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Medina EC lineman Taylor Stacy cuts an 8-foot pizza with an old plow disc.

FEATURES

8 Drive In, Chill Out Drive-in theaters persist as beacons of nostalgia that offer cinema under a boundless sky.

Story by Travis P. Hill | Photos by Dave Shafer

12 Make It a Large Sometimes your eyes—like the oversized food on Texas menus—are bigger than your stomach.

Story by Jeff Siegel | Photos by Tom Hussey

FAVORITES

5 Letters

6 Currents

18 Local Co-op News

Get the latest information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative.

29 Texas History

The Nylon Campaign

By Ellen Stader

31 Retro Recipes

Standout Summer Sides

35 Focus on Texas

Photo Contest: Feedin' Time

36 Around Texas

List of Local Events

38 Hit the Road

Lowly Activities in Arlington

By Chet Garner

ONLINE

TexasCoopPower.com

Find these stories online if they don't appear in your edition of the magazine.

Observations

Bad Moon Waning

By Clay Coppedge

Texas USA

D-Day's Texas Legend

By Gene Fowler

NEXT MONTH

Grown Locally Texas Tech program puts students on a farm-to-table career path.



PIZZA: TOM HUSSEY. GRAPES: KOVALEVA KA | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



ON THE COVER Sam and Shelbie Gaddy get cozy in a 1960s pickup at Brazos Drive-In Theatre in Granbury. Photo by Dave Shafer

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Another Lone Star Flag

The letter *Texas' First Flag* [April 2019] reminded me of the Lone Star flag flown in 1810 over the Republic of West Florida, the short-lived republic (78 days) with St. Francisville, now a city in Louisiana, as its capital.

The single, large white or yellow star in the center of a sky blue field was a symbol of rebellion after the settlers in West Florida rebelled against Spain to set up their own nation before being absorbed into Louisiana and the United States. History is interesting and does repeat, at least occasionally.

JOE WEBB | MARBLE FALLS
PEDERNALES EC

Safety Gear Evolution

Thank you for the article *Gearing Up* [March 2019]. Our grandson Mason Harper especially enjoyed seeing these pictures. He is employed by Primoris and wears lots of safety equipment.

LOREAN PULLEY | RIESEL
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

Blues History

I met Lightnin' Hopkins in 1957 at the age of 15 [*Texas: A Blues State*, March 2019]. We would sit on the porch, and by watching his hands, I learned the three chords he used all the time. I was more of a novelty then, but I did play solo at times with the drummer, Joseph Kilpatrick, better known as the Black Spider. Luke "Long Gone" Miles played with us once, and Cleveland Chenier, Clifton's brother, played a washboard with us several times.

Those days are sadly gone,

Chet Garner Hits the Road

Seen other Texas travel shows, but *Daytripper's* the best one. Chet's awesome. ... There's still so much to discover in the greatest state in the country.

JAIME GARZA | VIA FACEBOOK

You have been on the road for years, uncovering gems ... and having fun across our great state—and you do it all with fun and knowledge!

MARTHA HOLLOWAY LANDRY | VIA FACEBOOK



but back then, playing blues with Lightnin' was everything to me.

ROBERT R. COOK | NEW ULM

Back in 1966, a friend of mine found Lightnin' Hopkins playing at a backwoods bar outside Navasota. Later in the year, he was in Austin. He had a gig at a coffeehouse in an alley off 24th Street. He played the blues, quite often fretting with a whiskey bottle. I got to meet him that evening, and the next day I went out and bought an album with his music.

HAROLD LIECK | DEL VALLE
BLUEBONNET EC



As much as we in Bowie County, particularly De Kalb, would love to claim the blues and folk singer and writer Lead Belly as our own, he was actually born in Mooringsport, Louisiana. Lead Belly did reside in our area for a few years in the 1920s.

Lead Belly wrote many songs during his lifetime. Some are quite familiar, such as *Good Night, Irene*; *Cotton Fields Back Home*; and *Midnight Special*. One that was not so well-known was called *De Kalb Blues*, and that may well have depicted his life in our area.

CAROLYN MCCRARY | DE KALB
BOWIE-CASS EC

A Hispanic Hero

I am a fifth-generation Mexican American. I was very encouraged and inspired by the Marcelino Serna story and made to feel

proud of my Hispanic heritage [*A Hero in Any Language*, March 2019]. This story is one that will go into my scrapbook of many Hispanic heroes that have influenced me in my life.

ANTHONY BARRON | TERRELL
TRINITY VALLEY EC

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Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

A Day of Czech Treats

Join folks in **EAST BERNARD** on **JUNE 8** as they embrace their Czech heritage with the annual **KOLACHE-KLOBASE FESTIVAL**. *Kolache* are traditional Czech pastries—you might remember our feature story, *The Kolach Trail*, from January 2014—and *klobase* is the Czech word for sausage.

Obviously, food is the central theme of the festival, which includes a kolach-eating contest, but so is music—especially polka—and dancing. Part of the festival is indoors, at Riverside Hall, one of Texas' historic dance halls, which were featured in February's cover story, *Hail the Halls*.

INFO ▶ (979) 335-7907, kkfest.com



WEB EXTRAS
▶ Find more happenings online.

BY THE NUMBERS



Texline, in the far northwest corner of the Texas Panhandle, is 899 miles from Brownsville, in the southern tip of the Rio Grande Valley.

The folks in Texline, members of Rita Blanca EC, are closer to residents in 21 other states—Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah and Wyoming—than they are to fellow Texans in Brownsville.

◀ LOOKING BACK AT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY THIS MONTH



SINCE 1944, the year *Texas Co-op Power* debuted, Americans have taken Polaroids, walked on the moon and come to rely on Velcro. These are just a few of the science and technology milestones we remember this month.



1940s

1945 Grand Rapids, Michigan, becomes the first city in the world to fluoridate its drinking water.

1948 The Polaroid Land camera, invented by Edwin Land and the first to produce finished prints instantly, goes on sale.

1948 WBAP in Fort Worth becomes the first TV station in Texas.

1950s

1954 The first pocket transistor radio, the Regency TR-1 from Texas Instruments, goes on sale.

1955 The hook-and-loop fastener, or Velcro, is patented by a Swiss engineer.

1957 The Soviet Union inaugurates the Space Age with its launch of Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite.

1960s

1965 San Antonio native Ed White becomes the first American to walk in space—during the Gemini 4 mission.



1967 Texas Instruments creates the first handheld calculator.

1968 Chemist Spencer Silver of San Antonio invents the low-tack adhesive that changes the world when it's used to create Post-It notes in 1980.

WORTH REPEATING “Texas is big, and Texans are proud of it. Prideful boasts can be made about the countless facets of our greatness without the slightest sacrifice of honesty.”

—JAMES EARL RUDDER, Texan and leader during the Allied invasion of France on D-Day, 75 years ago

TECH KNOWLEDGE

Get Over It

IMAGINE HOPPING INTO a personal flying machine and zipping over traffic to your favorite coffee shop. Seems pretty far-fetched, right?

It might not be. A team from Texas A&M University is working on a vehicle that looks a little like a flying egg with rotor blades mounted near the base and is among the final 10 in a competition called GoFly that drew scientists from 95 countries. The winner of the competition will be announced this fall.

GoFly contest rules stipulate that the personal flying device must be safe, quiet, ultracompact and capable of vertical takeoff and landing. It also must be able to carry a single person for a distance of 20 miles without refueling or recharging.

Moble Benedict, a Bryan Texas Utilities customer, is an aerospace engineering assistant professor and A&M’s team captain. “We want a regular person to be able to fly this thing with minimum flight training,” he told *The New York Times*.

Benedict says he can see personal flying machines becoming a reality within the next 10 years. Great! Will they have cup holders?



FLASHBACK

CINE ON THE SEA

While drive-in theaters evoke nostalgia, they’re still around and drawing moviegoers in Texas, as you’ll learn in our cover story, *Drive In, Chill Out*.

The first American drive-in opened 86 years ago this month in Camden, New Jersey. A year later, on July 5, 1934, the Drive-In Short Reel Theater in Galveston became the third U.S. drive-in. The theater was built for \$1,500 right on the beach, with cars facing out to sea over the Gulf of Mexico.

Admission for a car and all its occupants was 25 cents. For 10 cents, an adult walk-in could sit in the bench seats at the front—5 cents for kids.

It operated for 20 days before a hurricane destroyed it and was never rebuilt.

1970s

1972 The first digital electronic watch, a Pulsar LED prototype built by Texas engineer George Thiess, debuts. Thiess is a director at HILCO EC in Itasca.



1974 A universal product code, or bar code, is used for the first time—at a supermarket in Troy, Ohio.

1980s

1983 The Motorola DynaTAC 8000x becomes the first commercial handheld cellphone.

1984 Apple kicks off a media campaign for its Macintosh computer during Super Bowl XVIII with a commercial invoking George Orwell’s *1984*.

1984 Michael Dell starts his computer company, then called PC’s Limited, in his dorm room at the University of Texas.

1990s

1991 Multipurpose internet mail extension allows emails to be sent with attachments.

1997 The first usable-by-anyone portable defibrillator debuts. It instructs the operator on how to use the paddles, automatically applies the correct voltage and sells for \$4,000.

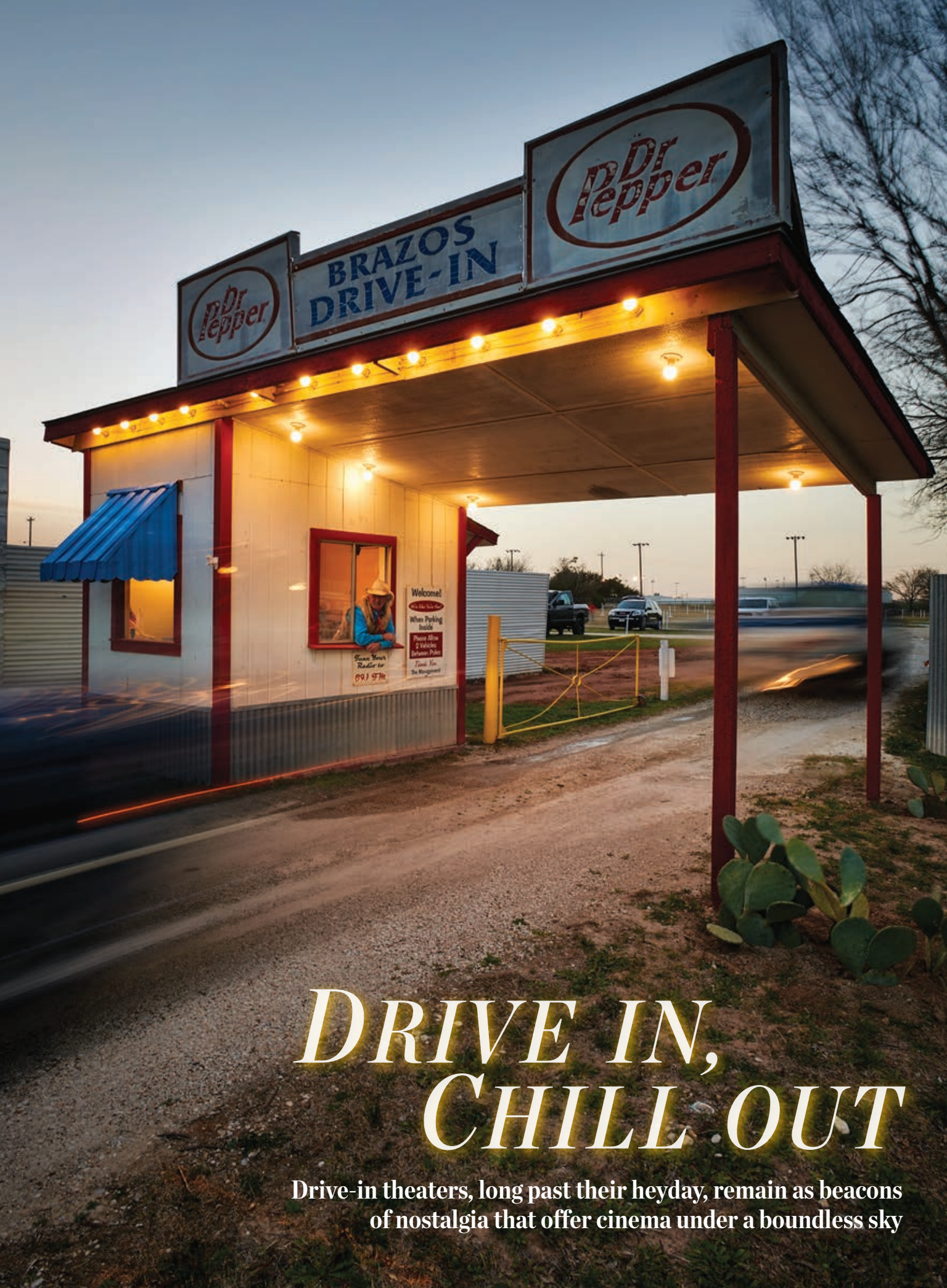


2000s

2007 The iPhone is released, revolutionizing cellphones and popularizing touchscreens.



2018 The University of Texas’ McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis is chosen by NASA as one of three sites nationally to host a facility for its Space Geodesy Project, which aims to help scientists counter the effects of earthquakes, volcanoes, sea level changes and landslides.



DRIVE IN, CHILL OUT

Drive-in theaters, long past their heyday, remain as beacons of nostalgia that offer cinema under a boundless sky

PERHAPS ANY MOVIE could have marked the watershed moment of Ryan Smith's young adulthood, but on that midsummer evening in 2002, it was M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs* that colored the mood at the Sky-Vue Drive-In Theatre on the dusty outskirts of Lamesa.

Smith, in his early 20s and fresh out of his first year of law school at SMU, was in West Texas to learn from his grandfather about the family businesses—bits about farming, real estate, oil and gas, and, most notably, the movie theater business. Smith's grandparents, R.A. "Skeet" and Sarah Noret, opened the Sky-Vue in 1948, and he grew up hearing stories about the iconic drive-in, like the time a then-unknown Buddy Holly played atop the projection room or when Albert Noret, Smith's great-grandfather, invented the now-legendary Chihuahua Sandwich, a quintessentially Tex-Mex concoction of homemade chili meat and pimento cheese, shredded cabbage and diced onions between two tostada shells with a side of jalapeño. Yet, despite his family's long history with the theater, Smith had never seen a movie at the drive-in before that evening 17 years ago.

He had just finished helping out with a rush on the concession stand when he grabbed some food for himself and went outside to catch a bit of the movie. Sitting in his car and crunching away on a Chihuahua Sandwich, he felt enchanted by the whole scenario—the collective energy of the moviegoers that surrounded him in lawn chairs and truck beds, the sound of their laughter at the film's tension breakers—and thought, "Man, this has to be preserved and shared."

He gazed through his open sunroof at the stars glowing over the Llano Estacado and waited for the aliens to invade Mel Gibson's on-screen world.

"It was a communal experience, and yet, I was sitting in the privacy of my own vehicle, enjoying dinner," he says today. "It was an experience that I had never had before but had heard about. And I now understood why the experience was so beloved."

Smith never made it back to law

school. He instead felt a calling to deliver the drive-in experience to others. Just over a year after that night at the Sky-Vue, aided by investments from his family, he opened his first theater, Stars & Stripes Drive-In Theatre in Lubbock.

"So that began the journey," he says, "to try to draw inspiration from what my granddad did and share it with [more] people."

Smith, who also owns land in Lyntegar Electric Cooperative's service territory, has since expanded the Stars & Stripes brand with a second location, in New Braunfels, south of Austin, and today his operation accounts for two of fewer than 20 drive-ins open for business in the Lone Star State. Some of these theaters stand as paint-chipped remnants of a bygone era, when the outdoor double feature dominated the cinema experience and some 400 drive-ins dotted the Texas landscape. Others, like Fort



Lala Watkins prepares for hungry moviegoers at Coyote Drive-In in Fort Worth.

Worth's Coyote Drive-In, inject a twist of modernity into that paradigmatic pastime of the mid-20th century. But all of Texas' surviving

drive-in theaters share at least one quality: the promise of a singular form of entertainment served with a healthy dose of nostalgia—bolstered by the dedication of theater owners to preserving the pastime.

THE FIRST DRIVE-IN theater in the United States opened in Camden, New Jersey, in 1933, and by the late 1950s, there were more than 4,000 drive-ins throughout the country. They were so widespread and popular that to some degree, says D. Vogel, administrative secretary of the United Drive-In Theatre Owners Association, "drive-in movie theaters built Hollywood."

But by 1980, the number of drive-ins had dropped to about 2,400, and a steady decline continued over the ensuing decade,

Opposite: As the sun sets in Granbury, Cowboy Fred awaits the next vehicle at Brazos Drive-In.

Whether it's a night out for the whole family or a romantic evening for two under the stars, there's still a drive-in theater in Texas to meet the occasion.



Coyote Drive-In's big screen set against the vast Texas sky at twilight.

the result of a combination of factors, including land value increases that made it financially attractive for owners to sell their properties to developers, retirements of aging owners and increased competition from entertainment options like home video and multiplexes.

Hollywood's digital revolution—a shift from 35 mm film prints to digital projection that began in the early 2000s—put the nail in the coffin for some drive-ins. A digital projector with a bulb strong enough to project across a field can cost upward of \$70,000, a prohibitive expense for the mom and pop operations these theaters tend to be. But drive-ins that didn't make the switch would be left without new movies to show.

TODAY, THERE ARE FEWER than 400 drive-ins in the U.S. Though their numbers are small, these theaters continue to offer an engrossing experience wholly distinct from their indoor counterparts. A ticket to the drive-in typically provides double-feature entertainment for a lower price than one movie at an indoor theater. The food, also at a reasonable price point, tends to go beyond the standard fare of popcorn, soda and candy. And then there's the freedom granted by the outdoor environment.

"Your options are wide open," Vogel says. "You could just get up and look at the night sky. Or you could just take a quiet stroll around the field and watch families laughing and having a good time together. Or, you could get through the movie simply by taking a little nap until the next one came on."

It's the privilege of providing that experience that keeps many drive-in owners in the game. The defining trait of those who remain,

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to see a map of drive-ins operating in Texas and additional photos.

Vogel says, is "a genuine love for this business. That's what it takes."

And that's a love that Jennifer Miller knows well. She's the owner of Brazos Drive-In Theatre in Granbury, one of the oldest drive-ins in Texas. First opened in 1952, Brazos has welcomed moviegoers every year since, closing only for the winter

offseason. Miller is responsible for more than half of that track record.

She's poured her heart and wallet into the theater since she bought it in 1985. She runs the single-screen operation with just a handful of employees and works the concession stand every night it's open. She shelled out the money for the expensive equipment when digital conversion became necessary and set up a minimuseum featuring the drive-in's old film projector and other memorabilia in the vintage snack bar. The 67-year-old has even donned a bunny suit to entertain kids around Easter.

For Miller, the theater isn't about making money. It's about preserving a piece of history and providing family-friendly fun for her patrons. "I just want to be able to make enough money to keep improving it, so everyone can enjoy it. I guess that's my passion, my focus," she says. "If all I do is save the drive-in, then it's been very, very rewarding for me."

The sense of nostalgia is intrinsic to the historic grounds of the Brazos theater. Newer drive-ins, like the Blue Starlite Mini Urban Drive-In in Austin, must work to evoke the feeling. For Blue Starlite owner Josh Frank, that requires more than showing a movie outdoors. "The movie is a part of the experience, but it's maybe 30%," he says.

Nestled in a partially paved clearing behind a Moose Lodge, the Blue Starlite consists of two mobile screens and a scattering of vintage and aging trailers—some of which can be rented for parties—and signage fonts that scream midcentury diner.

“I love nostalgia,” says Frank, who likens his theater more to an interactive show than a simple venue to catch a flick. “It’s about the classic culture, the nostalgia, the ’50s mentality. I would probably open a malt shop before I opened an indoor movie theater.”

The quest to revive a fading era is also what got Sam Kirkland, South Plains Electric Cooperative member, into the theater business. Kirkland grew up working for the Norets at the Sky-Vue in Lamesa, starting in 1957 and into the 1960s. In those years, he says, the theater was “the pride and joy of the town.”

Things had changed, though, by the late ’70s, when Kirkland was driving by the theater one day to find it closed and overgrown with weeds. He decided to clean it up and help the Norets reopen. Within a year, he bought the theater, which he and his wife kept alive until a fire destroyed the snack bar in 2015.

The demise of the Sky-Vue meant

more than the loss of an entertainment attraction for the Lamesa community. It also represented the passing of a place where generations of memories were made, Kirkland says.

“It was a big deal,” he says. “We had a wonderful playground. I kept all of the original toys repaired. Parents would bring their kids to the Sky-Vue and say, ‘These are the same toys I played on when I was your age.’”

Though the Sky-Vue is no more, Kirkland and others are keeping the tradition alive. Hungry theatergoers can still find the famous Chihuahua Sandwich at Midland’s Big Sky Drive-In, where Kirkland is part owner, as well as at the Stars & Stripes in Lubbock. For those who favor libations with their movies, the Coyote Drive-In in Fort Worth serves up beer and wine, often paired with live music before the show, at its canteen—the sort of appurtenances audiences have come to expect from modern theaters.

Whether it’s a night out for the whole family or a romantic evening for two under the stars, there’s still a drive-in theater in Texas to meet the occasion. And it’s sure to outshine a stuffy night at the mall multiplex.

“The drive-in can give you something that the indoors can’t,” Kirkland says, “and that’s freedom.”

Travis P. Hill is a TEC communications specialist. He lives in Austin.



Right: Cowboy Fred works the box office at Brazos Drive-In. Below: The expansive concession stand at New Braunfels’ Stars & Stripes Drive-In is a main attraction.





**MAKE
IT A**

LARGE

**SOMETIMES YOUR EYES—LIKE THE
OVERSIZED FOOD ON TEXAS MENUS—
ARE BIGGER THAN YOUR STOMACH**

BY JEFF SIEGEL | PHOTOS BY TOM HUSSEY

On a stage in front of the open kitchen at the Big Texan Steak Ranch and Brewery in Amarillo, an empty table looms above restaurant patrons enjoying warm meals on a rainy fall afternoon. At any moment, the table could become the center of attention—if only someone were to approach the kitchen and announce, “I want to eat the 72-ounce steak.” Once the steak is served, the digital clock on the wall behind the stage will start a 60-minute countdown. Spotlights

will click on. Webcams will broadcast the challenge around the world. And diners in the 500-seat restaurant will look up from their beef and beer to watch and shout encouragement.

At the Big Texan, visitors from around the world attempt to eat the restaurant’s legendary steak dinner—4½ pounds of beef plus a salad, dinner roll, baked potato, side of beans and shrimp cocktail. If they can devour everything in an hour, it’s free. During an eight-week period that included Labor Day weekend in 2018, 150 travelers from as far away as Ukraine and Australia took the challenge. Just 14 succeeded.

“Disneyland has Mickey Mouse,” says Big Texan’s Bobby Lee,



whose family has owned the Amarillo landmark for almost 60 years. “And we have the 72-ounce steak.”

Welcome to big food, Texas style. How about a pizza that’s 8 feet across? Or a 3-pound cinnamon roll? Or an eight-decker deli sandwich? Or a hamburger that includes a pound of bacon and a half-pound of cheese? If someone’s going to make such a colossus, you can bet someone will try to eat it.

“It was like, ‘Men of America, all the eyes are upon you,’” says Ed Montana of Amarillo, who finished the Big Texan steak dinner in 38 minutes during filming for the Travel Channel. “I didn’t want to let the side down. I had to finish it because macho men are meat

eaters, right?

“It’s the wiry little guys you need to worry about when you’re watching someone try to finish the dinner,” Montana says. “The big guys, the 6-8 [tall] ones who look like offensive linemen, they don’t seem to do as well.”

High school and college students seem particularly fond of challenging the specialty of the house. But at Big Texan, more women finish the steak than men, even though more men attempt it.

At Mel’s Country Cafe in Tomball, north of Houston, the Mega

Kurt Oefinger of Hondo’s Dirt Road Cookers prepares an 8-foot pizza, above, then, with help from Medina Electric Cooperative employees, eases the hot pie onto a stand for slicing.



Mel Burger, which starts with 1½ pounds of beef, has been on the menu in one form or another since 1994. “I honestly think that when people see how big it is, they feel a need to try and conquer it,” manager Sherry Pierce says. “And it’s just not the people who try to eat it—it’s the people who get excited about seeing people try to eat it.”

Big food, the larger-than-life dishes like the Big Texan’s steak, is not uniquely Texan. It’s not even uniquely American. A decade ago, a group of Spanish chefs combined 32 tons of rice, sausage and seafood to create a monster version of paella, Spain’s national dish.

But many Americans embrace big food enthusiastically. We watch TV shows about it. We visit restaurants to see it—as well as to eat it. Our enthusiasm for big food is not necessarily about gluttony. Rather, it’s about what Texas Tech sociologist Carol Lindquist calls “our culture of abundance.”

“Big food in particular is part of that,” she says, “the idea that bigger is better, a hypermanifestation of our American-ness.”

Our culture of abundance is unique in world history. We are, with a few notable exceptions, the only culture that has never endured famine, which Europeans have suffered through as recently as the 20th century and still occurs in some parts of the world.

“We think that our abundance—that we always have had enough food to eat—is normal,” Lindquist says. “But it’s not. The early European settlers, when they arrived, couldn’t believe what they found, all the wildlife and the forests and the food. It was remarkable coming from the old country, where that hadn’t been seen in centuries. So that’s one reason how our enthusiasm for ‘bigger is better’ started.”

The Mega Mel Burger is seven times taller than the average



A Dirt Road pizza can feed up to 150 people. Will Schneider, left, a staking technician at Medina EC, digs in.

mouth can open. The Big Texan steak contains almost three times more calories than the federal government’s

recommended daily allowance. The 20-scoop ice cream sundae at Dallas’ Hypnotic Emporium contains significantly more than the recommended daily allowance of fat.

Wallets take a hit just as diets do. The Mega Mel costs \$24.95. The Mt. Hypnotic sundae costs \$38, which can be refunded if you finish it in less than 30 minutes. The Big Texan steak is \$72, and that’s only refunded if you meet the hour deadline.

But none of that seems to matter.

“I honestly think it’s about the spectacle,” says Kurt Oefinger of Hondo’s Dirt Road Cookers, whose specialty is an 8-foot pizza that starts with 25 pounds of flour and takes two hours to mix. Oefinger travels around the state, pizza oven in tow, creating his giant pies that include 3 pounds of pepperoni, 8 pounds of brisket, 6 pounds of sausage and 30 pounds of cheese. They cost \$800–\$1,500 and can feed as many as 150 people.

“As soon as they see that 8-foot pizza, everyone wants to dive in. But no one ever seems to be able to finish it, and there is always a lot left,” says Kassie Cox, Oefinger’s sister-in-law and an accountant for Medina Electric Cooperative in Hondo, west of San Antonio. “I’m not sure anyone knows exactly how big an 8-foot pizza is. It’s not like many people have seen one before.”

Learn more about writer **Jeff Siegel** at winecurmudgeon.com.

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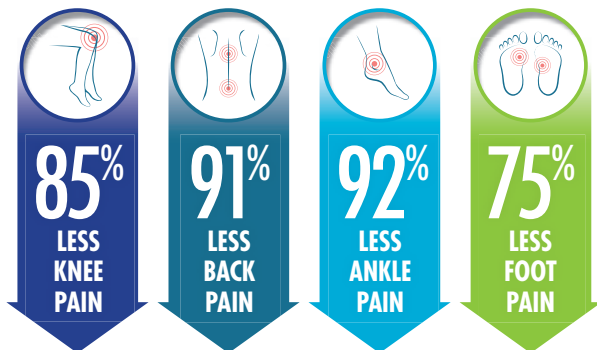
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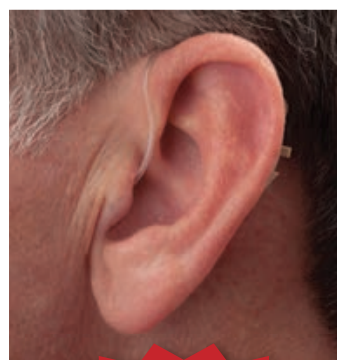
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Help Us Beat the Peak

Timing is everything when it comes to summer electricity use



MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER ALAN LESLEY

YOU CAN HELP KEEP ELECTRICITY RATES LOW BY USING POWER during hours when it's not in high demand.

During the summer, peak load demands occur at the times of day when most people use the most electricity, like in the middle of a hot afternoon when everyone runs air conditioners and around dinnertime when families are cooking, taking showers, washing dishes and doing laundry.

Off-peak hours usually are early in the morning, after dark and on weekends.

The less electricity you and your neighbors use during peak times, the less overall demand there is. That lowers the strain on the power grid and reduces the need for building additional—expensive—power plants.

Lower demand means CECA can lock in lower rates and pass those savings on to our members. So everyone saves.

You can do your part by scheduling tasks during off-peak hours and keeping electricity usage to a minimum between 3 and 7 p.m.

Here are some simple tips for adjusting your schedule to beat the peak:

- Wait until off-peak hours to run your dishwasher.
- Run full laundry loads during off-peak hours on weekdays or on weekends.
- Wait for off-peak hours to run your pool pump, which can

use more electricity than any other appliance—except for the air conditioner.

- Install a timer on your water heater so it won't come on during peak hours. You'll still have plenty of hot water in the morning because it can run overnight.

If we all work together to help reduce demand during peak times, we can reduce CECA's power costs, which in turn helps keep your cost down.



Shifting chores to off-peak hours can add up to big savings for your co-op and you.



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Congratulations to Our Schlitterbahn Prizewinner

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

a special giveaway CECA promoted recently in honor of *Texas Co-op Power's* 75th anniversary. As we reach the midpoint of this celebratory year, we'd like to congratulate the winner of five season passes to Schlitterbahn: **Michelle Florence** from Mullin. Enjoy this fun summer excursion on us!



SCHLITTERBAHN WATERPARKS AND RESORTS

For our members who didn't win, don't worry, there are still plenty of opportunities to try your luck. We have more prizes up our sleeves as we celebrate with you for the remainder of 2019. Every month, members of CECA will have a chance to win a uniquely Texan treasure.

These giveaways complement some other commemorative features *Texas Co-op Power* showcases this year. We have print and video versions of recipes pulled from the archives and updated for modern tastes, a 12-month Hit the Road series with *The Daytripper's* Chet Garner and thought-provoking Currents timelines each month that mark significant events spanning the magazine's history, across a broad swath of topics.

Amid the anniversary festivities, don't forget our themed monthly recipe and photography contests, which we hope you take advantage of, too. We can't wait to see the fruits of our members' creativity.

Michelle Florence and her youngest daughter, Paige.



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We Are Prepared for Summer Storms

SUMMER IS HERE, SCHOOL IS OUT AND FAMILIES ARE GEARING UP FOR A FEW MONTHS of relaxation. While summer brings much fun in the sun, it also can bring the occasional severe storm. In the event of a power outage, you can trust that CECA is ready to respond.

Most power outages are caused by damage to power lines from falling trees and branches. We work year-round—through continuous right-of-way clearing—to ensure power lines in our service territory stand little risk of being damaged by trees, branches or other types of vegetation.

Despite our best efforts, damage can occur to transmission stations, substations and power lines during major storms. When this happens, our first priority is to safely restore power to as many members as possible in the shortest amount of time.

We start by mobilizing our line crews and other critical staff. Every phone line available is utilized to take your outage report calls. The biggest problems—like damage to transmission lines, which serve thousands of our members—are handled first. These problems must be corrected before we can focus on other areas where more localized damage may have occurred.

CECA's line crews inspect substations to determine if the problem starts there or if there could be an issue farther down the line. If the root of the problem is at the substation, power can be restored to a large number of members at once.

Next, line crews check the service lines that deliver power to neighborhoods and communities. Once lineworkers are able to repair damage to those lines, power can be restored for hundreds of members. If you continue to experience an outage, there may be damage to a tap line outside of your home or business. Make sure you notify CECA so crews can inspect these lines.

We will do our best to avoid power outages this summer, but sometimes Mother Nature has other plans. In the event of an outage, you can rest assured we will work to restore your power as swiftly and safely as possible.



PHOTO: ILLUSTRATION



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Withstanding the Winds of Time

BY SHIRLEY KIDD DUKES

“Four years ago American agriculture was in the depths of depression. Though farm commodity prices had dropped to nearly 50 percent below the pre-war average, the prices of the goods and services that farmers usually buy were at or above the pre-war level. This disparity was a cause of widespread agricultural ruin. Farm bankruptcies were at record heights, dispossessed farmers joined the urban unemployed, and farmers still struggling could not make ends meet. There was a tremendous surplus of farm products; yet consumers were suffering scarcity. Falling farm prices did not help them much, because their incomes were falling too as a result of declining trade and employment. The whole economic system was out of balance.

“Since then conditions have changed for the better. The improvement has come about in the manner envisioned in 1933—through agricultural-price recovery with resulting increased demand for city goods. Net farm income this year will be three times that in 1933. All groups of farmers and all agricultural regions have participated in the recovery, though not to the same degree. There is still distress in some regions, as a result of drought in 1934 and again this year. On the whole, however, agriculture is out of the red and making progress toward financial rehabilitation.”

From the United States Department of Agriculture Yearbook of Agriculture, 1937

BORN IN 1895, ROBERT KEITH LANE SR. SAW MANY CHANGES

throughout his lifetime. The year he was born, Grover Cleveland was president, *America the Beautiful* was published, Booker T. Washington delivered the Atlanta Compromise and a reign of lawlessness was coming to an end as John Wesley Hardin was killed. Lane lived through the Gilded Age, the Gay '90s, the Progressive Era and the Roaring '20s. But perhaps living through the Great Depression had the most impact on him, shaping his everyday life as well as the future he would provide for his family.

Lane and his beloved wife, Tinie Swann Lane, had two children, the eldest named Robert Keith Lane Jr. Lane Jr. later had two children, one of whom he named Robert Keith Lane III. Lane III had one son, whom he named Robert Keith Lane IV. Robert Keith Lane IV has one son—and yes, you guessed it—his name is Robert Keith Lane V. What a testament to the life of Lane for his name to be carried on for so many generations!

It is not just Lane's name, however, that has been preserved through the years. His grandson, Robert Keith “Bobby” Lane III, has spent his retirement honoring the grandparents he loved by preserving the history of their lives through the homesite they created. Nestled in an open grove of live oak trees, the 82-year-old rock house has valiantly withstood the test of time.

Bobby Lane III grew up on his parents' place but spent much of his time with his grandparents, who lived about 3 miles away. “I just loved my grandmother and granddad, so I just had some good childhood memories,” Bobby said. “I even had some birthday

parties over here.”

Lane Sr. had seen the Great Depression and no doubt remembered the hard times he and Tinie endured. Based on the number of things they kept, it was clear they never threw anything away, leaving tangible evidence of the hardships they faced. So, when 1937 rolled around and the Lanes made the monumental decision to step out on faith and build a new

house in their hometown of Newburg, it must have been a boom year for the agricultural economy.

Built from rocks hauled from Lane Sr.'s place, the 1,418-square-foot home was built just one year before Comanche County Electric Cooperative formed. Not thinking they would have electricity any time in the near future, the Lanes built the house to conform to the constraints of the time, not the possibilities of the future. For two years, they lived in the home, complete with kerosene lamps, a wood cookstove and a fireplace. “They thought they were pretty comfortable,” Bobby said. “They were happy, they had a new house. But then, two years later, the rumor was that electricity was coming through. So they thought they'd probably sign up for that electricity.”

In 1939, with only lightbulbs hanging from the ceilings of each room and no electrical appliances whatsoever, electricity arrived at the Lane home compliments of Comanche County EC and the Rural Electric Administration. The family's first major appliance was a Frigidaire refrigerator, followed by a stove, vacuum cleaner, toaster and Westinghouse deep freezer.

Prior to electricity, the Lanes had



Robert Keith Lane Sr. and Tinie Lane in 1937.



Top: A painting of the original house, date unknown, by Robert Keith Lane Jr.
Bottom: The homestead as it looks today.

a radio that ran off the battery in their Model T. Much of the time, they would sit in the car and listen. However, when the weather was inclement, and if they had a cable long enough, they were able to run it into the house and listen to the radio from the comfort of home. Later, in the 1950s, they purchased their first TV, a black-and-white model and the first in the little community of Newburg. “What I was told, and I think it might be true,” Bobby said, “it was the first one here in Newburg, a 21-inch screen I believe, but people would come over every night. My granddad and grandmother were glad to see them. They would open the house up and let them view this newfangled TV apparatus.”

Lane Sr. passed away in 1975, and Tinie went to live with their son, Keith Lane Jr. The house and property were leased out for 35 years, with renters coming and going. In 2012, Bobby decided it was time to retire.

“The bottom line was that when I left Comanche County and went to Dallas for about 45 years, I realized what a great place Comanche County was, and especially Newburg,” he said. “So I had thought of any place that I would like to retire, and I decided there was no place better to return to than Comanche County and Newburg, and especially my grandmother and granddad’s house.”

Before making his final decision to return to Newburg, Bobby hired an inspector, who told him the house was structurally sound, particularly so for a house of that age. That sealed the deal for Bobby, and he and his wife, Sandy, began remodeling. Nothing had been done to the home since his grandparents had lived there, so many updates were needed, though the original hardwood floors were in good condition and remain in the home. The kitchen was gutted and completely



Bobby and Sandy Lane have hosted numerous reunions and holiday parties inside the decorated barn.

This clawfoot bathtub came out of Lane Sr.’s father’s home. The house’s kitchen has glass knobs from Lane Sr.’s grandparents’ turn-of-the-century home.



remodeled. The front windows of the home were installed new in 1937, and the back windows were salvaged from the original house, built in the 1800s.

“My granddad was very thrifty,” Bobby said, “and he wanted to use everything he could use from the old house when they tore it down. A lot of the lumber, shiplap and stuff did come from that old house.”

One of the major things Bobby refused to change was the front door. “Both of my great-grandpas and -grandmothers have come through that door, all of my mother’s family, my dad’s family. ... So I thought, you know, I’ve got a grandson that’s already been through that door. There’s been a lot of generations come through that door, so I think we’ll just keep that front door till it comes off the hinges.”

Bobby hopes that someday his son, Robert Keith Lane IV, or his grandson, Robert Keith Lane V, will carry on the tradition of keeping up the old homeplace.

Left: The first electric appliance purchased by Robert Lane Sr. and Tinie Lane was this Frigidaire refrigerator. Though no longer in the home’s kitchen, it is still in use on the property. “They thought they had struck pay dirt when they got that refrigerator,” Bobby said.



Below: Prior to the convenience of their Westinghouse deep freezer, Lane Sr. and Tinie would preserve meat, usually a hog, in this smokehouse.



Above: This barn was on Lane Sr.’s original homeplace. After the new home was built, with the aid of neighbors and friends, the barn was rolled down the hill on logs to the new location.

Below: The quilts and cabinet are original to Tinie Lane, who was a member of the Newburg Quilting Club. “She had many, many quilts,” Bobby said.





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The Nylon Campaign

Texas Co-op Power has defended electric cooperatives against gossip and graft since 1944

BY ELLEN STADER

A NEFARIOUS FIGURE STROLLED INTO Washington, D.C., toting a suspicious satchel filled to overflowing with contraband. In black top hat and tails, he swaggered toward the U.S. Capitol, a stogie clenched in his teeth. At least, that's how a cartoon, titled *A New March on Washington*, portrayed him in the May 1946 issue of *Texas Co-op Power*.

And when this cad arrived in the Capitol, what happened?

He doled out nylon stockings to lawmakers' wives.

The cad was Ham Moses, president of Arkansas Power and Light, an investor-owned utility. He offered the contraband to the wives of congressmen who would vote for an amendment—one prohibiting the Rural Electrification Administration from making loans to help generation and transmission cooperatives.

The scene was depicted as a cartoon, but it actually happened. Why was this payoff made of nylon? At the time, nylon stockings made a better bribe than a briefcase full of gold. In 1942, manufacturer DuPont had diverted its production to support the war effort. World War II robbed women of their cherished nylons, and the moment they began to sell again in 1946, stores were overwhelmed in nationwide riots. The payola was well-received, but the amendment failed.

"It's almost unbelievable what the power companies will stoop to in their effort to kill us off," responded Clyde Ellis, executive manager of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

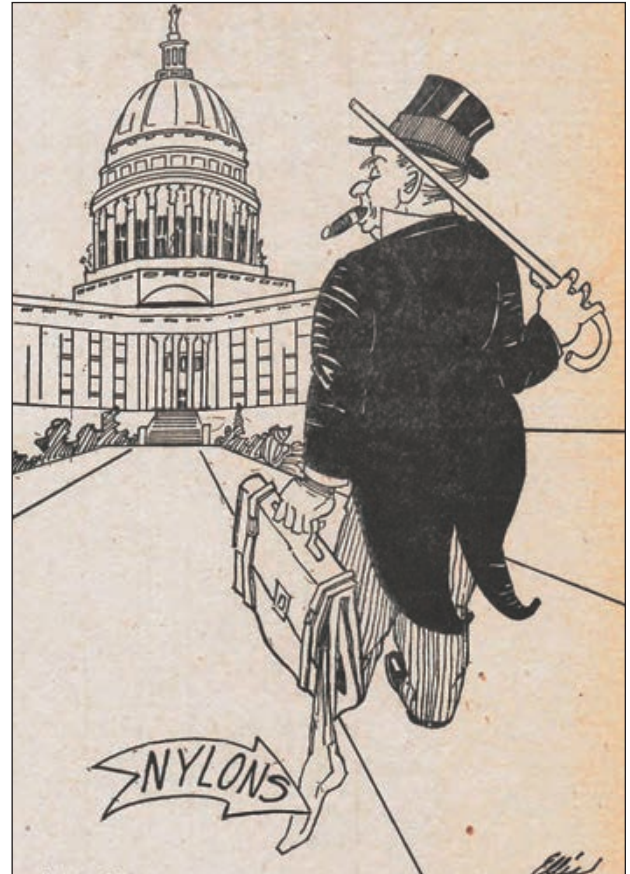
Long before this nylon campaign, the investor-owned utilities lobby already had thrown propaganda, bribery and legislative attacks at electric co-ops, with land grabs

and lawsuits to come. *Texas Co-op Power* articles from 1951 to 1991 document attacks from investor-owned utilities, lobbyists, legislators and even journalists from *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Associated Press*. After realizing its mistake in refusing to electrify rural America in the 1930s, private power spent decades taking swings at the co-ops that met the challenge instead. The resulting David-and-Goliath scenario has played out repeatedly, making for strange stories.

Take, for example, the brief and brutal feud between U.S. Sen. W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel of Texas and George W. Haggard, the first editor of *Texas Co-op Power* and then manager of the statewide electric cooperative association.

O'Daniel was something of a Goliath, himself. Years of radio popularity, a stint as governor of Texas and six years in the Senate had accustomed him to saying whatever he wanted—and in 1947 he called the co-op system "communistic."

Haggard fired back an indignant stone from his sling that flew to newspapers around the country via an Associated Press story: "This false and vicious charge ... is a studied insult to the 160,000 patriotic, substantial tax-paying farm and ranch families of this state who receive electricity through the REA cooperatives."



He attributed O'Daniel's smear to three motives: "profound and abysmal ignorance" of the way co-ops operated; the tendency of O'Daniel's congressional allies "to denounce everything that is for the general welfare of the American people as 'communistic'"; and O'Daniel's impending reelection bid.

Haggard then dealt the final blow, saying, "This looks like an effort to persuade the private utility interests, which hate the rural electrification program, to make a sizeable contribution to his campaign chest."

And though O'Daniel would later level the communist charge at other targets, including many of his own Senate colleagues, Texas electric co-ops never heard from him again.

Ellen Stader, a former *Texas Co-op Power* communications specialist, is a writer in Austin.

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Send us your best ORIGINAL holiday recipes—ones you've developed, not copied from a friend or found in a book or magazine. Winners will be featured in our November 2019 issue. Enter by June 10 at TexasCoopPower.com.

Go to TexasCoopPower.com for details and official rules.

TEXASCOOPPOWER

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com. Each entry MUST include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your Texas electric cooperative, or it will be disqualified. Specify which category you are entering, Sweet or Savory, on each recipe. Mail entries to: *Texas Co-op Power/Holiday Recipe Contest*, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You can also fax entries to (512) 763-3401. Up to three total entries are allowed per co-op membership. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper if mailed or faxed. Mailed entries all can be sent in one envelope. No email entries will be accepted. For official rules, visit TexasCoopPower.com. **Entry deadline: June 10, 2019.**



2018 GRAND PRIZEWINNER
Sherry's Shrimp Clemenceau
Sherry Zawadzki | Heart of Texas EC
Get the recipe at TexasCoopPower.com.

**LAST
CHANCE
ENTER BY
JUNE 10**

Standout Summer Sides

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A POTLUCK, backyard barbecue or any summer cookout without a big roasting pan of baked beans. This recipe, which appeared in this magazine in July 1955, shows that the old-world combination of sweet add-ins (molasses, brown sugar and ketchup), salty pork fat and beans is pretty timeless. Feel free to double this recipe (you'll need a large roasting pan) if you're feeding a team or want leftovers. Regardless, consider the contributor's suggestion for a quick lunch: Spread leftover beans on buttered bread, top with a slice of cheese, and broil until warm and bubbly.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Old-World Baked Beans

- 2½ cups navy beans
- 1 quart water
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- ¼ pound salt pork or bacon (cut into ½-inch slices)
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- ⅓ cup molasses
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons light brown sugar
- ¼ cup ketchup
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard (or 1 teaspoon ground dry mustard)
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce
- 1 tablespoon salt
- ½ tablespoon ground ginger

1. Rinse beans and place them in a large roasting pan or Dutch oven. Cover with water and soak overnight.
2. Drain beans, add 1 quart water and simmer over medium-low heat, covered, until skins are easily pierced (do not boil). Bury the onion, salt pork or bacon, and garlic in beans.
3. Stir together the molasses, brown sugar, ketchup, mustard, hot sauce, salt and ginger, then stir the mixture into the beans. Continue

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Retro Recipes

Standout Summer Sides



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

SHARON BROWN | PENTEX ENERGY

"This is my signature dish, and I never serve it without multiple recipe requests," Brown says. She makes it a day early to allow flavors to blend. It keeps in the refrigerator a week. Feel free to adjust the lime juice and cilantro to taste. "For large groups, I triple the recipe and serve it in a big bowl," she says. "People flip out!"

Southwest Couscous Salad

- 1½ cups water
- 1 cup uncooked couscous
- 2 cups canned corn with red and green peppers, drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, drained
- ¼ cup chopped tomato (or 6-8 cherry tomatoes, halved)
- 2 tablespoons thinly sliced green onions
- ½ bunch cilantro, chopped
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- ¾ cup fresh lime juice
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ⅓ teaspoon cayenne
- Salt, to taste
- Lettuce leaves, for serving (optional)
- Cilantro sprigs and lime slices, for garnish (optional)

1. Bring water to boil in a medium saucepan, remove from heat and stir in the couscous. Let the couscous stand 5 minutes, then fluff with fork and let cool.
2. In a large bowl, combine the corn, black beans, tomato, green onions and cilantro. Use a rubber spatula to fold in the couscous.
3. In a small jar with a lid, combine the olive oil, lime juice, garlic powder, cumin, cayenne and salt, and shake well to combine. Pour the dressing over the couscous and toss to coat.
4. Cover and refrigerate 1 hour or longer to allow flavors to blend. Line serving platter with lettuce leaves, spoon couscous mixture over leaves and garnish with cilantro and lime slices, if desired. ▶ Serves 12.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

to simmer the beans, covered, until they're very tender, about 2-2½ hours, or bake them in a 250-degree oven. ▶ Serves 12-14.

COOK'S TIP For added flavor, add bay leaves (fresh or dried), 1 teaspoon ground coriander or 2 teaspoons fresh chopped thyme or rosemary to the mix. Feel free to substitute Great Northern or cannellini beans for navy beans.

Crazy Stupid Corn

GAIL PATTERSON | PENTEX ENERGY

When you're looking for a warm, creamy comfort side, this mix of fresh vegetables, corn, hominy and bacon is a perfect partner for grilled sausages or burgers, or a fresh salad with grilled bread. Patterson suggests adjusting the seasonings to suit your preferences. For added heat, consider adding fresh chopped jalapeño or serrano peppers, or a pinch of cayenne.

- 6 slices thick-cut bacon, cut crosswise into thin strips
- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- 1 orange bell pepper, chopped
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 12 ounces cream cheese
- 2 cans (15 ounces each) yellow corn, drained
- 2 cans (14 ounces each) creamed corn
- 2 cans (15 ounces each) white hominy, drained
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon granulated garlic
- Heavy cream, as needed

1. Cook the bacon in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat until crisp.
2. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate and set aside, reserving bacon fat in the pan.
3. Add the butter to bacon drippings and stir until melted. Add the peppers, onion and garlic and stir until softened. Add the cream cheese, reduce heat and cook until almost melted and smooth. Add the corn, creamed corn and hominy and stir to combine. Season with salt, pepper and



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED,
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\$2,500 Holiday Recipe Contest

November's issue will feature winners of the 15th annual **Holiday Recipe Contest**. Share the dishes that make your holiday gatherings so special. Send us your best **ORIGINAL** recipes in the Savory Dish or Sweet Dish category, and your recipe could appear in *Texas Co-op Power* and win you a cash prize. The deadline is **June 10**. See complete rules at TexasCoopPower.com.

ENTER ONLINE at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; **MAIL** to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; **FAX** to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

granulated garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, until cream cheese is fully melted and mixture is smooth. Stir in reserved bacon. Thin the mixture with cream if it seems too thick. Adjust seasonings as desired and serve warm.

► Serves 8.

Pecan Potato Salad

JANE MORGAN | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Cooking potatoes in broth and combining them with bacon, sautéed onions, sour cream and pecans creates a rich, German-style salad with a Texas flair. This salad (served warm or at room temperature) would be right at home with grilled brats and cold beer.

- 2 pounds small red potatoes (about 2 inches in diameter)
- 3 cups beef or chicken broth
- 5 slices bacon, cut crosswise into ¼-inch strips (about ¼ pound)
- 2 tablespoons butter, divided use
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves, plus extra for garnish
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- ½ cup sour cream
- Salt and pepper, as desired

1. In a large saucepan, combine potatoes with broth and simmer until just tender, about 20 minutes, then drain and cool briefly.
2. While the potatoes are cooking, cook the bacon in a medium-sized heavy skillet over medium heat until crisp. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, reserving bacon drippings in the pan.
3. Add a tablespoon of butter to the bacon fat, then add the onion and cook, stirring, until tender. Transfer onion to a mixing bowl.
4. When the potatoes are cool enough to handle, thinly slice them and combine with onions. Add the sugar, parsley, pecans, sour cream and remaining butter to the warm potatoes and toss gently to combine. Season with salt and pepper, top with reserved bacon, and garnish with parsley or dill. ► Serves 6–8.

COOK'S TIP To perk up the flavor of this salad a bit, add a tablespoon or two of white vinegar to

the potato and onion mixture before tossing it with the dressing. For a nuttier flavor, lightly toast the pecans (and allow them to cool) before adding them to the salad.

Cucumbers and Sour Cream

JANE MORGAN | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

When made with care, this cool, creamy and crunchy combination elevates just about anything (especially lamb burgers). “My mom would make this side dish in the summer to serve with grilled meat,” Morgan says. “It was always a delicious contrast that tasted like summer.” Note that the cucumbers need to drain for an hour, so plan accordingly.

- 4 small, firm cucumbers
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- Salt (about ½ teaspoon for each cucumber)
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3 tablespoons fresh minced dill (or 1 tablespoon dried)

1. Peel the cucumbers, halve lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and cut them into thin slices.

2. Combine the cucumber slices, onion and salt in a large bowl and toss to combine; transfer mixture to a colander and drain 1 hour.

3. In a separate bowl, combine the sour cream, vinegar, sugar and dill.

4. Rinse the cucumber mixture to remove salt, then drain and pat dry with paper towels to remove excess moisture. Fold the cucumbers and onions into the sour cream mixture, taste and adjust seasonings as desired, and refrigerate at least 30 minutes before serving.

► Serves 3–4.

COOK'S TIP Feel free to substitute an equal amount of fresh mint or tarragon for the dill.

WEB EXTRAS

► Read these recipes on our website to see the original Old-World Baked Beans recipe from July 1955.

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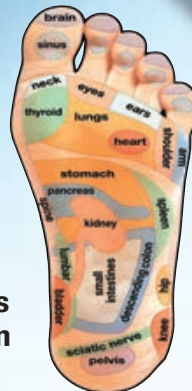
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WEB EXTRAS ► See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.

▼ **JENNY BOYD**, Cherokee County EC: "Donkey feedin' time."



▲ **DUB AND JODY MCLAUCHLIN**, Farmers EC: "This filly is enjoying some deer corn, quick to not let any of the pasture calves share."



▲ **CHARLES ASCHENBECK**, Jackson EC: A squirrel hangs from a bird feeder before indulging in a meal of tasty sunflower seeds.



▲ **LORI RUTHERFORD**, Deep East Texas EC: "I took this photo after finding this nest full of babies in our grapefruit tree."



▲ **LINDA WOODS**, Bluebonnet EC: Arwen feeds from Aaronn. Both are gray gypsy vanners.

UPCOMING CONTESTS

OCTOBER	GIVING BACK	DUE JUNE 10
NOVEMBER	UP THE CREEK	DUE JULY 10
DECEMBER	DESERTS	DUE AUGUST 10

All entries must include name, address, daytime phone and co-op affiliation, plus the contest topic and a brief description of your photo.

ONLINE: Submit highest-resolution digital images at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.
MAIL: Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We do not accept entries via email. We regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.



Pick of the Month Garden Tour

Celina June 8

(214) 957-3655, celinagardenclub.org

The tour offers a showcase of at least eight private gardens, farms and wineries in Celina and Weston in North Texas. Food will be available at most venues, including freshly prepared appetizers, shaved ice, fruit, ice cream and jarred items to take home.

June 7

Jacksonville Tomato Fest Classic

4-Man Scramble, (903) 541-4700,
jacksonvilletexas.com/tomato-fest

Abilene [7-8] Stars Over Abilene 25th
Annual Quilt Show, (325) 665-2724

Bonham [7-8] Highway 82 Yard Sales,
(903) 583-9830, visitbonham.com

Kerrville [7-8] Shakespeare in the Park,
(830) 896-9393, playhouse2000.com

San Antonio [7-9] Texas Folklife Festival,
(210) 458-2224, texasfolklife festival.org

8

Bandera Bandera Rodeo Club Youth
Summer Series Rodeo, (830) 431-1030,
banderarodeoclub.com

La Grange Art Stroll, (979) 968-3017,
visitlagrangetx.com

14

Boerne [14-16] Berges Fest, (830) 249-7277,
bergesfest.com

15

Brenham Summer Sip Wine Walk,
(979) 337-7580, downtownbrenham.com

Fredericksburg Meusebach Creek Historic
School Open House, (830) 997-7896,
historicschools.org

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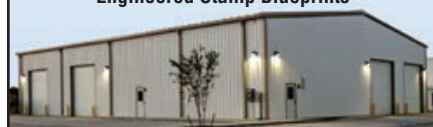
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Lowly Activities in Arlington

Top O' Hill Terrace was a tearoom atop an underground gambling hideout

GANGSTERS, GAMBLING, PROSTITUTION and illicit liquor. These things spark images of Chicago or New York in the 1920s. However, right here in the Lone Star State, deeds involving such salacious elements were part of the day-to-day operations of an unassuming tearoom on an unassuming hill halfway between Dallas and Fort Worth. While the location looks different today, visitors can still step back in time to when Top O' Hill Terrace was "Vegas before Vegas."

In 1926, Arlington residents Fred and Mary Browning decided that Fred's plumbing career lacked the excitement they desperately wanted. Amid the growing success of horse racing at Arlington Downs, the Brownings decided to get in on the action.

When they purchased a tearoom along the old Bankhead Highway, authorities had no idea the couple had plans beyond the teacup. The Brownings immediately began renovations, moving the tearoom to construct a network of underground rooms and tunnels. The additions included a casino, restaurant, an office and five doors at which every patron had to use passwords to gain access. There were two-way mirrors, secret staircases and fake doors, all designed to make Top O' Hill raidproof. With the front gate a quarter-mile down the drive, patrons had ample time to hide the evidence and run into the garden to sip tea if police showed up. It was a cover so believable that many folks visited the tea garden without any knowledge of the illegal activities just beneath their feet.

The Brownings' reputation grew as quickly as their bank account. The casino took in \$50,000–\$100,000 every night and attracted countless celebrities, including



"Officer" Chet Garner and associates revisit Top O' Hill Terrace's shady past.

Bonnie and Clyde and John Wayne. The couple invested their cash

into a swimming pool and air conditioning, two luxuries that were extremely rare at the time. Fred's newfound connections led him into horse racing, most notably with his horse Royal Ford, whose foal Heelfly beat the legendary thoroughbred Seabiscuit in 1940. He also stepped into professional boxing, employing his facilities to manage and train boxers like Lou Brouillard and "Slapsie Maxie" Rosenbloom. Yet the Brownings' very success would soon become a curse.

Top O' Hill gained an influential enemy in J. Frank Norris, pastor of Fort Worth's First Baptist Church and an ardent supporter of Prohibition. Norris vowed to shut down the establishment and return it to the realm of respectability. His prophecy became a reality in 1947 when Texas Rangers led a successful raid on Top O' Hill. In 1956, Bible Baptist Seminary bought the property and transformed it into a Baptist college.

On my first guided tour, I expected to walk dark hallways and feel the breath of

notorious Texas gangster Benny Binion on my neck. Instead I found the bright and bustling Arlington Baptist University with few remnants of the former days of Top O' Hill. Soon after buying the property, the new owners tore down the tearoom and replaced the casino with a cafeteria. The stable and pool have been incorporated into daily student life, and unless you know the stories, you could miss the stable and pool completely. What does remain is the tea garden and one 50-foot escape tunnel, where creative visitors can imagine men in pinstriped suits and women in flapper dresses stuffing gambling chips into their pockets to the muted sounds of a jazz band.

While visitors can no longer throw \$20 down on the roulette table, the cost of a tour is well worth the money. And while almost every Texas town has its stories of forbidden back alleys or underground operations, no Prohibition-era story is as Texas-sized as that of Top O' Hill Terrace.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

WEB EXTRAS ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video of his visit to Top O' Hill Terrace.



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