

# GIVING BACK TO THOSE WHO KEEP US SAFE



## VFDs, first responders top list of 42 nonprofits given \$1.2 million in Bluebonnet Community Grants

By Denise Gamino

**S**afety first. That is a key foundation value of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative and a guiding principle used to choose the 42 nonprofits that received \$1.2 million in the latest—and last — round of the popular Bluebonnet Community Grants program.

In April 2016, Bluebonnet awarded new grants to 18 volunteer fire departments and other first responder organizations in local communities served by Bluebonnet. Those volunteer crews were in dire need of safety equipment, firefighting vehicles and additional fire station space to properly carry out their lifesaving duties.

Other Bluebonnet grants in April went to nonprofit groups that provide health care, shelter, food, transportation and other vital services in the 14 counties served by the co-op. Some grants went to organizations that provide cultural activities in the community, too.

“In all my years on Bluebonnet’s Board of Directors, the Bluebonnet Community Grants program has been one of the most rewarding things we have done,” said Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet’s Board chairman. “I know my fellow directors feel the same way. During this process, Bluebonnet’s directors and employees reviewed hundreds of grant applications and came to appreciate the much-needed services provided by these organizations.”

“There is no greater love or commitment to our neighbors than to help someone in need, especially in a life-threatening situation. Every one of these



Sarah Beal photo

**An Elgin volunteer firefighter responds to reports of a brush fire. A new utility-terrain vehicle to fight brush fires will be provided with a \$27,855 grant from Bluebonnet. Read more about the Elgin Volunteer Fire Department on page 20A.**

### Bluebonnet Community Grants

grants will positively impact countless lives, especially the ones to public safety organizations,” Flencher said.

The Bluebonnet Community Grants money comes from a legal settlement. The \$3 million program is not funded through co-op operating revenue.

The 42 grants awarded in April cover capital projects, and range from \$4,898 to \$50,000.

Bluebonnet received 142 applications requesting \$6.9 million for this final grant cycle.

The new grants are the second round of Bluebonnet Community Grants. In November 2015, the program donated \$1.2 million to 38 community programs to improve the lives of tens of thousands of people in Central Texas.

The Bluebonnet grants originally were to be awarded over a three-year period. But the quantity and quality of grant applications showed the tremendous community needs in Bluebonnet’s service area. Bluebonnet



Lukas Keapproth photo

officials and its Board of Directors decided to award most of the \$3 million in the first two grant cycles to help nonprofit groups serve the immediate needs of so many people in local communities.

The \$600,000 remaining in the Bluebonnet Community Grants program will not be distributed through applications as in the past.

“Due to the overwhelming response and the amount of money awarded to the 80 area nonprofits during the first two rounds, we will not accept applications for a third round,” said Rachel Ellis, Bluebonnet’s chief administrative

officer. “We will look at the best way to make sure the remaining funds are distributed to area nonprofits in need of support and those that will provide the maximum benefit to our members and communities.”

Bluebonnet selected four new grant recipients to profile on the following pages to illustrate some of the community needs being addressed.

For more information about the Bluebonnet Community Grants, including recipients from both grant cycles, visit [bluebonnet.coop/grants](http://bluebonnet.coop/grants).

**Somerville volunteer firefighter Josh Barnett is equipped with an aging air tank that will be replaced by a new breathing device. A Bluebonnet grant will pay for new air tanks, a new thermal imaging camera and helmet-mounted lights for hands-free firefighting. Read more about the Somerville Volunteer Fire Department on page 20.**

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### MONTHLY MEETING

Bluebonnet’s Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. July 19, at Bluebonnet’s Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., (formerly 650 Texas Hwy. 21 East), Bastrop. Find the agenda and last-minute updates July 15 at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop). Hover your cursor over ‘next board meeting’ on our home page.

### OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet’s offices will be closed Monday, July 4, in observance of Independence Day.

### CONTACT US

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### OUTAGES

Call **800-949-4414** if you have a power outage. Keep up with outages 24/7 at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop). Hover your cursor over ‘outage report’ on our home page. You can also send us a text message: To get started, text **BBOUTAGE** to **85700** and follow the prompts. Save that number in your contacts, perhaps as “Bluebonnet Outages.” If your power goes out, text OUT to that number. Download our free mobile app for iPhone or Android and you can report an outage on your smartphone.

### ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative produced the blue-bordered pages 18-25 in this issue of the magazine with content that is of specific interest or relevance to Bluebonnet members. The rest of the magazine’s content is distributed statewide to any member of an electric cooperative in Texas. For information about the magazine, contact Janet Wilson at **512-750-5483** or email [magazine@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:magazine@bluebonnet.coop).

## MEALS ON WHEELS AND MORE

**J**eanette Jewart likes to snack on chips and melted cheese, even though it is not the healthiest choice.

Jewart, who turns 81 this month, is a former schoolteacher living in Cedar Creek, east of Austin in Bastrop County. She is diabetic, uses a walker because of arthritis and balance problems, and has survived quadruple heart bypass surgery.

Jewart, a widow, knows it is important to eat a balanced diet but is on a fixed income from Social Security. She feels fortunate to be one of 130 older adults who receive seven nutritious meals a week from Meals on Wheels and More.

The donated meals are frozen and delivered together once a week as part of Country Wheels, a Meals on Wheels and More program. The weekly delivery includes fruit and other nourishing goodies.

"It really helps with the grocery bill," Jewart said. "Seems like every time I send somebody to buy groceries for me, I am paying more and more."

A \$22,500 capital grant from Bluebonnet will help Meals on Wheels and More buy a new or used freezer truck to replace one of two trucks with more than 100,000 miles on them. The trucks transport frozen meals from the Meals on Wheels and More headquarters in Austin — where food is prepared — to recipients in Bastrop, Lee, Caldwell, Hays, Fayette, Travis and Williamson counties. Country Wheels serves people who live too far away for daily hot meal delivery.

"We are just so honored to receive this grant from Bluebonnet Electric," said Thad Rosenfeld,



Sarah Beal photo

spokesman for Meals on Wheels and More. "They are helping us reach folks who live in remote areas and supporting them with nutritious meals that help keep them healthy. We're helping those folks live independently."

A new freezer truck costs \$45,000. The nonprofit hopes to find a pre-owned truck or identify a donor who can match the Bluebonnet grant.

**Former schoolteacher Jeanette Jewart relies on Meals on Wheels and More to help with food. Teddy Tobias, a manager with Meals on Wheels and More, delivers seven frozen meals a week. The Austin-based nonprofit received a \$22,500 Bluebonnet grant to help pay for a new or used freezer truck to deliver meals to Bastrop, Lee, Caldwell and parts of Travis and Williamson counties.**

## SOMERVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

**W**ayne Wilhelm became a firefighter at age 16. Now, with more than 40 years of experience with the Somerville Volunteer Fire Department, Wilhelm can easily describe what it's like to fight a raging fire: "It's scary in there."

Smoke suffocates. Flames incinerate. And darkness hides victims and escape routes. Firefighters must be able to breathe, see and, ideally, pull a hose with two hands in a fire.

"You have to make sure you get in and out, and make sure you get the people out if someone is in there," said Wilhelm, chief of the 25-member volunteer crew in Somerville, 15 miles northwest of Brenham.

The Somerville Volunteer Fire Department is using nearly expired breathing devices, an all-but-obsolete thermal imaging camera to try to find hot spots and victims trapped in smoke, and hand-held lights that leave only one hand to pull heavy fire hoses.

A \$50,000 capital grant from Bluebonnet will outfit the Somerville firefighters with adequate protective breathing devices, a new thermal imaging camera and helmet-mounted lights for hands-free firefighting.



Lukas Keapthoth photo

"With man-made material in all the housing, the smoke is so toxic you have to have some kind of protection or else you may not make it," Wilhelm said. "You're not doing anybody any good if you can't get out."

The Somerville firefighters cover 80 square miles of territory, including oil fields. There, they encounter fires involving tank trucks carrying crude oil, batteries on oil wells, saltwater disposal wells as well as other oil-

related situations. They also conduct rescues on Lake Somerville.

The new equipment will make a big difference in safety.

"It gives you a better feeling about going inside a building when you have the kind of equipment that we're going to get," Wilhelm said. "It's just safer for the people you're trying to rescue and for the rescuers themselves."



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## TEJAS HEALTH CARE

Infection control is of utmost importance in every dental office. At Tejas Health Care's community dental clinic in La Grange, the sterilization machine, called an autoclave, works hard to sterilize instruments, but it is an older, slower model. A \$32,479 Bluebonnet capital grant will allow the nonprofit group to buy a new, faster sterilization machine.

The difference "is like a Corvette compared to a pickup truck," said Dr. Jared Parkinson, the clinic's dentist.

The bilingual dental clinic will also be able to buy newer dental x-ray equipment that exposes patients to less radiation and allows earlier detection of potential problems before they require more expensive treatment. The clinic entrance also will be renovated to improve access for people with disabilities.

Tejas also operates a bilingual medical clinic in La Grange and another in Giddings.

"We're doing everything we can so everyone in our community will have a place to go for health care," said Sheri Kehler, CEO of Tejas Health Care. "The need continues to grow. We are totally ecstatic about receiving this money from Bluebonnet."

Tejas began serving patients in 2009 and now has about 4,400 patients in Lee and Fayette counties — 36 percent are children and 64 percent are adults. The clinics had nearly 14,000 patient visits over the past year. Tejas has three doctors, two nurse practitioners, a dentist, a dental hygienist, a psychologist and two licensed professional counselors through a



Sarah Beal photo

partnership with the local mental health authority.

Tejas's mission is to provide health care that everyone can afford. Many Tejas Health Care patients "are people who would normally fall through the gaps," Kehler said. Tejas offers uninsured patients a sliding fee payment schedule based on their financial situation.

"It's a real good feeling, what we do every day to be able to take care of folks and not turn people away," Kehler said.

**Dr. Jared Parkinson is the staff dentist at the Tejas Health Care dental clinic in La Grange. A \$32,479 Bluebonnet grant will pay for a machine to sterilize dental instruments, new X-ray equipment and improvements to the clinic's entrance to provide better access for people with disabilities.**

## ELGIN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT



Sarah Beal photo

**T**he 38 civic volunteers who put out fires and respond to car crashes in Elgin are accustomed to rescuing people. But sometimes they have to be rescued themselves.

The rural landscape around Elgin — 30 miles east of Austin on U.S. 290 — can make it impossible for the Elgin Volunteer Fire Department to respond adequately to fires or rescue situations on undeveloped land. Several Elgin fire trucks that carry 200-300 gallons of water have been trapped in sand so fine it is called sugar sand. When that happens, firefighters have to call a bulldozer to pull them out.

The Elgin Volunteer Fire Department, formed in 1897, is finally getting a utility-terrain vehicle (UTV) that can push through sand, heavy vegetation, creek beds and other challenging off-road conditions. Bluebonnet awarded the Elgin volunteer unit a \$27,855 capital grant to buy a six-wheel Polaris Ranger with a water

tank, pump, hoses and other attachments for firefighting.

"It was kind of like Christmas in April" when the grant news arrived, said Chuck Fromme, a former Elgin High School auto mechanics teacher and treasurer of the fire department.

Elgin firefighters have been fighting hard-to-reach brush fires on foot.

"We use shovels and small backpack pump sprayers," said Emily Meads, a volunteer firefighter whose day job is installing emergency lights and radios for the Texas Department of Public Safety. "It is effective to a certain extent, but if you have a pretty long stretch to go it will take a toll on you pretty quick."

The Elgin Volunteer Fire Department, which responds to about 55 calls a month, serves 220 square miles as part of Bastrop/Travis Counties Emergency Services District #1. With a new UTV, Elgin firefighters can now get to every corner of their service area to do the job they need to do. ■

**Elgin volunteer firefighter Emily Meads, above, and other members of the Elgin Volunteer Fire Department will no longer have to fight brush fires on foot with a backpack water pump. A Bluebonnet grant will provide the department with a utility-terrain vehicle equipped with a water tank, pump, hoses and other attachments for firefighting.**



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# BLUEBONNET CAPITAL GRANTS AWARDED APRIL 2016

## Blue Branch Volunteer Fire Department

Lee County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Off-road compressed-air foam-system firefighting truck  
**Grant:** \$50,000

## Camp for All Foundation

Burton camp for children/adults from South and Central Texas  
**Mission:** Barrier-free camp for those with illnesses or special needs, and their families  
**Project:** Repair dam/drainage system for camp's lake  
**Grant:** \$50,000

## Ebenezer Lutheran Church

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Faith community  
**Project:** Parking lot for three community buildings  
**Grant:** \$50,000

## Faith Mission & Help Center

Based in Brenham, serving within 100-mile radius of Washington County  
**Mission:** Homeless shelter; medical care; financial aid; education/job opportunities for homeless and working poor  
**Project:** New thrift store/donation distribution center  
**Grant:** \$50,000

## McMahan Volunteer Fire Department

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Brush truck to fight grass and brush fires  
**Grant:** \$50,000

## Somerville Volunteer Fire Department

Burleson County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Firefighter equipment  
**Grant:** \$50,000

## Washington Texas Volunteer Fire Department

Washington County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** New Volunteer Fire Department and Community Training Center  
**Grant:** \$50,000

## Lee County First Responder Organization

Lee County  
**Mission:** Rescue & emergency services  
**Project:** Emergency rescue equipment  
**Grant:** \$46,500

## Elgin Caregivers

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Transportation, visits and in-home support for senior adults  
**Project:** Disability-accessible van  
**Grant:** \$42,000

## Smithville Food Pantry

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Hunger relief  
**Project:** HVAC system, floor sealant and doors/windows for new facility  
**Grant:** \$40,000

## Texas Black History Preservation Project

Lee County  
**Mission:** Document the African-American experience in Texas  
**Project:** New pavilion plaza  
**Grant:** \$37,765.80

## Meyersville Volunteer Fire Department

Washington County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Expand facility with truck bays, office space and training room  
**Grant:** \$37,500

## Giddings Volunteer Fire Department

Lee County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Firefighter equipment  
**Grant:** \$33,400

## Tejas Health Care

Fayette, Lee and Colorado counties  
**Mission:** Affordable medical, dental and behavioral health care  
**Project:** Dental equipment and renovations  
**Grant:** \$32,479

## Bastrop Opera House

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Community theater  
**Project:** Repairs/renovations  
**Grant:** \$30,000

## Luling Foundation

Caldwell, Gonzales and Guadalupe counties  
**Mission:** Agriculture diversity demonstration and education farm  
**Project:** New workshop  
**Grant:** \$30,000

## Martindale Volunteer Fire Department

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Firefighter equipment  
**Grant:** \$29,050

## Boys and Girls Club of Washington County

Washington County  
**Mission:** Educational, health and leadership programs for children and youth  
**Project:** Purchase school bus  
**Grant:** \$28,148

## Elgin Volunteer Fire Department

Bastrop and Travis counties  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Purchase utility vehicle with firefighting equipment  
**Grant:** \$27,855.08

## Dale Community Center

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Community event facility  
**Project:** Kitchen/dining room renovation  
**Grant:** \$27,800

## Art Guild of Fayetteville

Fayette County  
**Mission:** Visual and performing arts in rural areas

**Project:** Repair/renovation of historic ARTS headquarters building  
**Grant:** \$25,000

## Joe Roland Community Center

Caldwell and Fayette counties  
**Mission:** Enhance quality of life in the under-served rural community by offering services including meals for elderly, youth computer classes and a food bank  
**Project:** Community center repairs/renovation  
**Grant:** \$25,000

## Lincoln Volunteer Fire Department

Lee County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Disability-accessible restrooms in Lincoln Community Hall  
**Grant:** \$25,000

## Luling Area Oil Museum

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Preserving the history of the Central Texas oil industry  
**Project:** Elevator installation  
**Grant:** \$25,000

## Prairie Hill - Rocky Hill Volunteer Fire Department

Washington County  
**Mission:** Fire protection  
**Project:** Firefighter equipment  
**Grant:** \$24,990

## Fayette Resale Inc.

Fayette County  
**Mission:** Ecumenical resale shop for the community  
**Project:** Replace HVAC units  
**Grant:** \$24,000

## Luling Little League

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Baseball/softball teams for children  
**Project:** Field maintenance equipment  
**Grant:** \$23,775

## Meals on Wheels and More

Bastrop, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Williamson and Travis counties  
**Mission:** Meals/home repairs for homebound  
**Project:** Refrigerated vehicle  
**Grant:** \$22,500

## Smithville Volunteer Fire Department

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Portable radios  
**Grant:** \$20,624

## Unity Theatre Co.

Washington County  
**Mission:** Community theater in Brenham  
**Project:** A/C upgrade of theater  
**Grant:** \$20,071

## Tanglewood Volunteer Fire Department

Northern Lee County  
**Mission:** Fire protection  
**Project:** Firefighting equipment  
**Grant:** \$19,999

## Primera Baptist Church

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Hunger relief for community  
**Project:** Remodel food pantry, purchase walk-in freezer/shelving  
**Grant:** \$19,926.46

## Bleiberville Volunteer Fire Department

Austin County  
**Mission:** Fire protection  
**Project:** Firefighting vehicle/equipment  
**Grant:** \$19,500

## Luling Area Ministerial Alliance

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Hunger relief/aid for those in need  
**Project:** Roof replacement, porch enclosure  
**Grant:** \$19,500

## Rosanky Community Center

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Community meeting facility  
**Project:** Interior/exterior restoration  
**Grant:** \$18,900

## Muldoon Volunteer Fire Department

Fayette County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Wireless communication system for vehicles  
**Grant:** \$18,528

## Lockhart Area Senior Activity Center

Caldwell County  
**Mission:** Facility/services for senior citizens  
**Project:** Purchase vehicle to deliver meals, kitchen ice machine and refrigerator  
**Grant:** \$17,335

## York Creek Volunteer Fire Department

Guadalupe County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Thermal imaging camera  
**Grant:** \$15,793

## Burleson County Wildlife Association

Burleson County  
**Mission:** Improve wildlife habitat in the county and help support the annual Lake Somerville Challenged Hunter Deer Hunt for wheelchair-bound hunters  
**Project:** Hunting stands, blinds, feeders and feed  
**Grant:** \$15,580

## Heart of the Pines Volunteer Fire Department

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Firefighter equipment  
**Grant:** \$10,080

## Bastrop County First Responders

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Fire protection & rescue  
**Project:** Purchase portable defibrillators  
**Grant:** \$7,145

## Samella Williams Angels Unaware Ministry

Bastrop County  
**Mission:** Meals for children in Smithville public schools  
**Project:** Refrigerator and shelving unit  
**Grant:** \$4,898

