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to restore habitat and
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to creation of a bat cave





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November 2020



08

Bat Lodging

A conservationist creates a unique oasis for roving insect hunters in Central Texas.

*By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Eric W. Pohl*

ON THE COVER AND ABOVE
Dusk sends bats rushing out of a cave at Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve to feast on insects.
Photos by Eric W. Pohl

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The International Space Station, controlled entirely in Houston and home to groundbreaking research, turns 20.

By Melissa Gaskill

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By Dan Oko



Tuning Up a BMW

BY LAW, ELECTRIC CARS must emit artificial sounds to alert pedestrians, bicyclists and people with visual impairment. When BMW debuts its i4 sedan for 2021, its sonic signature will be the creation of film composer Hans Zimmer, who won an Oscar in 1995 for his score of *The Lion King* and has been nominated for 10 others.



Not Giving an Inch

The U.S. remains one of three countries that does not use the metric system.

The others are Myanmar, in Southeast Asia, and Liberia, on the West African coast.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I'M MOST THANKFUL FOR ...

TOP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and city. Here are some of the responses to our September prompt: **I can't believe I bought ...**

A 2020 planner.
JANICE SCHWAB
VIA FACEBOOK

My daughter's story about the dent in the car.
JANET MOSLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Toilet paper for Christmas presents.
DONALIE BELTRAN
CECA
MAY

A Super Bowl XII Cowboys-Broncos ticket for \$32.
CRAIG MASSOUH
PEDERNALES EC
SATTLER

To see more responses, read Currents online.

“When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around.”

—WILLIE NELSON

Texas has 247 freshwater fish species.

SOUND FISHY? OR ALLURING?



PRIZED SCRIBES

November 1 is National Authors Day. *Texas Co-op Power* writers and editors tell of the authors who have been captivating them lately:

Chris Burrows: **Carlos Ruiz Zafón** crafted enchanting tales about enchanting tales.

Travis Hill: **Claudia Rankine** writes cross-genre poetry that lyrically weaves public engagement and private emotion around today's most relevant themes.

Charles Lohrmann: **John le Carré's** international intrigue has been replaced by **Attica Locke's** fast-moving crime fiction.

Jessica Ridge: **Toni Tipton-Martin** cracks open the culinary canon.

Tom Widlowski: **Elmer Kelton** takes me by horseback to pioneer Texas.



Howard Daniel Jr. and wife Clara with an award presented by Burke.

TCP WEB EXTRA
Read about other co-op members who are making a difference in their communities in TCP's Power of Our People program.

Real Passion, Real People

HOWARD DANIEL JR. of Livingston says everyone is important and that belief would be universal if people knew each other as individuals.

Daniel, a retired Army colonel and longtime member of Sam Houston Electric Cooperative, serves on the board for Burke, an organization that assists more than 10,000 people with mental health needs and developmental disabilities in 12 East Texas counties.

Daniel learned about Burke after his daughter, Marie, was born with a developmental disability. He joined the board in 1999 and has been its chair since 2011.

Under Daniel's leadership Burke has doubled its mental health services capacity, expanded developmental disability services, engaged law enforcement in mental health emergency management, and expanded Burke's reach to provide specialty services for children and veterans.

"I want the best for the people we serve," says Daniel, pastor of Chesswood Baptist Church, "because the people we serve, like my daughter and others, are real people, with real feelings—and they are special."

Daniel believes everybody should help people born with intellectual and developmental challenges. "We need to make them feel good," he says. "The best way to make them feel good is to put the best facilities out there that we can."

Learn more about Burke and Daniel at myburke.org.

To nominate a person who is making a difference in your community, email details to people@texascooppower.com.



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ANDREA COBB

Meadow Oasis

“Thank you, Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, for your Observations, which calmed my pandemic soul. It felt like I was there at the meadow with you.”

CATHERINE NELSON
PEDERNALES EC
SAN MARCOS

Freaks of Nature

I and many other native plant “freaks” have enjoyed our own little refuges of native habitat, experiencing the flora and fauna that used to be so common here—a true reflection of Texas—before the manicured lawn with its plants from Asia, Africa and Europe came to be the standard [*Meadow Oasis*, September 2020].

Regina Levoy
MidSouth EC
Shiro



Thank you for highlighting the story of [Jessie Daniel Ames](#), a compassionate, strong, confident woman who fought for our right to vote in addition to protesting against lynchings of people of color [*Empowering Every Vote*, August 2020].

MARTA LOPEZ
VIA FACEBOOK



WARNER BROTHERS | GETTY IMAGES

Giant Fan

The first time I saw *Giant*, I was very young [*Reel Moments*, September 2020]. It made such an impression on me. I am 63 and have seen it more times than I can count. Thank you for the wonderfully written story.

Daniella Spann
Medina EC
Medina

Movie Critics

It is amazing that so many good movies have been made in Texas. One that was left out, *Secondhand Lions*, was filmed around Austin in 2002 and was, hands down, one of the best movies ever made.

Norris and Pat Croom
Hamilton County EC
Copperas Cove

How can you do a story on films in Texas and not mention *Hud*?

Dan Golden
Houston County EC
Lovelady

TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest Texas Co-op Power

How could you not include *The Last Picture Show*, filmed in Archer City, written by Larry McMurtry and nominated for eight Academy Awards?

Mark Spurlock
Taylor EC
Abilene

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 77, Number 5 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC). Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 75 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power's* website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS Subscription price is \$4.20 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50. Individual copies and back issues are available for \$3 each.

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holiday



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BAT LODGING



A CONSERVATIONIST creates a unique oasis for roving insect hunters in Central Texas

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL

AS DUSK FALLS ON A WARM SUMMER EVENING, I've joined J. David Bamberger and a few close friends at a table about 50 yards from a gaping hole on a hillside at his ranch near Johnson City.

As we nibble chips and salsa, a single bat emerges from the opening. In a flash a hawk swoops down, snatching the fluttering scout in midflight. A few minutes later, with sunlight quickly fading, a few more bats appear. Soon a narrow stream of flapping shapes forms, like a horizontal plume of campfire smoke.

Bamberger, a former door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman who co-founded the Church's Chicken chain, used his fortune to buy this once-overgrazed property in 1969, paying just \$124 an acre. He named it Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve and began nurturing it, removing nonnative species and planting indigenous grasses. The dry, eroded Central Texas landscape sputtered back to life. Today the 5,500-acre oasis features flowing creeks, fields of waving grass and towering trees and serves as a laboratory for land conservation.

It's also got a bat cave, or "chiroptorium," as Bamberger, 92 and still hiking or exploring his property nearly every day, calls it. (The word hasn't made it into dictionaries, but it's a standard at Selah, which itself is a biblical word whose definition is debated but to Bamberger means "to stop, pause, look around and reflect.")

While volunteering as a trustee with Bat Conservation International's Bracken Cave in the 1990s, Bamberger met BCI founder and bat expert Merlin Tuttle, who taught him the environmental benefits the furry, sometimes pecan-sized mammals provide. Bats gobble up tons of insects across the country each night, Bamberger learned, saving farmers more than \$3.7 billion a year in crop damage and pesticide use. Bamberger, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative, got the wild idea to lure a bat population to his own ranch by building a bat cave. Constructing a bat habitat, he figured, meshed with his mission to restore rangeland and protect wildlife.

Mexican free-tailed bats emerge from the chiroptorium—the bat cave constructed at Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE J. David Bamberger shows an indigenous grass that thrives at the preserve. Bamberger walks with author Pam LeBlanc. Sunset at the preserve.

TOP WEB EXTRA

Enter online to win Pam LeBlanc's recent book, *My Stories, All True: J. David Bamberger on Life as an Entrepreneur and Conservationist*.

"People laughed at the idea," Bamberger tells me. We met and became friends more than a decade ago, when I first wrote about his work. "When people laugh at you, sometimes you back away," he says. "Most successful people continue on."

After consulting with bat experts, architect Jim Smith designed a 30-by-100-foot, three-domed habitat with a special observation room where scientists and visitors could watch the bats through a plate glass window. They picked an easily accessible spot near water with a clear flight path. Then they went to work building the structure of concrete and gunite, backfilled it with dirt and covered it with native vegetation.

Newspaper reporters flocked to the ranch in 1998 to report the story. Now all he needed was a resident population.

Bamberger hauled in a load of bat guano to make the cave more appealing, but the bats turned up their noses. He brought in a small occupied bat box to lure a population, but the bats didn't stick around. Still, Bamberger persisted.

"If it doesn't work, it'll hold a hell of a lot of wine," he rationalized.

Every once in a while, a few bats would show up. "I'd be about to rapture," Bamberger says. But the stream of bats he dreamed about didn't move in until four years later, after biologists realized that the few bats that discovered the cave were smashing into the observation window. After they boarded up the window, the bats moved in.

"Unbelievable," Bamberger says, telling the story of driving up to the site and discovering the new residents. "Tears are running down my face. I can't believe what I'm seeing. The bats are pouring out."





“PEOPLE LAUGHED AT THE IDEA,”

Bamberger tells me. We met and became friends more than a decade ago, when I first wrote about his work. “When people laugh at you, sometimes you back away,” he says. “Most successful people continue on.”

He felt vindicated, especially since the *San Antonio Express-News* was printing a story that very week, dubbing the cave “Bamberger’s Folly” and noting that he’d spent more to build a house for bats than most people spend building a home for their family.

When he phoned biologist Tom Kunz, though, the bat expert warned that the emergence was likely a fluke and that a migrating group had probably just stopped over temporarily.

But the bats came back. And since they arrived in big numbers in 2002, they have never left. Today the ranch is

home to year-round populations of Mexican free-tailed bats and cave myotis, another type of bat. Thermal imaging scans show that as many as 400,000 individuals pack shoulder to shoulder along the chiropterium walls during the summer and fly out nightly to forage for insects. In the winter the population dwindles to 3,000–15,000.

“Our bats are very strange,” says Jared Holmes, staff biologist at Selah, equating the population to the bat version of a wild college fraternity house. While a large maternal population inhabits the space during summer months, it



changes when temperatures drop. “We don’t know if the winter colony is just a bunch of lazy males [from northern populations] that don’t want to fly all the way south or something else,” Holmes says.

The maternal population generally shows up in April or May and remains until the heat eases in September or October. Bamberger built the chiroptorium to hold a million individuals, but biologists today believe the cave’s current population represents full capacity. “If you go in there, it’s wall-to-wall bats, and as [evolutionary biologist] Gary McCracken put it, they are a possum’s crawl off the floor,” Holmes says.

Bamberger likes to say you could run around naked all day and never get bitten by a mosquito at his ranch. And while that’s not quite true, the bats do keep down the insect population at Selah.

“It’s David’s bat cave of dreams,” Holmes says. “We’re lucky David tried it.”

But testing also has shown the cave carries a high load of the fungus that causes white nose syndrome, the disease that has killed millions of bats across the country, mostly in the Northeast. When conditions are right, the fungus blooms, creating an itchy, white, mushroomlike growth on the bats’ faces that wakes them from hibernation. That’s less of a problem in warmer places like Central Texas, where they can still find water and insects year-round, but devastating in colder climates. So far the Selah bats have not shown signs of the disease, but as a precaution, Holmes hopes to pressure-wash the chiroptorium this winter, at

Bamberger overlooks a pond from one of his favorite spots on the preserve.

night while the population is out foraging.

“If we lose bats, we lose ecosystem services—all that free pest control and food for other animals,” Holmes says.

“Bats are in trouble, and we have a very unique opportunity to study how these man-made bat caves can function with fungus and virus and how we can disinfect their habitats. It’s an opportunity to see how we can help bats, and it’s great to have a proven design that we may be able to scale down for smaller colonies.”

Besides, bats don’t deserve their negative reputation, Holmes and Bamberger say. The mammals have long been maligned, equated with evil in old films and described as blood-sucking vermin.

“But everything in the natural world, even things we despise, plays a role in the conservation of planet Earth,” Bamberger says. “From the very beginning of my time here, I knew I wanted to make the ranch something special with Mother Nature. I realized the potential of bats—they would be another thing I could brag about, teach from and demonstrate.

“This is small potatoes, but I think my small potatoes are terribly important.” ■

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



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

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

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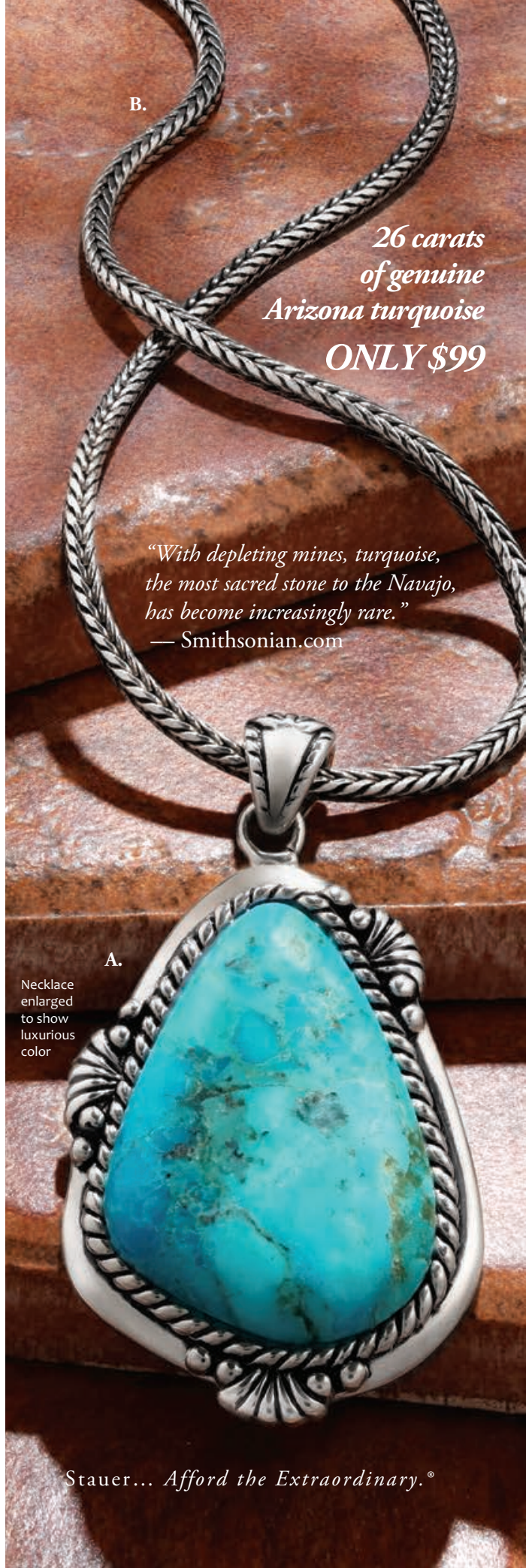
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A.

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BY MELISSA GASKILL

OUT OF THIS WORLD

The International Space Station, controlled entirely in Houston and responsible for groundbreaking research, turns 20

IF YOU OR SOMEONE you know recently underwent laser eye surgery, the surgeon likely used technology developed on the International Space Station to track eye movements of astronauts. Surgeons needed a way to follow eye position that doesn't interfere with the procedure, and the space technology proved ideal. The equipment is now used in corrective eye surgeries worldwide.

The space station, the only microgravity laboratory in our known universe, enables research that cannot be conducted anywhere else. As of November 2, scientists have used the orbiting lab continuously for 20 years, conducting more than 2,700 experiments.

All of this science—and in fact every aspect of the space station—is managed at Johnson Space Center, established in 1961 in southeast Houston. Flight control teams of engineers, medical officers and technicians remain on duty there 24/7/365 for the space station.

"I'm not sure people understand what goes on in Mission Control," says John-David Bartoe, who flew on the space shuttle for the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory in 1985 before spending 20 years, starting in 1993, as the space station's research manager. "No astronaut on the station is sitting at a console with a stick flying the space station. That all happens in Mission Control. They are



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE Astronaut Nick Hague shows materials that were part of an experiment for middle and high school students. James H. Newman works outside the space station. Christina H. Koch conducts a capillary structures experiment.

TCP WEB EXTRA

Learn more about the space station—and watch it pass over your town.



Scientists study colloids, which are mixtures of various particles in a liquid, to create more effective and longer-lasting products. Shampoo, laundry detergent and salad dressing are examples of colloids. On Earth, colloids are hard to study because gravity causes heavy particles to sink and lighter ones to float, but in microgravity, that problem goes away, leading to advances we see on store shelves.

Anheuser-Busch has tested germination and malting of barley on the space station to learn how the grain can be altered to improve its use in brewing, distilling and food production. Goodyear Tire has conducted studies to help produce more fuel-efficient tires, and Adidas uses the space station to research improvements in the process of making insoles.

Agriculture and land management benefit from space station research, too. Farmers can monitor water use with thermal infrared measurements taken of Earth's surface from the space station, and another instrument indicates how much carbon is stored in forest canopies.

Equipment on the space station also supports disaster monitoring and responses on Earth. Crew members on the space station can adjust sensors in real time in response to natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, flooding and tsunamis—something satellites cannot do—and relay valuable information to scientists on Earth. Night images taken from the space station help responders check the restoration of electric power after a disaster. Images also help monitor the spread of wildfires and the path of storms so earthbound experts can guide evacuations and rescue operations or the deployment of firefighters.

Researchers in Texas take advantage of the space station for their own work. Larry Kramer, an academic radiologist at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston, is working on a study with the Cardiovascular and Vision Laboratory at Johnson Space Center that looks into how space travel affects vision and the brain.

"Vision problems are a major problem for NASA to solve, something they have to worry about as flight duration becomes longer and they contemplate travel to Mars," Kramer says. "I had experience and was in the right place at the right time."

The team at Johnson Space Center continually plans experiments, and NASA is flooded with proposals from people wanting to conduct research on the space station, Bartoe says. "A long time ago, the executive director of a national science organization said that research in microgravity is of micro-importance. I think we have clearly proven him wrong." ■

actually controlling the mission.

"People in the space station program office make decisions every day on how to make this thing work," Bartoe says. "No one had ever done this before, and the brains behind making this thing happen are right there at JSC."

Bartoe says that when he arrived at Johnson Space Center, his goal was to interest the scientific community in using the space station, which was difficult because it did not yet exist. "We took the philosophy of 'build it and they will come,'" he says, "and turned out it worked."

Every single astronaut who has flown to the space station—more than 240 people so far—trained at the Houston facility.

Research on the space station has contributed to a variety of medical advances in addition to the eye-tracking technology. People soon may be able to receive treatments for some types of cancers via a simple injection rather than intravenous infusion, and studies in space contribute to development of medicines targeting specific cancers, muscular dystrophy, Alzheimer's and other diseases. Advances that help with osteoporosis, stiffening of the arteries and other symptoms of aging spring from research to help protect astronauts from bone loss and cardiovascular problems they can experience in space.

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MESSAGE
FROM
GENERAL
MANAGER

**ALAN
LESLEY**

Giving Thanks for Electric Co-ops

THIS THANKSGIVING, as I reflect on the many reasons for gratitude in my life, I want to share why I am thankful for electric cooperatives.

First, I am thankful for CECA because it provides safe, reliable and affordable electricity to our community. Electricity is a vital part of our modern lives, providing heating and cooling, lighting, convenience in cooking, instantaneous communications, and more.

I'm grateful to be part of an organization that endeavors to make a difference in people's lives because it is the right thing to do. We empower our members to improve the quality of their lives. We have served residents of our rural area since before investor-owned utilities would even consider stringing immense quantities of line over many miles to provide electricity to a few, spread-out connections.

I'm proud that CECA, as a nonprofit organization, makes it routine to return capital credits to our members. Capital credits are any margins returned to you, the members, after all operating expenses are paid and investments are made and the board votes to issue retirements.

I'm glad that CECA is part of a network of electric cooperatives across the United States that supports hundreds of thousands of jobs. Here at home we employ members of the community, providing careers with good wages and meaning.

I'm grateful for a job where I have co-workers who are focused on providing excellent service to members. That service includes providing energy conservation tips so your electricity stays affordable

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CECA operates in Brown, Callahan, Comanche, Eastland, Mills, Shackelford and Stephens counties.

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Eastland

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CURRENT NEWS

Keep Small Businesses Thriving



**Do you own a small business?
If so, we want to help your
business make a comeback!**

To find out how CECA and small businesses can work together toward renewed prosperity in rural America, contact Shirley at 1-800-915-2533 or sdukes@ceca.coop.

**We're stronger together, so
let's join forces to keep small
businesses thriving!**

and safety tips so you and your family can stay safe around electricity. After all, we are serving our friends and neighbors.

I'm pleased, too, that we support the community in other economic and charitable ways. Our payment of state and local taxes benefits all local residents, as tax money goes toward shared services. Additionally, we support those in need through programs such as Operation Round Up, through which co-op members can round up their electric bills to the next whole dollar to contribute to a fund that helps their neighbors. The co-op also makes donations to various charities.

It gives me a sense of purpose to know that electric cooperatives are broadening their use of renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind and hydropower, and that we are contributing to cleaner air. Collectively, across the U.S., co-ops have reduced carbon dioxide emissions by more than 18%.

I'm grateful we are not alone in this business. Across the nation electric cooperatives power 56% of the landmass and own 42%—or 2.6 million miles—of electrical distribution lines. Together we serve more than 20 million businesses, homes, schools and farms in 48 states. We join forces through the

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and Texas Electric Cooperatives for political strength, buying power, mutual aid and other shared resources.

Most of all, I'm thankful for each and every co-op member who makes possible the continuation of CECA—this important business and community supporter. I wish you and yours a happy Thanksgiving. ■

What keeps you up at night? What world problems settle in on your thoughts and make you go “hmm”? If you could change one part of your world, or the world more generally, what would it be? For one unlikely duo, it was a group of young people who were being allowed to fall through the societal cracks.

BY SHIRLEY KIDD DUKES

COMANCHE COUNTY SHERIFF Chris Pounds and De Leon resident Sarah Childers have a common interest, forged in their respective careers and fostered by their care and concern for at-risk children.

Due to his chosen career path, Pounds has seen a lot of kids slip through the proverbial cracks. “There’s a hole in the system,” he says. “Kiddos that have reached the juvenile court in some form or fashion, whether it be formal or informal, but they’ve reached the point that they’ve got the attention of the court.”

As Pounds sees it, part of the problem is that Comanche County sits just beyond the reach of any youth resources. To get help of any kind, kids must travel to Brownwood, Stephenville or Eastland. Pounds wanted to fill that need—one that would help set local kids back on the right path. “What I’ve seen is that their option in juvenile court is to give them back to their parents, who may or may not be part of the problem, or they lock them up,” he says. “In my opinion there’s time for locking them up, but if you continually lock them up, all you’re doing is conditioning them, and I get them in my facility when they turn 17.”

Childers is a former teacher in the public school system. She too has seen kids she felt had a promising future fall through the cracks. Her dedication to changing that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. “I just couldn’t stop thinking about the ones who called school their safe space because they didn’t like being at home,” Childers says. “And I knew what their home lives were like. That’s something that really kept me up at night, thinking about how they were doing and what they were doing and who’s watching out for them.”

Childers believed many children were being damaged by the adults around them, causing them to act out. The result of that acting out was people walking away from them, leading to even more acting out. “I owe it to them to see if there’s any way to change the trajectory of their lives,” Childers says. “I know I can’t save every single one of them, but we owe it to them to see if things can be changed. Because these are the broken ones. These are the ones that are unwanted. These are the ones

Raising Youth Services



that have had things happen to them that no child should have happen to them.”

In late 2019 Pounds and Childers discovered their common interest. Shortly after that, the pandemic took hold, giving them more time to pursue their project to help at-risk kids. They thought it would take a year or more to get their project off the ground, but then everything seemed to fall miraculously into place. Within three months Raising Youth Services was up and running.

RYS is a 501(c)(3) program dedicated to catalyzing the turnaround of at-risk kids facing juvenile detention. To be accepted into the program, applicants must be considered by the courts to be good candidates and receive a court recommendation. Currently RYS is a 12-week program, although graduation from the program is determined on a case-by-case basis and ultimately is decided by the juvenile probation department. Children in the program are assigned one or more mentors and are required to meet with them for at least one hour per week.

Each child must attend a two-hour weekly meeting at the RYS headquarters, which is overseen by Pounds and Childers. During the weekly meetings, participants are coached on many topics. The curriculum covers respect for family, partners,

friends, classmates and community; appropriate relationships, which includes healthy dating habits, toxic relationships and self-worth; setting focused intention through thought processes, time management and planning; communication, including thoughts, judgment/bias/acknowledgement, temperance and empathy; postsecondary readiness, such as SAT/ACT preparation, aptitude, trade school and military paths; crisis intervention with a focus on mental health; and budgeting and personal finance, which educates participants about banking and credit, income versus expenses, and assets versus liability. The curriculum also offers instruction on how to deal with difficult people, focusing on toxicity, readiness and acceptance; current events, including perceptions, response and self-care; job interview preparation that encompasses engagement, work ethic and a mock interview; perception and reaction in law enforcement encounters; and skills to shore up domestic independence such as laundry, dishes and cooking.

In addition to the meetings, the participants are fed a home-cooked meal with dessert. They assist in the preparation of the meal as well as setting the table and helping with cleanup.

A Measure for Success

Pounds says he can already see a difference in the kids at this early stage. “I’m excited to see where we are at 12 weeks,” he says. “It’s been rewarding to see the difference between the kiddos from week to week. It’s one of the things that keeps me looking forward to the next week.”

Pounds’ philosophy is that every action has a consequence, and hopefully some of those outcomes can be helpful instead of detrimental. “You can work through this,” he says. “Here’s what you can do to go through the situation and learn from your consequences and not do that again—and still achieve your goals. I’ve seen a lot of folks who have screwed up when they were younger, and they’ve come around and made something of themselves. I’ve seen others that just continued to make bad choices, and not all of it’s absolutely their fault. Some of it’s circumstantial, some of it’s just they got bad luck.

“I guess that’s to me the biggest point I want to make with these kids: That you can mess up and still do something. It does not have to be the same cycle over and over again. You can change what’s going on if you want to.”

Childers measures the success by the enthusiasm of the kids. “They get here early, and when it’s time to leave, they are not ready to go,” she says.

The Future of the Program

As RYS is in its beginning stages, adjustments will of course need to be made as Pounds and Childers figure out the program’s strengths and weaknesses. These adjustments will be made based on the program’s effectiveness, recommendations from the probation department and feedback from all parties.

The program currently can accommodate only four to five participants, but Pounds and Childers hope to one day have room for more. More funding would help them expand.

The group’s current facility is located in De Leon, and the mentors are also from De Leon. Eventually RYS would like to branch out and have another building and mentor group in Comanche as well as a paid administrative assistant. Additional funding and

a larger facility would be required to make that happen.

Pounds and Childers also would like to eventually add a phase two to the project. While phase one is court-ordered, phase two would not be. Referrals for those participants would come via pastors, parents, juvenile probation officers, etc. Plans and details for the program’s next phase are still being hammered out.

What Can You Do?

RYS’ biggest need at the moment is mentors. Mentors are thoroughly vetted and are required to have an active driver’s license as well as car insurance in good standing and must agree to abide by a code of conduct.

“We want somebody with the right intentions coming to us,” Childers says. “It’s more about meeting the standard as far as the child is concerned. Because [mentors are] going to come in and be dealing with past issues, a lot of past trauma, stuff like that, so I want to know that they can handle what they’re going to encounter.”

Mentors need to be willing to commit to the project long term. “They’re going to start forming a bond with [the kids] whether you’re looking for it or not,” Childers says. “Because that’s what [the kids] are looking for. If they had formed a healthy bond with the people they are with now they wouldn’t be in the situation they’re in. I’m looking for someone who’s prepared to sign on long term. And they’ve got the emotional tools and emotional development and maturity to handle something like this.

Chris Pounds look on in amusement while kids clown around in the kitchen.





Sarah Childers poses in front of Raising Youth Services' sign.

“Rules without a relationship equals rebellion.”
—Sarah Childers

“Because it’s not short term to me. So we look for emotional security, stability, long-term goals, somebody that’s going to be around and be a stable influence in a child’s life.”

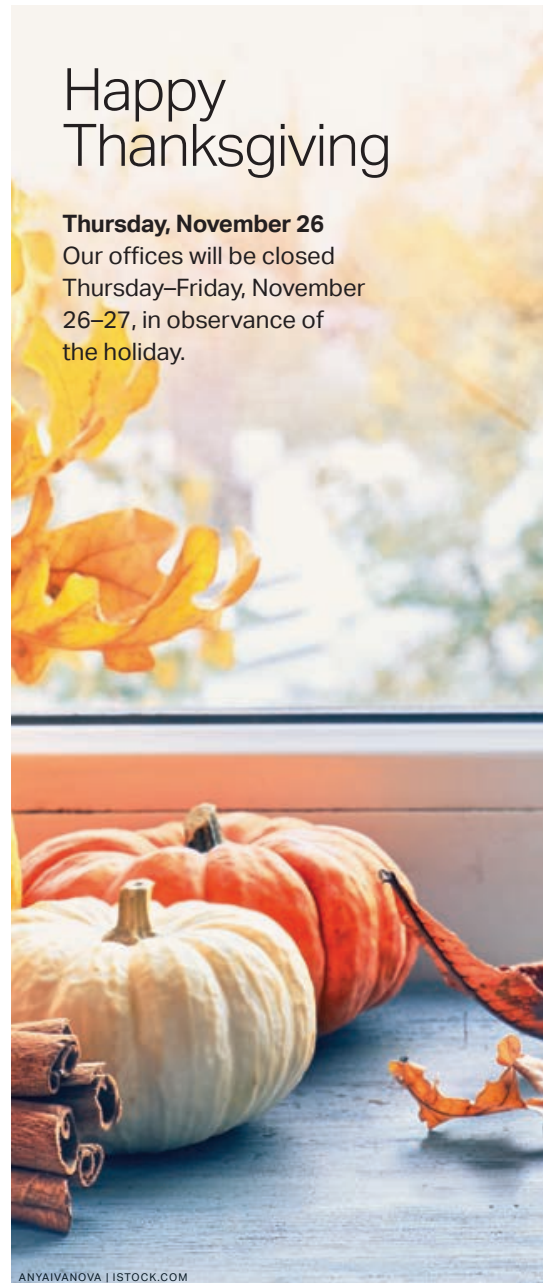
RYS also needs a dependable SUV at a reasonable price. “We’ve had to prioritize,” Pounds says. “Right now there’s transportation issues.” Pounds and Childers are using their personal vehicles and funds for a number of things.

The organization is also in need of kitchen appliances. “If someone has some stuff laying around that they’re not using that they think we can use, just email us,” Childers says. “Some of this stuff materialized because people would contact us and say ‘hey do you need x, y and z,’ and I didn’t even realize we needed it till they asked.”

With a little help from the community, and a big commitment from these community leaders, a lot of good is possible.

“[These kids] have experienced more than most adults,” Childers says. “To me it’s worth it to see if something can be done to help them.”

To volunteer as a mentor or to make a donation, go to the RYS website, raisingyouthservices.org. In lieu of donating online, checks can be mailed to 232 W. Pecan Ave., De Leon, Texas 76444. For questions about the program or to arrange delivery of donations, email raisingyouthservices@gmail.com. ■



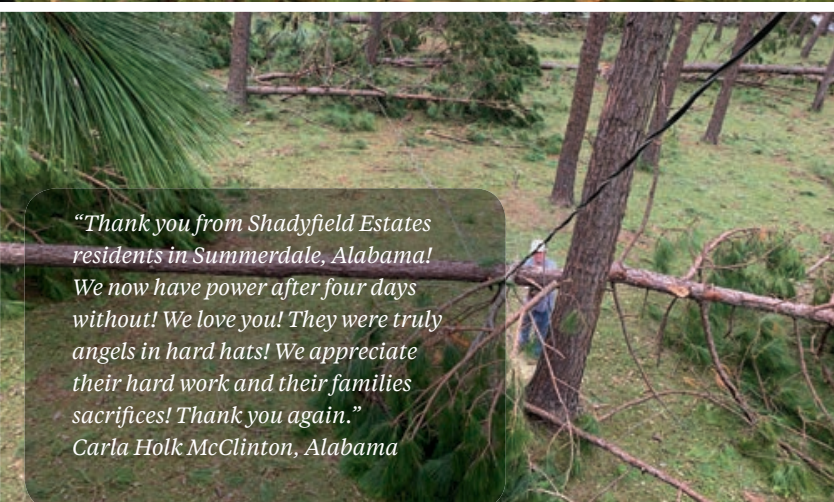
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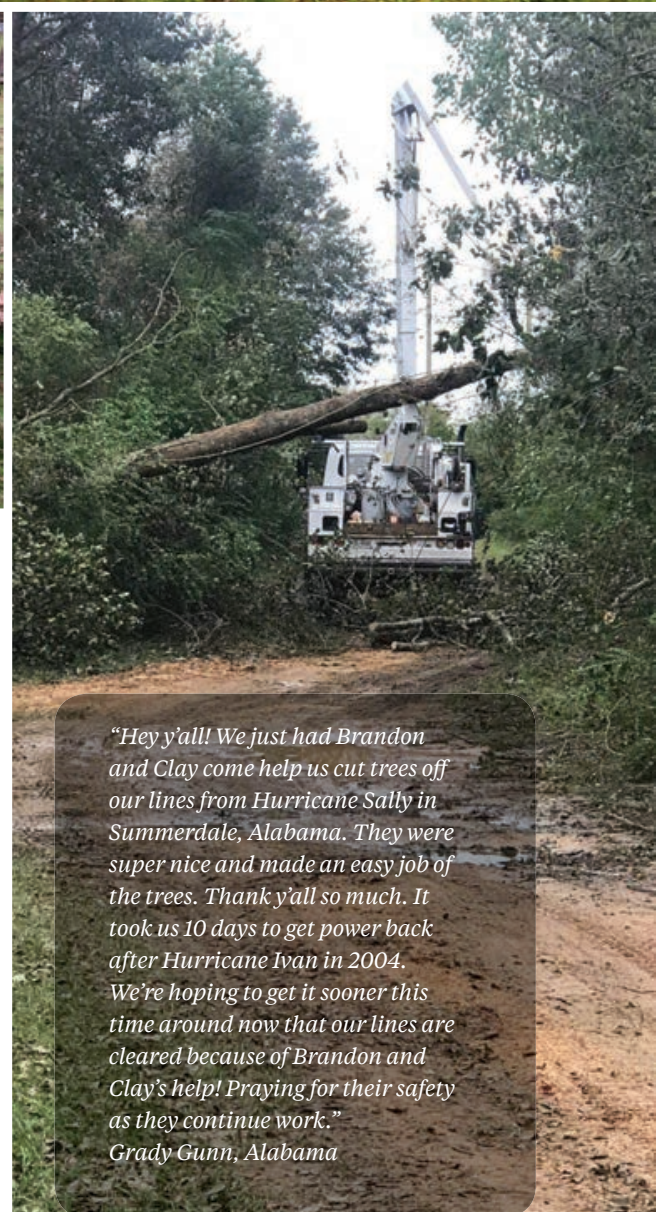
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CECA Sends Aid to 100,000 Hurricane Victims



*“Thank you from Shadyfield Estates residents in Summerdale, Alabama! We now have power after four days without! We love you! They were truly angels in hard hats! We appreciate their hard work and their families sacrifices! Thank you again.”
Carla Holk McClinton, Alabama*



*“Hey y’all! We just had Brandon and Clay come help us cut trees off our lines from Hurricane Sally in Summerdale, Alabama. They were super nice and made an easy job of the trees. Thank y’all so much. It took us 10 days to get power back after Hurricane Ivan in 2004. We’re hoping to get it sooner this time around now that our lines are cleared because of Brandon and Clay’s help! Praying for their safety as they continue work.”
Grady Gunn, Alabama*

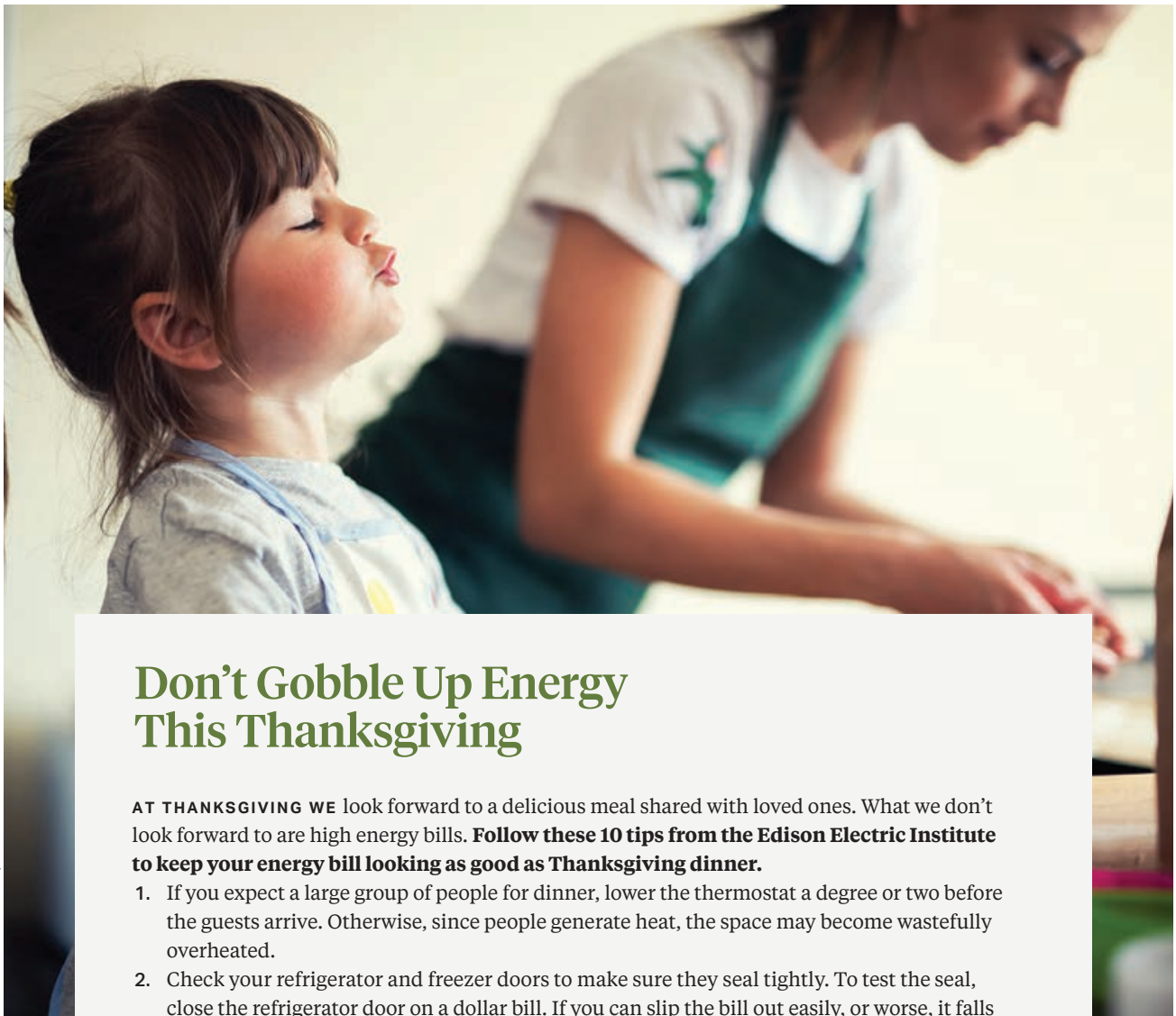
Cooperative Principle No. 6: Cooperation Among Cooperatives

ON AUGUST 27 Hurricane Laura made landfall with 150 mph winds on the Texas-Louisiana coast. Three days later CECA sent three trucks and four linemen to Jasper-Newton Electric Cooperative in Southeast Texas, to assist with hurricane repairs. JNEC had more than 21,000 members without power.

Hurricane Sally rolled in slowly September 16 and stayed a little too long, wreaking havoc on coastal cities. On September 17, CECA sent a five-man crew with two bucket trucks and a work truck to Baldwin EMC in Alabama. That cooperative had more than 78,000 members without power.

Cooperatives come together during crises to lend a helping hand to restore power to other cooperative members. The mutual aid and outreach displayed in times of need exemplify the sixth cooperative principle, Cooperation Among Cooperatives.

It happened to CECA in 2016, when Winter Storm Goliath cut power to more than 7,000 members for an extended period. CECA is more than happy to repay the favor. That’s the cooperative way. ■



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Don't Gobble Up Energy This Thanksgiving

AT THANKSGIVING WE look forward to a delicious meal shared with loved ones. What we don't look forward to are high energy bills. **Follow these 10 tips from the Edison Electric Institute to keep your energy bill looking as good as Thanksgiving dinner.**

1. If you expect a large group of people for dinner, lower the thermostat a degree or two before the guests arrive. Otherwise, since people generate heat, the space may become wastefully overheated.
2. Check your refrigerator and freezer doors to make sure they seal tightly. To test the seal, close the refrigerator door on a dollar bill. If you can slip the bill out easily, or worse, it falls out on its own, the door needs to be adjusted or the gasket needs to be replaced.
3. Allow hot foods and liquids to cool off before placing them in the fridge. A short cooling-off period should not affect the taste of the food or allow bacterial growth and will reduce the load on the refrigerator.
4. Plan ahead and collect all the ingredients for Thanksgiving dishes at one time. Each time your fridge or freezer door is opened, its compressor has to run a bit longer to replace the cold air that spills out.
5. Use a "lids-on" approach to cooking. Tightly fitted lids on pots and pans help keep heat in, enabling you to lower the temperature settings and shorten cooking times.
6. When boiling liquids, start by using the highest temperature settings to reach the boiling point. Then lower the heat control setting and allow the food to simmer until fully cooked.
7. Use a microwave instead of your oven whenever possible. Microwave ovens draw less than half the power of a conventional oven, and they require much shorter cooking periods.
8. When preheating your oven for baking, time the preheat period carefully. Five to eight minutes should be enough time. There is no need to preheat for broiling or roasting.
9. When roasting or baking, avoid making frequent progress checks that involve opening your oven door. Each time the door is opened, a considerable portion of the oven's heat escapes.
10. When using an electric oven, cook as much of your meal as possible at one time. Foods with different cooking temperatures often can be cooked simultaneously at one temperature; variations of 25 degrees in either direction still produce good results and save energy. ■

Creamy Creole Turkey Bake

2/3 cup chopped onion
2/3 cup chopped celery
1/3 cup chopped green pepper
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tablespoon butter
1/4 pound mushrooms, sliced
4 ounces light cream cheese, softened
1 can (8 ounces) stewed tomatoes, drained
1 1/2 teaspoons Creole seasoning
4 ounces fettuccine, cooked
2 cups cooked, cubed turkey
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

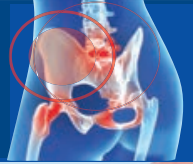
1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees.
2. Sauté vegetables and garlic in butter until crisp-tender. Add mushrooms and sauté 2 minutes more. Remove from heat.
3. Blend cream cheese, tomatoes and Creole seasoning. Fold in vegetable mixture, cooked fettuccine and turkey.
4. Pour mixture into a 9-inch-square baking dish and sprinkle with Parmesan. Bake 30 minutes or until bubbly.

SERVES 6

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



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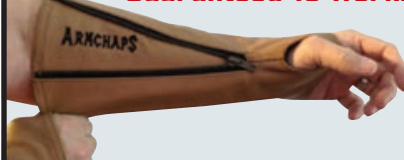
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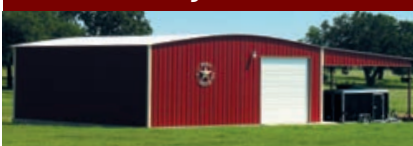


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Toeing the Line

How a Washington connection helped Texas keep a 900-square-mile slice of New Mexico

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TRACI DABERKO

YOU CAN NEVER underestimate the value of a good friendship forged early in life. If not for one such friendship, Texas would be more than 900 square miles smaller.

Before I get to the friendship, come with me up to the northwest corner of the Panhandle, where Texas meets Oklahoma and New Mexico. If you look closely at a map, you see that the border between Oklahoma and New Mexico doesn't meet up exactly with the border between Texas and New Mexico. The northern Texas border continues 2.3 miles west before heading straight south, essentially notching into New

Mexico. That jog is the result of a mistake some have called the worst survey error in U.S. history.

In truth, that land should have gone to New Mexico. The border between Texas and the New Mexico Territory was to be exactly along the 103rd meridian, same as the border between Oklahoma and New Mexico.

John H. Clark was hired to do the Texas survey in 1859. He started from the south and surveyed northward until he ran out of access to water. He figured: No problem, I'll just go up to the north end of Texas and work my way down and connect to this spot.

Clark started again northwest of present-day Dalhart, at a spot that was a couple of miles to the west of where he should have been. He headed south, marking his way, until Native Americans ran him off. He was just 70 miles from connecting the line to where he left off in the south, so he connected the dots on the map and turned in his work. Sadly, he never would have connected with his earlier starting point. He would have missed it by more than a mile to the west. His northern starting point was 2.3 miles west of where it should have been, and his southern corner was nearly 3.8 miles west of the correct point. The error amounted to an extra 603,348 acres, or 942 square miles, for Texas.

By the time New Mexico was set to achieve statehood, state leaders knew about the error and slipped a clause into the statehood legislation that said that the eastern boundary would be the true 103rd meridian. Thus, New Mexico would get its land back. Nobody seemed to be paying attention to the state's intentions except John Farwell, an original investor in the XIT Ranch in Texas. He realized that the XIT would lose hundreds of thousands of acres—and mineral rights—if the New Mexico plan went through.

Farwell had been good friends with President William Howard Taft during college at Yale University. He went to see his old buddy and explained the predicament. Taft summoned powerful men to his office and told them the Clark border would be the legal border when New Mexico became a state, or it would remain a territory.

And that is how a survey error, along with an old friendship, made Texas almost a thousand square miles bigger than it was supposed to be. Once again, it's about who you know. ■

Cookie Swap

Get to know people and recipes with a sweet exchange

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Cookie swaps are a wonderful way to get your sugary holiday fix while learning a bit about the other swappers. I feel like you can tell a lot about people from what kinds of cookies end up on the table, whether there are classic thumbprints or delicate macarons. Because bourbon balls don't require baking, they are a perfect treat to make while your other holiday cookies have their stint in the oven. While I use graham crackers here, vanilla wafers or gingersnaps are also options. Go with your favorite—or whatever you already have on hand.

Bourbon Balls

2 cups crushed graham crackers
1¼ cups powdered sugar, divided use
1 cup finely chopped pecans
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ cup bourbon
2 tablespoons pure maple syrup

COOK'S TIP To make these nonalcoholic, use apple juice in place of the bourbon.

1. In a large bowl, mix together graham cracker crumbs, 1 cup powdered sugar, pecans, cocoa and cinnamon.
2. Whisk together bourbon and maple syrup, then add to dry ingredients. Stir together until everything is evenly moistened. If the mixture looks too dry, add more bourbon and syrup, a small amount at a time. The mixture should clump easily when squeezed.
3. Form mixture into small balls by hand. On a flat surface, roll balls in remaining ¼ cup of powdered sugar and then place them on a waxed paper-lined plate or tray. Chill to let the flavors meld before serving.

MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Raspberry Jam Cookies.





Chocolate Chip Ginger Wheels

NANCY FILER
COSERV

These big cookies are a great option for mailing to friends and family thanks to molasses, which keeps the treats soft and tender. For the ones you keep for yourself, Filer recommends wrapping each baked cookie individually in plastic wrap to freeze and enjoy as desired.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- 3 teaspoons baking soda**
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger**
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon**
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard**
- 1 teaspoon instant coffee**
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1¼ cups sugar, divided use**
- 1 cup molasses**
- 1 egg**
- 4¾ cups flour**
- ¾ cup milk**
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips**
- 1 cup chopped nuts**

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees and line two cookie sheets with parchment.
2. In a large bowl, cream butter, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, mustard, coffee, cloves and salt. Blend in 1 cup sugar, then molasses and egg.
3. Mix in the flour, alternating with the milk. Stir in chocolate chips and chopped nuts. The dough will be somewhat sticky.
4. Measure a scant ¼ cup of dough and place on parchment-lined baking sheet, spacing cookies 2 inches apart.

CONTINUED >

\$500 WINNER

Mocha Wedge Cookies

MELISSA SEXSON
PANOLA-HARRISON EC



This recipe was inspired by Sexson's grandmother, who baked butter cookies with a light raspberry glaze. "I love the combination of chocolate and coffee flavors, so I came up with these cookies, which my family and friends all love," Sexson says. If you can't find espresso powder, use ground espresso.

MAKES 16 COOKIES



COOKIES

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- ½ cup packed dark brown sugar**
- ⅛ teaspoon salt**
- 2½ cups flour**
- ⅓ cup mini semisweet chocolate chips**

TOPPING

- ½ teaspoon espresso powder**
- ⅛ teaspoon cinnamon**
- 1½ tablespoons hot water**
- 3 tablespoons light corn syrup**
- Sparkling or sanding sugar**

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat two 8-inch round cake pans with nonstick spray and set aside
2. **COOKIES** In a large mixing bowl, cream butter, sugar, brown sugar and salt. Incorporate flour in thirds, using a sturdy spoon to mix. The dough will be crumbly.
3. Once the flour is mixed in, use your hands to continue mixing dough together and forming clumps with your hands. Mix in chocolate chips by hand.
4. Remove dough to a clean surface and knead for a few minutes until dough is evenly moistened and holds together well. If needed, sprinkle on 1 teaspoon of water to moisten.
5. Divide dough into halves and press each into a prepared cake pan, making sure to create an even layer all the way to the edges. Use a fork to prick holes over the surface of the dough.
6. Bake 25–30 minutes, until golden brown on top, rotating pans halfway through. Remove pans and immediately invert onto a clean cutting board. As soon as rounds are turned out, cut each into 8 wedges.
7. **TOPPING** In a small bowl, combine espresso powder and cinnamon. Whisk in hot water, then corn syrup. Using a pastry brush, brush each cookie wedge lightly with syrup mixture. Sprinkle each with sparkling or sanding sugar, then cool completely.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

HERBS DUE NOV 10

Fresh herbs can elevate almost any dish. From basil to rosemary and dill to mint, we're looking for your best recipes using herbs. Enter at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests by November 10.

RECIPES CONTINUED

5. Pour remaining ¼ cup sugar into a shallow bowl or onto a rimmed plate. Wet the bottom of a glass with water, then dip glass into sugar. Press the glass onto each cookie to flatten slightly, leaving sugar on the cookies. Bake 12–15 minutes.

MAKES 2 DOZEN LARGE COOKIES



- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
- 1 teaspoon almond extract

FROSTING

- 1 tablespoon butter, softened
- 2 cups powdered sugar, divided use
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1–2 teaspoons heavy cream

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. COOKIES In a large bowl, mix together flour, cornstarch and powdered sugar. Cut in butter using a pastry blender or two butter knives, much like mixing a pie crust. Once mixture resembles coarse

sand, sprinkle in almond extract, then continue mixing until dough forms large clumps.

3. Scoop dough into small balls and place on cookie sheets. Bake 10–12 minutes, until edges just begin to brown. Let cookies cool on cookie sheets for 5 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. FROSTING Mix softened butter with ¼ cup powdered sugar, then blend in lemon juice. Add remaining sugar a little bit at a time, then blend in cream. For a thinner glaze, add more cream until frosting reaches desired consistency. Frost cooled cookies, then let frosting set before serving.

MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES

TCP WEB EXTRA Don't stop swapping. We have nearly 900 recipes in our archive, including dozens for cookies. Help yourselves.

Lemon Bonbons

LONNA RANADA
COSERV

These tender cookies, first made by Ranada's mother, have a burst of lemon flavor thanks to the easy frosting. Be sure to sift the powdered sugar before measuring to remove any large lumps, which can make the cookies and frosting thicker than desired.

COOKIES

- 1¼ cups flour
- ¾ cup cornstarch

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Road Trip Relics

The U-Drop Inn still entices travelers to pull off Route 66 in Shamrock

BY CHET GARNER

TEXANS LOVE a good road trip.

With the advent of the automobile in the early 20th century, road-tripping became a pastime as important as baseball and barbecue. With the completion of Route 66, the Mother Road of America, road trippers needed rest stops to refuel gas tanks and stomachs. The U-Drop Inn Café in Shamrock stood ready to serve.

The first time I saw the U-Drop Inn, I was traveling the Texas stretch of Route 66 that slices across the Panhandle. Fifteen miles west of Oklahoma, I found the High Plains town of Shamrock, known for the tallest water tower in Texas. But another tower, a cream-colored column with glowing green neon atop an art deco gas station, caught my attention. It was the U-Drop Inn and Tower Station, one of the iconic stops along historic Route 66. The distinctive architecture even inspired a building in *Cars*, the Pixar animated feature about a forgotten highway town.

Built in 1936, the Tower Station was open 24 hours a day and connected with U-Drop Inn Café, which also kept long hours to serve weary travelers. The U-Drop became famous as the best stop between Oklahoma City and Amarillo. Even Elvis Presley dropped in on occasion. The diner no longer offers food but now serves visitors a glimpse into the past. I roamed through, wishing I could park at a booth and order a blue-plate special.

The rest of the building is now a visitors center catering to folks from all over the world who travel the Mother Road. The world map was cluttered with pushpins noting visitors from more than 100 countries. To them, Route 66 and classic stops like the U-Drop Inn signify freedom—the sort of freedom that can only be found on the open road. ■

ABOVE The Tower Station and U-Drop Inn as it looks today.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Chet's video from the U-Drop Inn Café in Shamrock and check out his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Some events may have been affected by COVID-19. Call or check an event's website for scheduling details.

NOVEMBER

07

Corpus Christi Harbor Half Marathon, (361) 884-6561, harborhalf.com

Kerrville Kerr County Market Days and Hill Country Swap Meet, (830) 459-6198, kerrmarketdays.org

New Braunfels Fall Walk, (830) 660-4935, my.ava.org/find-an-event.php

Tyler [7-8] Texas Rose Fall Horse Trials, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

Georgetown [7-15] Field of Honor, (951) 834-3301, georgetowntxfieldofhonor.org

10

Bryan Messina Hof U.S. Marine Corps Ball, (979) 778-9463, messinahof.com/events

11

Grapevine Paint Your Pet, (817) 442-8463, messinahof.com/events

Ozona Veterans Day Appreciation Banquet, (325) 392-2827, ozona.com/eventscalendar

12

New Braunfels [12-14] Shop, Crop & Craft, (830) 221-4011, heirloompro.com

13

Palestine [13-Dec. 27] The Polar Express, (855) 632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

14

Denison Holiday at the Market, (469) 712-9122, downtowndenisonfarmersmarket.com

20

Kingsbury Pioneer Flight Museum Wings and Wheels Fly-In, (830) 639-4162, pioneerflightmuseum.org

Santa Fe Heritage Festival, (409) 925-8558, santafetexaschamber.com

Tyler [14-15] North Texas Hunter Jumper Club Year-End Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

Corsicana Christmas Tree Lighting and Fireworks Display, (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

Alpine [20-21] Artwalk, (432) 294-1071, artwalkalpine.com

Giddings [20-21] Texas Word Wrangler Book Festival, (979) 542-2716, texaswordwrangler.com

Fredericksburg [20-22] Fredericksburg Trade Days, (210) 846-4094, fbgtradedays.com

Ingram [20-21, 27-28, Dec. 4-5, 11-12] Inspecting Carol, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

21

Jacksonville Cherokee Craft & Trade Fair, (903) 268-1598, jacksonvilletexas.com

Seguin Texas Hold 'em Poker Tournament, (830) 379-0933, texagedu.org/texasholdem tournament

Tyler [21-22] Dallas Hunter Jumper Scholarship Circuit Year-End Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

26

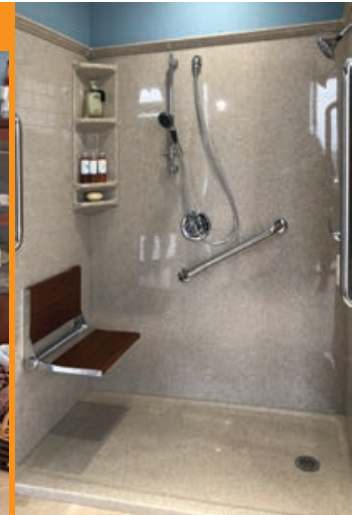
Lake Jackson [26-27] Turkey Trot 5K, (979) 285-2501, lakejacksonturkeytrot.com

MORE EVENTS >

TCP *Submit Your Event*

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event online for January by November 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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TCP *Enter Today*

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(Required by 39 USC 3685)

1. Publication Title
Texas Co-op Power

2. Publication Number
0540-560

3. Filing Date
October 1, 2020

4. Issue Frequency
Monthly

5. Number of Issues Published Annually
Twelve

6. Annual Subscription Price
\$7.50

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Street, city, county, state and ZIP+4)
1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Travis, Texas 78701-2167

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher
1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Travis, Texas 78701-2167

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor
Publisher
Texas Electric Cooperatives, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Texas 78701-2167

Editor
Charles Lohmann, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, TX 78701

Managing Editor
Karen Nejttek, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, TX 78701

10. Owner
Full Name Complete Mailing Address
Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., is a nonprofit association of rural ECs organized as a cooperative membership corporation under Article 1528b, Texas Civil Statutes. Its members are: Bailey County ECA, Muleshoe; Bandera EC, Bandera; Bartlett EC, Bartlett; Big Country EC, Roby; Bluebonnet EC, Giddings; Bowie-Cass EC, Douglassville; Brazos EC, Waco; Bryan Texas Utilities, Bryan; Central Texas EC, Fredericksburg; Cherokee County ECA, Rusk; Coleman County EC, Coleman; Comanche County ECA, Comanche; Concho Valley EC, San Angelo; CoServ EC, Corinth; Deaf Smith EC, Hereford; Deep East Texas EC, San Augustine; East Texas EC, Nacogdoches; Fannin County EC, Bonham; Farmers EC, Greenville; Fayette EC, LaGrange; Fort Belknap EC, Olney; Golden Spread EC, Amarillo; Grayson-Collin EC, Van Alstyne; Greenbelt EC, Wellington; Guadalupe Valley EC, Gonzales; Hamilton County ECA, Hamilton; Harmon EA, Hollis; Oklahoma; Heart of Texas EC, McGregor; HILCO EC, Itasca; Houston County EC, Crockett; J-A-C EC, Bluegrove; Jackson EC, Edna; Jasper-Newton EC, Kirbyville; Kames EC, Kames City; Lamar County ECA, Paris; Lamb County EC, Littlefield; Lea County EC, Lovington, New Mexico; Lighthouse EC, Floydada; Lower Colorado River Authority, Austin; Lyntegar EC, Tahoka; Magic Valley EC, Mercedes; Medina EC, Hondo; MidSouth EC, Navasota; Navarro County EC, Corsicana; Navasota Valley EC, Franklin; North Plains EC, Perryton; Northeast Texas EC, Longview; Nueces EC, Robstown; Panola-Harrison EC, Marshall; Pedernales EC, Johnson City; PenTex Energy, Muenster; Rayburn County EC, Rockwall; Rio Grande EC, Brackettville; Rita Blanca EC, Dalhart; Rusk County EC, Henderson; Sam Houston EC, Livingston; San Bernard EC, Belville; San Miguel EC, Jourdan; San Patricio EC, Sinton; South Plains EC, Lubbock; South Texas EC, Victoria; Southwest Rural EA, Tipton, Oklahoma; Southwest Texas EC, Eldorado; Swisher EC, Tulia; Taylor EC, Merkel; Tex-La EC of Texas, Nacogdoches; Tri-County EC, Azle; Trinity Valley EC, Kaufman; United Cooperative Services, Cleburne; Upshur-Rural EC, Gilmer; Victoria EC, Victoria; Wharton County EC, El Campo; Wise EC, Decatur; Wood County EC, Quitman.

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders None

12. Tax Status Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months

13. Publication Title
Texas Co-op Power

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below
October 1, 2020

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies	1,706,161	1,733,218
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation	1,694,365	1,721,961
<small>(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions</small> <small>(2-4) In County, Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Other-mailed</small>		
c. Total Paid and/or Requested	1,694,365	1,721,961
d. Free Distribution	5,095	5,030
<small>(1) Free Outside-County Mailed Copies</small> <small>(2-3) Free In-County/Other</small> <small>(4) Free Distributed Outside the Mail</small>		
e. Total Free Distribution	10,798	10,652
f. Total Distribution	1,705,163	1,732,613
g. Copies not Distributed	998	605
h. Total	1,706,161	1,733,218
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested	99.37%	99.39%
16. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies	none	none
b. Total Paid Print Copies	1,694,365	1,721,961
c. Total Print Distribution	1,705,163	1,732,613
d. Percent Paid	99.37%	99.39%

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership
 Publication required. Will be printed in the November 2020 issue of this publication.

Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner Date
Karen Nejttek, Managing Editor October 1, 2020



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Pick of the Month

American Legion Anvil Shoot

Hamilton, November 11
(254) 386-3992
facebook.com/cunningham222

American Legion Cunningham Post 222 has held this event every November 11 since 1918, when World War I ended. It involves exploding gunpowder that has been placed between two stacked heavy anvils, which sends the anvil on top flying. Anvil shoots were once a common way for pioneers to commemorate holidays, elections and other special occasions.

NOVEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

27

Granbury Night of Lights Christmas Parade, (817) 573-5548, visitgranbury.com

Abilene [27-28] Thanksgiving Throwdown, (325) 673-4233, abilenevisitors.com/calendar

Fredericksburg [27-29] Peddler Show, (512) 358-1000, peddlershow.com

Fredericksburg [27-29] Trade Days Thanksgiving Show, (210) 846-4094, fbtradedays.com

Jefferson [27-28, Dec. 5, 12, 19, 26] Christmas Express, 1-866-398-2038, jeffersonrailway.com

Llano [27-Dec. 31] Starry Starry Nights Lighted Christmas Park, (325) 247-5354, llanostarrystarrynights.com

28

Comfort Christmas in Comfort, (830) 995-3131, comfortchamber.com

DECEMBER

01

Amarillo [1-3] Farm and Ranch Show, 1-800-827-8007, ideagroup.com/amarillo

02

Alpine Christmas in Alpine, (432) 837-2326, vitalpinetx.com/christmas

03

Cameron Christmas Drive-Thru Parade, (254) 697-4979, cameron-tx.com

Columbus Ladies Night Out, (979) 732-8385, columbus-texas.org

Jacksonville Christmas Parade, (903) 586-2217, jacksonvilletexas.com

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

New Braunfels Wassailfest, (830) 221-4000, since1845.com

04

Fredericksburg First Friday Art Walk Fredericksburg, (830) 997-6523, visitfredericksburgtx.com

La Grange [4-6, 10-13, 17-23] Trail of Lights, (979) 968-5658, friends-of-kreischebrewery.org

05

Fredericksburg Holiday Home Tour, (830) 990-8441, pioneer-museum.net

Fredericksburg Kinderfest, (830) 990-8441, pioneer-museum.net

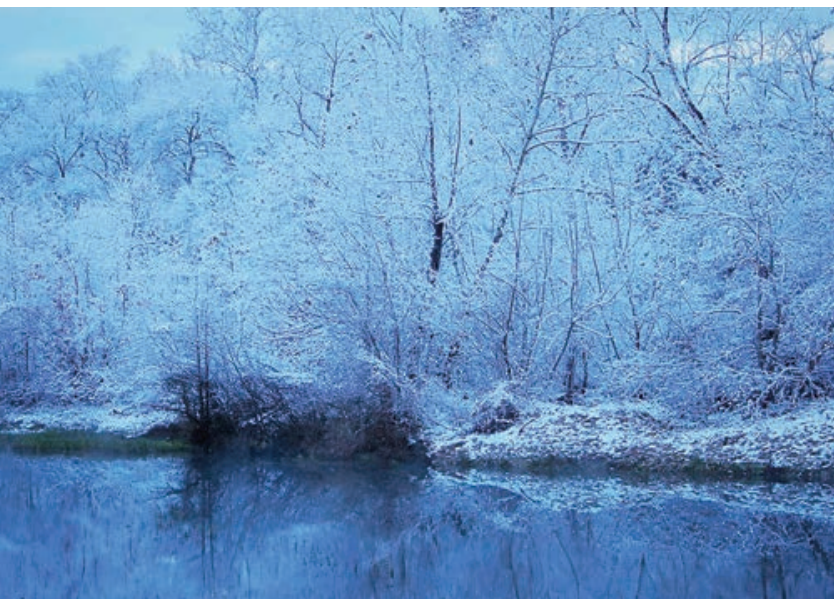
Grand Saline Salt City Christmas, (903) 962-5631, grandsalinemainstreet.com

Kerrville Kerr County Market Days and Hill Country Swap Meet, (830) 459-6198, kerrmarket.days.org

Extremes

Extreme environments, animal behaviors and weather are to be expected, and Texans rise to meet any challenge.

GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

TOMMIE CALFEE
PEDERNALES EC

A winter scene on Onion Creek.

AMBER LADYMON
FARMERS EC

"Our neighbor was burning his field. This is one of my favorites that I got."

JENNIFER CARMACK
HEART OF TEXAS EC

Carmack's son Cyress took this photo of a large thunderhead on the horizon.

JESSICA RAMOS
SOUTH PLAINS EC

"A sunny, warm day takes an extreme turn filled with hail and rain."



Upcoming Contests

DUE NOV 10 **Diners**

DUE DEC 10 **Storms**

DUE JAN 10 **Historic Texas**

Enter online and review submission rules at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



Fresh Perspective

An ardent conservationist resurfaces as a 'meat angler'

BY DAN OKO
ILLUSTRATION BY NIC JONES

ALONG THE BRACKISH shallow lakes off Matagorda Island in the Gulf of Mexico, I'm scanning for redfish fins. Restless mullet keep distracting me, their schools pulsing in the shallows, when all I want is a keeper red.

I'm armed with light spinning tackle, and my friends are spread across the flats. It is an undeniably beautiful day. I spotted herons, egrets, flamingo-pink spoonbills and surfacing dolphins as we crossed the salt. Adding a stout redfish for dinner would make the day even better.

I have not always been what's sometimes referred to as a "meat fisherman," but 20 years in Texas have taught me that redfish on the half shell, prepared over coals and sprinkled with Cajun spice mix and drizzled with oil and lemon, is a treat every angler should enjoy. Before I moved south,

I could be found stalking trout in the riffle lines of Rocky Mountain streams, fly rod in hand, either standing astern in a drift boat or moving like a slow-motion hunter along the bank.

As an ardent conservationist, I don't know what to say about my trajectory from catch and release to deadly hunter except that I believe in abiding the law of the land, and ultimately, fishing purely for sport lacks a certain zest. Rather than debating whether fish feel pain, let's just say my thinking has evolved.

I know plenty of saltwater anglers who prefer fishing with flies, and I have watched redfish hit crab patterns, clouser minnows and popping foam shrimp. But in the name of efficiency and simple camaraderie, I fish conventional tackle when I'm on the Gulf Coast. Whether I am pursuing assorted stream fish or ocean species, the joy I experience remains rooted in the same nitty-gritty details: the attention paid to subtle signs and structure where fish might lurk, the anticipation when a well-placed cast brings the bite, the pulse-pounding joy of the hookup and the epic relief of bringing a fish to hand.

Which returns us to this patch of Matagorda Bay, where I attempt to wade with the stealth of a prowling cat. Through polarized lenses, I glimpse the prize—a bronze bruiser suspended in a few inches of water. I've got a speckled soft-plastic bait, which lands a few feet from my target. I reel slowly, then rest a beat. The movement puts the red on high alert.

He chases down the lure, and I raise my rod to set the hook. A fight ensues that lasts minutes but feels like hours. With a 20-inch red in my net, I look around and spot my friends on the boat. The sun is setting. Dinner will be fresh fish after all. ■



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