a doctor. And if your first consideration was to cause no harm and you were blessed with at least a modicum of common sense, other people would call you a doctor too.

"Dr." John F. Webber is a case in point. Born in Vermont and a veteran of the War of 1812, Webber settled in Stephen F. Austin's colony, in what was then Mexico, by 1824.

Along with Texas chronicler Noah Smithwick and two other men, Webber took part in a tobacco-smuggling operation farther south in Mexico. Webber wasn't a trained doctor, but he played

one to avoid answering a bunch of annoying questions about the nature of his visit. Posing as a doctor was easier than explaining 1,000 pounds of leaf tobacco to the authorities.

In one town Webber advertised his services as a physician. Smithwick was fairly fluent in Spanish, so he accompanied the "doctor" as he tended to patients. "With an air of importance that would have done credit to a professional, Webber noted the symptoms, shaking his head, knitting his brows, and otherwise impressing the patient with the seriousness of his condition," Smithwick later wrote.

Smithwick and Webber had a sampling of medicines, mostly quinine, calomel and tartar emetic, a poisonous compound that some brave souls took to induce

vomiting; it made Webber's patients feel different, if not better. "The doctor's fame went abroad, and he soon had a large practice, same as imposters of the present day," Smithwick wrote.

Smithwick also knew the inventor Gail Borden Jr. before Borden patented the process for making condensed milk and became known as Dairyman to the World. They knew each other first in San Felipe and later in Burnet County, where Smithwick operated a mill.

Borden was looking for gold on Sandy Creek and also advertising himself as a doctor when he stayed a few days with Smithwick and described to his host how he practiced medicine. "It is no use to be a doctor unless you put on the airs of one," he said. "Nine times out of 10 sickness is caused by overeating, or eating unwholesome food, but a patient gets angry if you tell him so; you must humor him."

Borden humored his patients by administering tiny bits of calomel with enough starch to turn it into a pellet. He glazed the pellets with sugar to make the medicine taste more like a doughnut. Borden said most people who abstained from "hurtful articles of food" felt better as a result.

Unlike Borden or Webber, Dr. Johnson Calhoun Hunter, a native of South Carolina and one of the Old Three Hundred colonists, received a diploma in medicine around 1805, when he was just 18. He was in Texas, in what is now Harris County, by the early 1820s with his wife and the first five of their eventual 11 children. He did a lot more than doctoring when he got here.

Historian Mike Cox wrote that Hunter "could deliver a baby, ride a plow, go hungry, trade with the Indians, run a traverse, pilot a scow, adjudicate a case ... cut a bull, teach a school ... and deliver mail."

They don't make general practitioners like that anymore. ■

Ooodles of Noodles

Heaps of flavor that will keep your forks twirling

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

My friends are always nervous about inviting me to a meal because I cook for a living, but that's exactly why you should invite me. I will never turn down being cooked for. I was recently invited to dinner and served this deliciousness. I immediately asked for the recipe, because I had to share with y'all.

Ginger Pork Noodles

1 package rice noodles (14 ounces)
½ cup soy sauce
¼ cup light brown sugar
¼ cup rice vinegar
1 tablespoon chili garlic sauce
1 tablespoon minced ginger
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 pounds lean ground pork
2 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 cup shredded carrots
1 cucumber, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced
Sesame seeds, for garnish
Fresh cilantro, for garnish
Lime wedges, for garnish

1. Cook noodles according to package directions and set aside.
2. In a bowl, whisk together soy sauce, brown sugar, rice vinegar, chili garlic sauce and ginger. Set aside.
3. Heat oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Cook garlic and pork, breaking up with a spoon, until fully cooked, about 7 minutes.
4. Reduce heat to low and stir in prepared sauce. Simmer 3 minutes.
5. While the pork simmers, whisk together water and cornstarch in a small bowl until well blended. Stir into pork and continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, until sauce thickens.
6. Stir in cooked noodles. Serve warm, topped with carrots and cucumbers. Garnish with sesame seeds, cilantro and lime wedges.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Sopa de Fideo con Garbanzos.





Garlic Spaghetti

JANET EAKINS
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

We all need a go-to recipe in our back pocket for when the to-do list is never-ending, the kids are starving and you must get dinner on the table. This garlic spaghetti is quick and easy, but it packs a punch in the flavor department. Some nights, a bowl of pasta like this is just what we need.

- 8 ounces uncooked spaghetti**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic**
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley**
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese**

1. Cook spaghetti according to package directions, reserving ½ cup of pasta water when draining.
2. In the same pot, heat oil over medium-high. Add garlic and cook 30 seconds.
3. Stir in pasta water, parsley, lemon zest and spaghetti and toss to coat. Season with salt, pepper and red pepper flakes. Stir in feta.

SERVES 4

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

\$500 WINNER

Slow Cooker Chicken Lo Mein

JENNY ZACHMAN-REICHARDT
HAMILTON COUNTY EC



Pull out those slow cookers, and get to tossing this lo mein together! I loved-loved this recipe and plan to make it on repeat. And don't let me find you skimping on the baby bok choy—it's the star of this dish.



- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**
- ⅔ cup low-sodium chicken broth**
- 3 tablespoons oyster sauce**
- 2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce**
- 3 teaspoons hoisin sauce**
- 2 teaspoons honey**
- 2 cloves garlic, minced**
- ½ tablespoon minced ginger**
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- 1 package lo mein noodles (8 ounces)**
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch**
- 3 tablespoons cold water**
- 2 cups sliced baby bok choy, washed**
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced**
- ½ cup matchstick carrots**
- Sesame seeds, for garnish**

1. Lightly coat a 4- to 5-quart slow cooker with cooking spray. Add chicken and season with salt and pepper.
2. In a bowl, whisk together chicken broth, oyster sauce, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, honey, garlic, ginger and red pepper flakes. Pour over chicken and stir to coat evenly.
3. Cook on high 1½–2 hours or on low 3–4 hours. Meanwhile, cook noodles according to package directions and set aside.
4. Remove chicken from slow cooker and shred or dice. In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and water, and stir into remaining sauce in slow cooker.
5. Return chicken to slow cooker and add baby bok choy, bell pepper and carrots. Stir to combine. Cover and cook on high an additional 20–30 minutes or until sauce thickens.
6. Stir in noodles. Serve warm, garnished with sesame seeds.

SERVES 6

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

THE ART OF THE SANDWICH DUE JAN 10

Can you stack, spread and spice your way to a masterpiece between bread? Your best sandwich could win \$500.

UPCOMING: DON'T SKIMP ON SHRIMP DUE FEB 10



ENTER ONLINE



Mom's Best Hamburger Noodle Casserole

JULIE PIERANTONI
PEDERNALES EC

Casseroles are all about comfort and nourishment, and no one understands this better than Mom. This dish is all comfort. Hearty, filling and a snap to whip up, it's delicious—Mom knows best!

- 12 ounces uncooked egg noodles
- 1½ pounds ground beef
- ½ cup chopped white onion
- 1 can corn (12 ounces), drained
- 1 can cream of chicken soup (10.5 ounces)
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup (10.5 ounces)
- 1 cup sour cream
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon meat tenderizer
- 1 cup fresh breadcrumbs
- 3 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter, melted

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. Cook noodles according to package directions, drain and allow to cool.
3. In a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, add ground beef and break up with a spoon. Add onion and cook until onion is tender and ground beef is fully cooked. Drain grease.
4. Stir in corn, soups, sour cream, salt,

Noodle Knowledge

Store unopened noodles in a cool, dry area, away from appliances that generate heat, to prevent exposure to excess moisture.

Store opened noodles in an airtight container.

Store cooked noodles in an airtight container in the fridge and eat within three days.

—Vianney Rodriguez

pepper, tenderizer and cooked egg noodles. Pour into prepared baking dish.

5. In a bowl, mix together breadcrumbs and melted butter. Sprinkle over top of casserole.

6. Bake 30 minutes or until breadcrumbs are slightly crispy.

SERVES 8

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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.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Tip of the Hat to Paris

France’s Eiffel Tower is taller and older, sure, but it’s rather bare

BY CHET GARNER

NOT EVERYTHING IS BIGGER in Texas. Case in point: our Eiffel Tower in our Paris. But that didn’t stop me from breaking out my beret and heading to the Northeast Texas “City of Love” to see our rendition of France’s most famous landmark.

The French built theirs of iron in 1889 for the world’s fair. Texans—never ones to sit quietly while another Paris hogs the spotlight—answered in 1993 with a scaled-down steel replica that has way more Texas swagger.

I rolled into town craving a crêpe and a glass of wine, but those had to wait. First stop was my *petit* pilgrimage to the petite tower. I found it standing proudly on the south side of town, wedged between the civic center and the impressive Red River Valley Veterans Memorial.

I wasn’t alone. Dozens of folks were lined up for their chance at the ultimate French-Texan selfie.

Of course, the first thing anyone notices is the bright red cowboy hat perched on top. It wasn’t there originally. Locals say that after rival Paris, Tennessee, built a tower a smidge taller, Texans did what Texans do—we added a hat and claimed victory.

With the topper, our tower clocks in at 65 feet, proudly earning the title of second-tallest Eiffel Tower in a city named Paris. (The French original stands about 16 times that height at more than 1,000 feet, so first place wasn’t exactly in reach.)

Up close, it looks a bit like a radio antenna’s artsy cousin who studied abroad, but the vibe is pure Parisian picnic. Families sprawled in the grass, kids craned their necks to the top, and couples kissed beneath its steel beams as if the Seine were flowing nearby.

So if you find yourself in Northeast Texas, make the detour. And remember—when in Paris (Texas), the dress code is cowboy casual. ■

ABOVE Chet lands in Paris—no passport required.

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.

JANUARY

8

Dallas [8–11] Hadestown: Teen Edition, (214) 526-4076, juniorplayers.org

10

Amarillo Serenading the High Plains, (806) 376-8782, amarillosymphony.org

Corsicana Mimosas at the Market, (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

Palestine [10–11, 17–18, 24–25, 31–Feb. 1] Faire of Champions, contact@faireofchampions.com, faireofchampions.com

15

Lufkin T.G. Sheppard, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

16

Galveston [16–17] Yaga’s Chili Quest, Beers & Cheers; (409) 770-0999; yagaschiliquest.com

Lubbock [16–18] Water for Elephants, (806) 792-8339, americantheatreguild.com

17

Brenham Uptown Swirl, (979) 337-7239, downtownbrenham.com

El Paso Veterans Create, (915) 533-0048, tomlea.com

Fredericksburg Book Festival, (830) 997-6513, fredericksburgbookfestival.org

Gonzales Come and Take It Makers Market, (830) 888-6800, bit.ly/makersmarket26

Plano [17–18] Dallas Area Train Show, (214) 906-8092, dfwtrainshow.com

18

Fredericksburg Texas
Guitar Quartet, fredericksburg
musicclub.com

19

Elgin Martin Luther King Jr.
Walk, (512) 281-5724,
elgintexas.gov

22

El Paso Tom Lea's Twelve
Travelers Through the
Pass of the North Exhibit
Opening, (915) 533-0048,
tomlea.com

Fort Worth Mah Jongg
Tournament, (817) 335-3525,
thewomansclubfw.com

Paris [22-24] Tower
City Comedy Festival,
(903) 785-5233, towercity
comedyfestival.com

24

Jefferson Queen Mab Ball,
(903) 240-6809,
mardigrasupriver.com

29

Brenham [29-Feb. 1,
5-8, 12-15] Ken Ludwig's
Dear Jack, Dear Louise,
(979) 830-8358,
unitybrenham.org

FEBRUARY

4

Laredo [4-7] Birding
Festival, (956) 964-4102,
laredobirdingfestival.org

6

Lufkin The Jazz Legacy
Project Presents the
Life & Music of Billie Holiday,
(936) 633-5454,
angelinaarts.org

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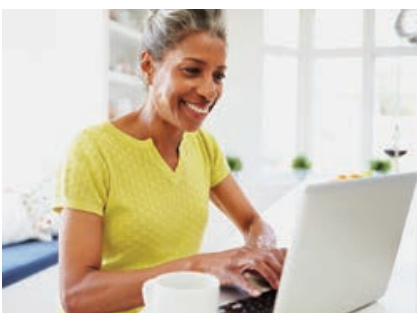
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Snakes Alive!

Not to get you rattled, but off the beaten path you'll find more than a few snakes in the grass. These readers took their chances and didn't roll snake eyes. We've balanced the scales, and the winners were so close, they may strike!

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 ALAN ABAIR
COSERV

A western diamondback rattlesnake.

2 JOSHUA TREVINO
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

A Sunda Island pit viper.

3 CHARLES BAXTER
COSERV

"An eastern racer under a crape myrtle tree in Argyle."

4 SHARON CARTER
PEDERNALES EC

"I saw this beauty resting in the woods next to my Wimberley home."



Upcoming Contests

- CAUGHT NAPPING** DUE JAN 10
- MAKING A SPLASH** DUE FEB 10
- SEASONED SNAPS** DUE MAR 10



TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Snakes Alive! photos from readers.



Fortune Knocks

Scottish tradition holds that good luck comes through the front door on New Year's

AS TOLD BY RON RUSSELL
TO ANNA RUSSELL
ILLUSTRATION BY TARA JACOBY

IN THE SUMMER of 1954, when my family's neighbor Brad Proctor asked me to help with farm work, I did not know it would lead to me becoming a first footer.

I pedaled my bike 1 ½ miles to help Brad put up hay. From then on, year-round, every afternoon, I milked cows and mucked stalls.

His mother-in-law, Mrs. Harris, lived with them. And whenever I ventured into the kitchen for a drink, Mrs. Harris told me tales of her youth in Scotland. Eventually, they decided to move Mrs. Harris to a nearby, almost secluded, house.

A few days before the end of the year, I stopped for another visit with Mrs. Harris. She clasped my hand. "I want you to be my first footer," she said.

Well, I knew a lot about farm life, farm animals and an abundance of chores.

However, I had no idea how to be a first footer. I did not want to insult Mrs. Harris. I squirmed before I asked, "Please, what is a first footer?"

"My great-great-great-grandparents passed the Scottish tradition through the family to me," she said, explaining that a tall, dark-haired man must be the first to set foot in a house in the new year. "Because you are a dark-haired man, when ..."

I interrupted her. "But I'm only 14 years old. That leaves me out."

Mrs. Harris raised her hand to stop me. "The worst is for a woman to be my first visitor. Oh, Lordy, that'd guarantee bad luck all year." She looked me up and down as she nodded her head. "Now, if you had red or blond hair, fear would shiver me with alarm at the sight of you on New Year's Day."

She chuckled. "However you do qualify. You're the size of a man, and you have dark hair, so when your foot hits my threshold, you will bring me good fortune for the coming year."

She winked. "Best you bring a gift, say bread, salt or coal. OK?"

When I got home, Mom listened to Mrs. Harris' proposal to me. Then she said, "We have Scottish blood, too. Remember the cabbage, carrot and onion soup that we eat at noon each New Year's Day? It's also a custom that my Scottish ancestors practiced."

"Why cabbage? I hate cabbage."

"Cabbage represents abundance to some people." Mom elbowed me aside to remove bread from the oven.

I did not want to take Mrs. Harris a lump of coal or a piece of firewood. And my Grandpa Ed would not like me taking his whiskey bottle. Ah, the perfect gift was on the kitchen counter.

Allowing that Mrs. Harris would be awake at 9 o'clock on New Year's morning, I knocked on the door. Her wide grin almost stretched to the door sills.

She waved me in. I handed her a loaf of Mom's fresh-baked bread.

I am a first footer! ■

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¹DETAILS OF OFFER: Offer expires 2/28/2026. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Buy one (1) window or entry/patio door, get one (1) window or entry/patio door 40% off, and 12 months no money down, no monthly payments, no interest when you purchase four (4) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 1/1/2026 and 2/28/2026. 40% off windows and entry/patio doors are less than or equal to lowest cost window or entry/patio door in the order. Additional \$45 off each window or entry/patio door, minimum purchase of four (4) required, taken after initial discount(s), when you purchase by 2/28/2026. Subject to credit approval. 12-month Promo Period: while no payments are due, interest accrues but is waived if the loan is paid in full before the Promo Period expires. Any unpaid balance owed after the Promo Period, plus accrued interest, will be paid in installments based on the terms disclosed in the customer's loan agreement. Financing is provided by various financial institutions without regard to age, race, color, religion, national origin, gender, or familial status. Savings comparison based on purchase of a single unit at list price. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. License numbers available at renewalbyandersen.com/license. Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. ²Based on testing of 10 double-hung units per ASTM E2068 20 years after installation. ³It is the only warranty among top selling window companies that meets all of the following requirements: easy to understand terms, unrestricted transferability, installation coverage, labor coverage, geographically unrestricted, coverage for exterior color, insect screens and hardware, and no maintenance requirement. Visit renewalbyandersen.com/nationsbest for details. ⁴Review aggregator survey of 5-star reviews among leading national full-service window replacement companies. January 2024 Reputation.com. ⁵Renewal by Andersen[®] and all other marks where denoted are trademarks of Andersen Corporation. © 2026 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. RBA14201