

# Road Less Traveled By



**It's a family affair at The Holy Highway, and the place abounds with the children and grandchildren of Pam and husband Brian, as well as the children of instructors. From left are Sister Sharon Wetzel, Trey Wetzel, Krista, baby Kyndal held by Pam Dickens-Burton, Pam's husband and the schoolmaster, Brian Burton, Kinzie and Sister Judy Park. Kinzie, Krista and Kyndal are three of Pam's grandchildren.**

**T**here's a Bible verse that comes to mind when traveling on one acutely slim and path-like road in Pickton. That verse, Matthew 7:14, says, "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." How ironic that this particular Pickton county road leads to a life-changing place named The Holy Highway.

Amid a 170-acre working farm stands a chapel, barn, several group houses and an accredited academy, all built to lift up, encourage and serve teen girls from 12 to 17 years of age. Together, these structures are just a part of what makes up The Holy Highway, a nondenominational Christian home and private school for girls where love and encouragement, along with discipline and spiritual teaching, are used to instill self-respect and respect of others.

The founder, Pam Dickens-Burton, almost all of her family and many other special people are the earthly forces that breathe life into what Pam says is a God-called ministry. Pam has lived in and around Scroggins and Winnsboro since she was 12 years old. These piney woods are where she married and started her family. It was also here that her first-born son, Kevin, was killed in a boating accident when he was 18. So it was here that she grieved, and then also began her healing. As part of that restoration of heart, mind and soul, Pam began volunteering her time at Teen Challenge Ranch, which, at that time, was a home for disenfranchised boys. While she was there, she became deeply aware of the need for a similar facility for troubled girls. But she also said she did not necessarily want to work with teen girls, who some would say have the reputation for being a tad catty, selfish, moody and emotional.

Pam said she had quite an internal battle before she decided that she was being called to use the skills and the knowledge from her time at Teen Challenge to build a restorative place for teen girls. With support of the community to raise funds and a very willing and generous land seller who greatly reduced his asking price, she bought the property in 1988.

She said when she bought the land, it had a deserted look about it. As she prayed about the name for the min-

istry, she looked through The Living Bible and came across a scripture that spoke to her. Found in Isaiah 35, Pam recites the verses: “And a main road will go through that once deserted land; it will be named The Holy Highway. No evil-hearted men may walk upon it. God will walk there with you.” As she continues to quote, there’s a special part that makes her grin, “Even the most stupid cannot miss the way.” And, she said, that’s when the scripture spoke to her, and she said she felt the name was made known to her.

Deserted or not, Pam moved into the house that was on the property and began the process of turning the place into a home to repair the hearts and shape the attitudes of troubled and rebellious girls. That first house, with much reconstruction, became what is now called Hope Dormitory, and it can house seven girls along with a dorm mother. It was just two months after Pam set foot on the property that she invited her first resident, Shannon, to the home. By the very next year, she was having her second dorm built.

Today, seven dorms stand on the property, and The Holy Highway can accommodate up to 48 girls at one time. Each dorm is very similar to a house but on a little larger scale. There’s a nice living room open to each kitchen and dining area, a reading room, laundry room, large pantry and large bedrooms, each shared by two or three girls.

On a typical day, the girls rise early and straighten their rooms. Then each has scheduled chores, which change every two weeks among the house members. Of those chores, some are cooking, cleaning the bathrooms, laundry, dusting and interior cleaning, and outdoor cleaning of the porch and garbage duty—responsibilities that teach them basic homemaking skills. After morning chores, there is chapel for a few songs and a devotional. After chapel, all of the girls head off to the schoolhouse, where each works at her own pace. It’s similar to a one-room schoolhouse with various grade levels represented.

The school itself, called the Nobel Learning Center, is fully accredited and a pilot of Como-Pickton Independent School District (CPISD). It is a Christian academy but is also an alternative school of the State of Texas. During the regular school year, a teacher from CPISD is assigned to Holy Highway. In addition to the CPISD teacher, there are generally five other full-time teachers and several part-time teachers and tutors. Many of the girls don’t initially come to the school with stellar academic records, so the instruction is very individualized to help them maximize their potential.

Twelve months a year, with shortened hours in the summer, core curriculum is taught at Holy Highway

including English, math, history and science. But, there are also language classes, choir, physical education and others. There is vast attention paid to infusing each student with a good Christian education, with academics being secondary to a developed relationship with Christ. Thus, Bible studies and character-quality education remain the central focus at the school.

For example, upon entering the program, girls must first finish a Bible course before they begin their regular studies. But the teachers also use self-paced curriculum and individual tutoring to ensure that each girl is able to transfer



**Pam Burton will tell you that like Cheria, Hannah and Cheyanne, every single one of the girls at Holy Highway are smart, articulate and full of potential, and the mission of the academy is to help them find those qualities in themselves, so they may share them with others.**

credits when they go back to school after leaving Holy Highway—or, so they can successfully graduate high school from the academy or earn a GED. Just like any other accredited school, CPISD is also responsible for administering the required state tests, and girls can earn an official high school diploma.

Although Holy Highway is state-licensed, it is not state-funded. Therefore, it is dependent upon tuition, and above that, donations, because, Pam says, “Tuition never meets our needs.” Much of the donations come from parents of girls who have been helped by the school, or the now-grown and successful women who were once residents there. The schoolhouse is but one example of grateful giving; it’s named the Nobel Learning Center after the last name of the family that donated the funds to build it. Since 1988, when Pam first founded The Holy Highway, the institution has grown to encompass the seven dorms—Hope, Faith, Joy, Grace, Peace, Rest and Mercy—that were also built with help from donations. Pam says she named the last one Mercy because “I was hoping the Lord would have mercy and not have me build any more dorms.”



**Sister L.C. Williams, third from right, leads by example, working alongside the girls as they perform hard labor. In this tall project, they are clearing the property of a large tree that had fallen after a storm.**

One of the structures that is central to the entire operation, The Harvest Chapel, was also made possible through a donation by a Holy Highway board member. Chapel services are held each morning before school, and there are also evening chapel services every Thursday with programs from a variety of speakers, youth groups and worship or praise ministries. In addition to being a chapel, this structure also houses all of the administration offices, a large community kitchen and a dining hall.

Pam says, "Girls from every single walk of life have come to stay at Holy Highway. Girls have been placed by their parents, their grandparents and other family members." They are also placed by various state systems and probationary institutions and officers.

She explains if family members are placing the girls, tuition is based on income and a sliding scale. And, for probationary systems, Holy Highway is much cheaper than just about any other facility they can work with. In all, Holy Highway has been home to girls from every U.S. state as well as 16 countries and has taken in those who have been involved with drugs, alcohol, running away, gangs, prostitution or other crimes. The goal is to return a healthy, productive girl back to her parents or reintegrate her into society.

"I don't work with bad girls," Pam stresses. "I work with girls who have made bad choices. These girls are beautiful and articulate. We work with them to bring out their talents and help them recognize those talents within themselves."

Proof of that statement comes from the 641 girls who have had their names engraved on the wall plaques heralding their successful completion of the Holy Highway pro-

gram. Other evidence comes from the girls who have graduated, but come back to the Holy Highway chapel to have their marriage ceremonies conducted by Pam, who is ordained. Proof comes also from the many girls, like Sister L.C. Williams, who've been through the program and have come back to work there, even though there is not a lot of money in it.

And work they do. One of the premises of The Holy Highway is that the teachers and dorm mothers lead by example. That means that on any given day, they roll up their sleeves and work right alongside the girls to accomplish chores. That can be a little taxing, though, when a girl has had an infraction and is assigned to hard labor, because those girls won't be doing it alone. Pam says she is 60, and she gets out there and works. And she says one of her leaders, Sandra Morgan, is 67, and she helps build fences or cut

weeds or mow with the best of them. The chores are part of the learning process, designed to teach teamwork, give a sense of accomplishment, and also to teach the girls the value of education.

The Holy Highway, a nonprofit, depends on donors to perform the work it does. Pam said much of their support comes from local churches, the United Way, and individual gifts. In the downturned economy, donations to The Holy Highway have been greatly reduced, as with many charities. But they make the very most with what they have. In addition to monetary donations, any paper goods, personal hygiene or food items, clothes, soap or craft supplies are always welcome and appreciated.

It's bound to be love of God, love of the place and love for the girls that motivates Pam, the other administrators, dorm mothers, teachers and other workers. After all, the payroll for the 16 who currently work there is just \$20,000 a month.

In acclaimed poet Robert Frost's beloved poem, *The Road Not Taken*, he penned, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." That narrow road to The Holy Highway is such a place of divergence for both the girls and those willing to lead. It's a path to a life lived with grace and character, a path to a life of potential, a path to an optimistic future.

The Holy Highway is served by Wood County Electric Cooperative. It can be reached by mail at P.O. Box 160, Pickton, TX 75471 or by calling (903) 866-3300. For more information, visit [www.holyhighway.com](http://www.holyhighway.com).

# A Fresh Electronic Perspective

In addition to a new look and feel, WCEC's website, [www.wcec.org](http://www.wcec.org), now offers members much more functionality. If you are a member who regularly pays your bill online, you've likely already discovered this. If not, and you are among those who have not yet visited our site, we encourage you to do that. There's quite a bit of good information there, ranging from tips on how to reduce energy usage and save on electric bills, to safety recommendations, and even details on community events. Some of the features are outlined below.

**BILL PAYING**—The prominent Account Services button in the upper left of the website will take members to a secure Member Services Portal. Members can sign up for E-Bill and leveled billing, manage bank drafts and make payments. Members can also now sign

up to receive electronic notifications of bill due dates, past-due warnings, returned checks, account changes and electronic payment confirmations.

Members can review and change their profile here and also look at their account history.

And, importantly, members and potential members can now apply online for a new service location or disconnect service.

**MEMBER SERVICES**—It's here that members can connect via computer to request a letter of credit, request tree trimming, report a nonemergency service concern, such as a broken security light, or send us an e-mail.

**HOW DO I?**—On the new website, if you are looking for something and are not sure where to find it, there is a new keyword search, as well as a "How Do I" feature. Members can just type in a word in the search area, or use the pull down the "How Do I" option for typical functions.

**REALLY GOOD EXTRAS**—In addition to all things WCEC, you'll also find a few other ways we are supporting our community. If you belong to an organization that's having an event to which you'd like to invite the public, just go to the Community Calendar in the bottom left corner and submit the data about your event. Once it's reviewed, if acceptable, we'll post it on the website. We're hoping this will be



a valuable tool for all of our neighbors in the communities that we serve.

Also, under the Community tab, we've added a Member Spotlight, where we'll build an online archive of many of our interesting and community-oriented members. Feel free to tell us about yourself or another member here. After verification of membership and approval of suitability for online publishing on our site, we'll "spotlight" your submissions. And who knows? These spotlights, if especially intriguing, could even be considered for a more in-depth story in this magazine.

## Education, Safety and Just For Fun

There's also a place just for Safety & Consumer Tips. It pays to be prepared. We hope none of our members will ever need these tips, but we encourage all to take the time to be prepared. Another important area of the website is our Energy Saving Center that has a myriad of practical tips

to help members reduce their own usage and electric bills. And, because you can never start too early, there's also a fun Kids Energy Zone, made possible through our partnership with Touchstone Energy.

## Your Feedback

It's important to us to know how we are doing. We'd love to hear what you think of the new website. We are open to constructive criticism, as well as hearing your ideas. To that end, you are always welcome to send us an e-mail at [info@wcec.org](mailto:info@wcec.org).

## Go ... Go ... Go Paperless!

AT WCEC, we recognize the importance of giving members options. One way we've done that is through our new electronic billing (E-Bill) option. We hope all members will consider the benefits of E-Bill. As a paperless bill-paying

method, E-Bill reduces clutter and saves both time and energy, while benefiting the environment, too. Another advantage of E-Bill is the reduced postal charges to the cooperative. In our nonprofit cooperative model, any cost reductions and savings benefit all members.

To review this option and all other bill-paying options, go to [www.wcec.org](http://www.wcec.org). Then select the big, red button titled ACCOUNT SERVICES in the upper left of the screen. Then go to MY ACCOUNT. Select E-NOTIFICATIONS and then E-BILL. Then log in with your WCEC account number and password.

All of your accounts should then be listed on the screen. Using your current WCEC login information, select the account you wish to change to the E-Bill method. You will then be prompted to select the way you choose to be billed; enter an active e-mail address, then submit.

*WCEC Invites All Members to the*  
**73<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**



NOTICE OF MEETING  
**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2011**

Governor Jim Hogg City Park • Quitman  
*Entertainment 12:30 p.m. • Meeting 2 p.m.*



The 73rd Annual Meeting of Wood County Electric Cooperative, Inc., will be held Friday, October 7, 2011, at Governor Jim Hogg City Park in Quitman at 2 p.m. All members are invited and encouraged to attend. Beginning at 12:30 p.m., there will be entertainment by the crowd-pleasing New Plainsmen. This popular gospel group entertains with energy, tight harmony and humor. It has appeared at the National Quartet Convention in Branson, Missouri. This is the group's fifth year to entertain WCEC members at the annual meeting.



**The employees of Wood County Electric Cooperative always delight in handing out vendor-donated prizes during the annual meeting—almost as much as the members enjoy receiving them.**

This year's election for directors will be by mail ballot and includes candidates for WCEC Districts 2, 3 and 7. Members currently serving on the board of directors in these districts are: Burke Bullock, District 2; Dennis Wright, District 3; and Lewis Young, District 7.

All members should look for their ballot in the mail soon. Be sure to detach and mail the postage-paid ballot to arrive before noon on October 6, 2011. Members who mail in a ballot will automatically be entered into a drawing awarding four members to be selected at random a \$250 credit toward their electricity bill.

Please DO NOT drop off or mail your ballot to WCEC with your bill. Only ballots received at the mailed address before noon, October 6, 2011, will be counted and entered into the prize drawing.

Be sure to save and bring the other half of the card with you to the annual meeting. This card will be used for participation in door prize drawings for those present. As always, there will lots of prizes, with this year's grand prize being an HD flat-screen TV.

We hope to see you at the annual meeting!

## About the Directors' Elections

The Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) Board of Directors is composed of seven member-elected trustees, each residing in the WCEC district they serve. These board members are all local residents who are members of the cooperative and they represent the needs of their neighbors and communities. The board meets monthly to determine guidelines for management and approve policies and procedures.

To serve on the board, a candidate must receive electric service in the WCEC district they wish to serve within the nine-county service territory. WCEC directors' terms are for three years. Elections are held annually for alternate districts to allow for a continuity of business knowledge from year to year. WCEC's bylaws contain exact details about director qualifications and the nomination/election process.

The bylaws are posted on [www.wcec.org](http://www.wcec.org), and paper copies are available at the cooperative.

# Equipment Operators Urged To Look Up for Overhead Power Lines

*Story of Tragic Farm Accident Provides Valuable Safety Lessons*

An Illinois farmer, Jim Flach, was operating a crop sprayer in a neighbor's field when one of its arms contacted an overhead power line. Climbing down from the cab, Flach was severely burned when he jumped down into the field (creating an electrical path to ground), and he eventually died of his injuries.

Thousands of accidents like this happen every year when large equipment touches overhead power lines. Folks on the ground who touch or even approach energized equipment can also be killed.

Flach's family is working with Safe Electricity's "Teach Learn Care TLC" campaign, sharing the story of their tragic loss in hopes of preventing future accidents. A video of their story can be seen at [www.safeelectricity.org](http://www.safeelectricity.org).

More than 400 electrical fatalities occur every year, and electrocutions on farms are the fourth highest of any other job classification, according to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Most of the electrical deaths investigated in a NIOSH survey could have been prevented.

"You need to double-check, triple-check, to see what's above you," cautions Flach's widow, Marilyn. Son Brett adds, "Be conscious of your surroundings. You need to keep your eyes open and beware of overhead lines."

Wood County Electric Cooperative urges everyone to keep at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines when operating large equipment, and notes that new standards for some construction equipment require a 20-foot clearance. Use a spotter, someone with a broader view, when working with extensions or tall loads around power lines.

Agricultural machinery has increased substantially in size in recent years and can come dangerously close to overhead lines when leaving and entering fields. Combines and grain wagons with extended augers can reach well into the 10-foot radius around a power line. Communication antennas on farm vehicles can also make contact and energize the vehicle with deadly current. On farmsteads, grain augers often tower over power lines when extended to reach the top of grain bins.

Note the location of overhead power lines and make sure all farm workers know to stay clear of them—as well as what to do if equipment does become entangled with a line.

The best action is to stay on the equipment and warn others to stay away until the electric utility ensures that the line is de-energized. Unless you have that assurance, don't climb off the equipment unless there is a fire.

In the event of a fire, an operator should jump clear



**Farm equipment and power lines don't mix but often occupy the same location. Extra attention is necessary to ensure safety and prevent accidents.**

from the equipment without touching the equipment and ground at the same time. Land with feet together, and hop away to avoid deadly current flow.

One of the more frequent mishaps reported by NIOSH involves electrocutions and electrical burns suffered by individuals around truck beds raised high enough to contact overhead lines. When the truck bed is raised to unload the contents, the top front of the bed can easily reach lines.

We encourage farmers and all operators of large equipment to use a spotter when necessary, take steps to keep equipment away from power lines and make sure everyone knows how to survive if there is an accident.

To learn more about electrical safety and see the video about the Flach family, visit [www.safeelectricity.org](http://www.safeelectricity.org).

*Safe Electricity is the safety outreach program of the Energy Education Council.*