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JUNE 2025

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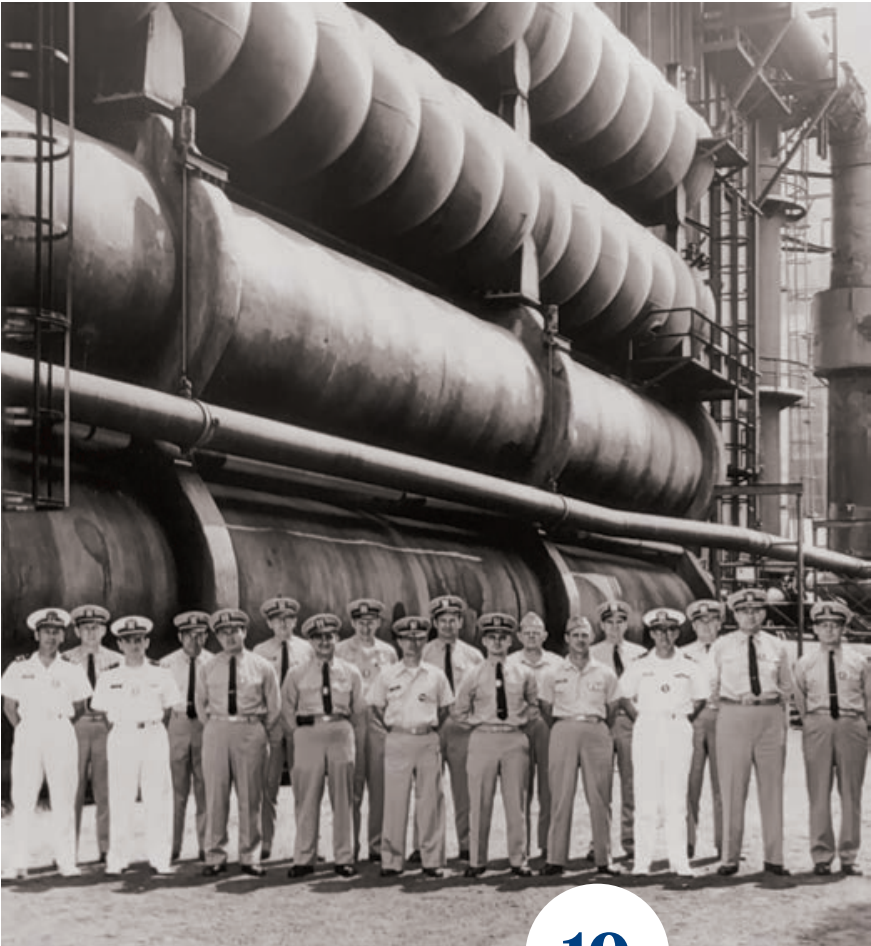


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June 2025



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ON THE COVER
Johnny takes a break from chomping through a neighborhood outside Austin.
Photo by Eric W. Pohl

ABOVE
Servicemen assigned to the Ordnance Aerophysics Laboratory at Lone Star Steel some 70 years ago.
Courtesy Ladies of Lone Star



A rendering of the planned National Juneteenth Museum in Fort Worth.

Juneteenth Has a Home

MORE THAN THREE years after plans were announced to build a National Juneteenth Museum, Fort Worth officials have made way for the planned 50,000-square-foot museum, food hall, business incubator and theater.

The \$70 million museum of Black history will be built on a plot on the city's Historic Southside, with the city kicking in \$15 million. Opal Lee, the "Grandmother of Juneteenth," gave City Council members two thumbs up.

"Wow, I tell you, I could have hugged everyone, but they've got work to do," Lee told the Fort Worth Report.



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Stay Weather Aware

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FINISH THIS SENTENCE

It's summer, and I'm ready for ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some of the responses to our April prompt: **The best view in Texas is ...**

A "Welcome to Texas" sign alongside any highway.

MIKE WEBER
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
GRANBURY

From my front porch every time my husband blows me a kiss as he passes on his tractor.

SUZY DOSS
PENTEX ENERGY
VALLEY VIEW

The Sabine River bridge in my rearview mirror and the afternoon sun shining in my face. I'm home!

JOHN STOLL
BANDERA EC
MICO

Getting home and seeing my wife and grandkids outside enjoying the spring weather.

RANDY HARDEE
WISE EC
BRIDGEPORT

Visit our website to see more responses.

APRIL 2025 Ode to a Mighty Hunter

“My daughter, Stella, and I are always excited to read through your publication and make collages. This story was especially inspiring for my future entomologist [left].”

MINDY WALKER
JASPER-NEWTON EC
KIRBYVILLE



COURTESY MINDY WALKER

Eyes and Hearts

Honestly, I'm not a bug person [*Ode to a Mighty Hunter*, April 2025]. But I do love dragonflies because they don't stick to me or bite me.

I never realized there were so many different species of them. These photos are incredible!

The close-up of the eyes is kind of scary. But my favorite part was Love on the Wing. They make a perfect heart.

Denise Sims
Bowie-Cass EC
Redwater

Inspiring Flyers, Part II

At 17 my dream was to fly [*The WASPs Who Flew Out of Sweetwater*, April 2025]. I applied twice for acceptance to the WASPs. I counted the days to hear from them.

It wasn't to be. To my disappointment they were deactivated. This led me to

serve in another form of communications, which continued the rest of my working life.

I will be 99 this year. Thanks for the memories.

Wanda Tackett
United Cooperative Services
Desdemona

Lake of Bluebonnets

Nanny's Blessing [March 2025] touched my heart. In the 1950s my grandparents turned two acres of their Walker County property into a Texas wildflower field, predominately with *Lupinus subcarnosus*, the sandyland bluebonnet.

For almost 50 years, those bluebonnets made their property look like a lake, and people often stopped to take photos. To this day the sandyland bluebonnet, with its gentle shade of blue, is my favorite, although, sadly, they seem to be migrating into obscurity.

Jan Lawrence
Sam Houston EC
San Jacinto County



COURTESY OFFICIAL NATIONAL WASP MUSEUM, SWEETWATER, TEXAS

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

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GORGING A PATH

BY PAM LEBLANC

For those hard-to-remove, unwanted plants, goats may be the greatest of all time

In a steep, overgrown ravine in the Steiner Ranch neighborhood west of Austin, dozens of goats are buzz sawing their way through a thicket of brambles.

The ruminants work through the brush like furry, four-legged locusts, pausing now and then to share a goofy grin accented with slobbery bits of greenery. Their jaws work nearly nonstop, chewing plants along a trail that winds between houses.

The goats are here to work, hired hands in an army deployed to reduce the risk of wildfire. A blaze in Steiner Ranch during the hot, dry summer of 2011 destroyed 23 homes, and officials are eager to prevent another disaster.

That's why a homeowners association there teamed with Lake Travis Fire Rescue to hire 100 goats from Rent-A-Ruminant as part of an experimental fire mitigation program. The animals spent a week clearing out brush on 7 hard-to-access acres. After they make a first pass, human volunteers finish the job, cutting down and removing downed trees and other fire fuel.

Goats, proponents say, are cheaper, greener and safer than humans with lawn mowers or herbicides that could work their way into waterways. And they're cute.

"They go where man, machine and chemicals can't go," says Carolyn Carr, co-owner of Rent-A-Ruminant.

Goatscaping, as it's sometimes called, is just one form of modern-day goat employment. Besides putting the animals to work clearing poison ivy from urban hiking trails or tidying up grass growing around solar panels, goats can inject a bit of fun into social activities such as yoga, wine tastings and parties.



Bleating and Eating

Carolyn and her husband, Kyle Carr, own a herd of about 600 goats in Brownwood. They hire their animals out to private landowners, municipalities and businesses. Goats, they say, are an eco-friendly solution to maintaining landscaping projects large and small.

The Carrs' herd is made up of nine breeds of goat. Almost all the animals have names, which are noted on brightly colored tags attached to their floppy ears.

"Goats are great," Carolyn says as they stream out of a trailer and into a cordoned-off area of land at Steiner Ranch. Curious residents have gathered to watch the proceedings.

The Carrs started their business after inheriting an overgrown piece of property in Brownwood, about 80 miles southeast of Abilene. Carolyn joked at the time that they needed a herd of "green grazers" to tidy things up.

It turned out to be a smart suggestion. Kyle's father had been a Xerox salesman, with plenty of connections at municipalities around the state. They quickly learned that many of those cities needed help controlling brushy overgrowth.

Goats can clamber up and down steep slopes and reach awkward spaces that heavy machinery can't access. They also clip vegetation growing along sensitive waterways where herbicides shouldn't be used. Best of all? They love plants that make humans itch or stab them with thorns or assault airways, including green briar, poison ivy, ragweed and blackberries.

LEFT Goats groom the terrain of Steiner Ranch outside Austin.

ABOVE Rent-A-Ruminant owners Kyle and Carolyn Carr manage a herd of about 600 goats that can landscape in hard-to-reach areas.

The Carrs travel the state with their herd, which has trimmed up Hermann Park in Houston, munched invasive species while all but ignoring the lush lawn at the Houston Arboretum, and cut back poison ivy along the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail around Lady Bird Lake in downtown Austin.

But not just any goat can make the Rent-A-Ruminant team. Only quiet goats that don't pester people for food can become part of the traveling work crew, Carolyn says.

Sometimes, onlookers set up chairs to watch the goats in action. That's fine with the Carrs, as long as the humans don't distract the animals by feeding or petting them.

"They have a job to do, and this is not a petting zoo," Carolyn says.

Sheep, she says, can do similar work, such as "mowing grass" that grows around rows of sun-collecting panels at solar farms. Both species have their niche—sheep prefer grass over leaves, making them good at keeping lawns and weeds in check. Goats prefer leaves, so they're better at tidying up unruly brush.

In Steiner Ranch, the experiment seems to be working. The HOA and fire department split the \$9,000 tab to hire the goats, and even after a few hours, the difference is obvious.

"We have a lot of area and so much poison ivy," says Debbie Tanner-Jacobs, president of the Steiner Ranch Residential Owners Association.

As a bonus, the goats leave behind a little fertilizer, in the form of their droppings. Goats, Carolyn Carr notes, sterilize seeds that pass through their bodies, so they can't repropagate those pesky plants.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: PAM LEBLANC





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Krystal Evans of Kyle and a new friend that is not at all sheepish at a Goat Shenanigans event at the Hive coffee shop in Austin. Shirley Marek cuddles a goat at Blue Lotus Winery in Seguin. Kids get to know each other at the Hive. Katie Knox with a baby goat at Blue Lotus.

Kidding Around

San Antonio-based Goat Shenanigans puts goats to work in a different way.

On a crisp afternoon in January, 10 goat enthusiasts convene at Blue Lotus Winery in Seguin, where they sip wine and cuddle a pair of Nigerian dwarf goats, each just three or four weeks old.

Besides happy hours with goats, the company organizes yoga classes, toddler gatherings, movie nights and beer tastings, all in the company of adorable baby goats.

They'll even deliver a "goat gram"—a livelier version of the traditional candy gram—to your home to celebrate a special occasion. A single-goat visit lasts 20–30 minutes, but you can add additional ruminants to the order.

Goat Shenanigans also offers ranch visits. Visitors can pay for a 10-, 30- or 60-minute session on the goats' home turf, on the northwest side of San Antonio.

"Whenever a goat is involved, it's going to be a good time," says Laura Romer, manager of Goat Shenanigans. "The best thing about them is they have different personalities. A cow is a cow, but a goat has its own unique personality. They're very loving, very playful and emotionally intelligent. They bring out so much joy in people."

The goats seem to enjoy their work. Aside from a chorus of high-pitched bleats that sound like out-of-tune harmonicas,

they zoom around an outdoor patio at the winery and accept an overflow of snuggles from their admirers.

"They're not afraid of people," Romer says. "They're motivated by food and love to be cuddled."

Allyson Marek of San Marcos learned about Goat Shenanigans through social media and bought tickets for the wine tasting with goats for herself and her parents for Christmas.

"They're just so cute and mischievous and silly," Marek says as she holds one, a bright-eyed armful of soft hair named Thor with a tongue that sticks out with each bleat. "Oh my gosh, amazing. They're so soft, so chill, so very awesome."

One day, when she has enough land, Marek says, she hopes to own her own herd. She dreams of raising goats for their milk and to make cheese and soap.

Another afternoon, a dozen children and their parents (along with a few adults who can't resist) gather at the Hive coffee shop in South Austin to mingle on an outdoor patio with four animated, beagle-sized baby goats.

"I like how they're kind of like dogs but cuter," says Evelyn Jackson, who has come to the event with her mother, a sister and a friend.

All around Jackson, kids—the human kind—offer the hardworking goats kibble and pet their soft bodies. Two of the goats wander into the coffee shop's garden, where they sample herbs growing in a raised bed. Another hops onto a picnic table and stares down a woman sitting there.

"How can you be upset with a baby goat in your arms?" asks goat wrangler Sarah O'Brien, who is doing her best to keep her charges in line.

You can't. And that's why we need more goats in the workforce. ■

TCP Watch the video on our website and get to know these hardworking and lovable animals.



BY PATTI PFEIFFER

Steel to the Stars

While a consequential steel mill rusts, locals ensure memories shine on

The Lone Star State is known around the world. The town of Lone Star, however, isn't well known—even among Texans.

But it should be. So says a group of 13 volunteers working to bring light to the East Texas town of 1,400 people about an hour southwest of Texarkana. They want to share the rich history of its steel plant, metal from which spanned the skies over Vietnam and the subsurface of the oil industry and deeply impacted the U.S. economy, environment and space exploration.

They call themselves the Ladies of Lone Star, and their goal is plain.

"We want to gather memories and record as much of the history of Lone Star Steel as possible for future generations," Lesley Dalme says.

It all began with an idea about décor.

Randy Hodges, former Lone Star mayor who was technical services manager when his 45-year career at the plant ended with its closing in 2020, proposed adorning the walls of the Lone Star Senior Citizens Center with pictures of the plant. The framed photos caught the attention of locals, and the project was born.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: COURTESY LADIES OF LONE STAR

The Ladies of Lone Star collect photos, documents and memorabilia to preserve and showcase the town's shuttered steel mill.



...s take are Robert Russell, E.H.
...ss, David Childress (inspection),
... and C.A. Burris.



Russell and O.N. Cape on the job.



John, Missa, and two of his kids, the wife and Missa, and the four years who recently are finishing words.



Russell and Wilson Martin (an inspector)



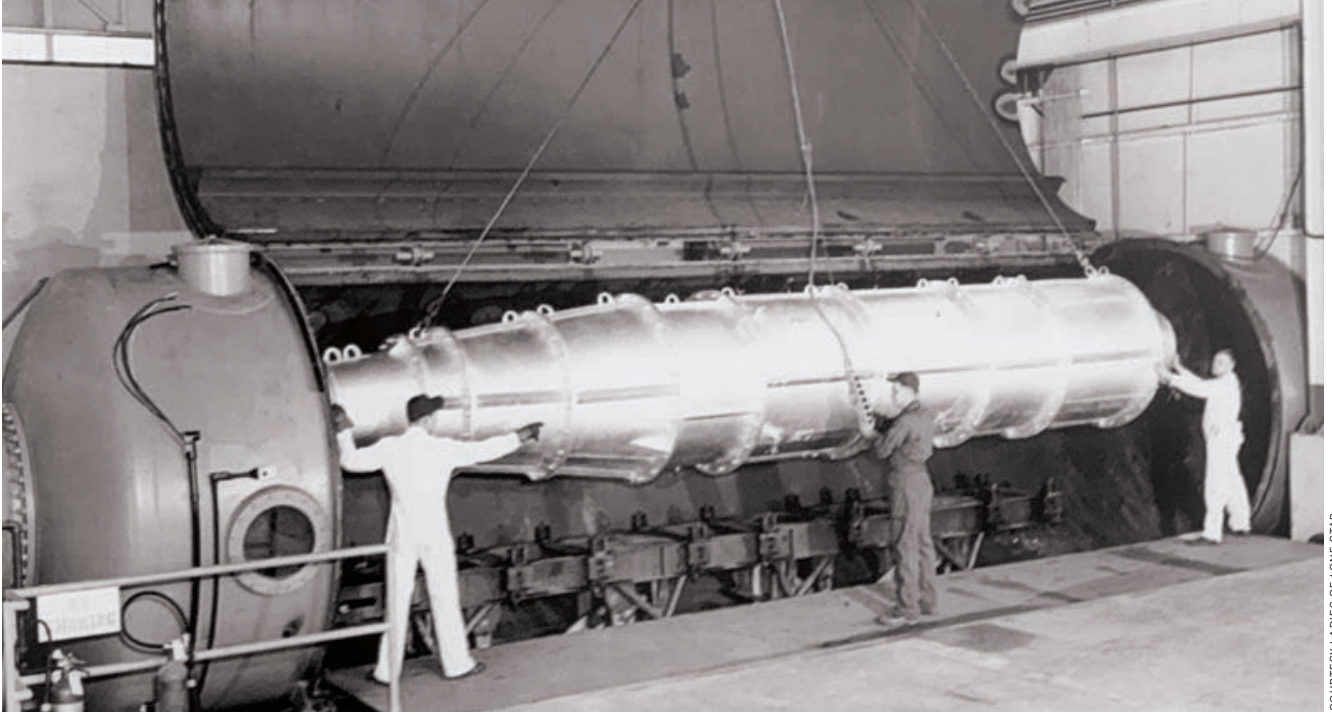
P.E. Moore, Orell Adams, E.E. Williams, G.G. Nickleberry, Alton Harris, Harnden Barber make up another cutoff crew.



... are finishing crew members Johnny Pettit, Jerry Smith, B.C. Dobby, J.M. Howard, Jr., W.J. McCarty

Photos and Text by Dave Lewis

EDITOR'S NOTE:—Due to mill scheduling requirements, some employees have been pictured more than once while working on different crews. There may also be some who participated in the record-setting finishing turns who aren't pictured. However, everyone involved is credited with the team effort required to set such records.



COURTESY LADIES OF LONE STAR



JAY PATRICK

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Several volunteers from the Ladies of Lone Star in the mill's chapel, the site of hundreds of plant employees' weddings over the years. A wind tunnel that could simulate the vacuum of space using blast blowers. Randy Hodges, the former mayor of Lone Star who worked at the plant for 45 years, with his father's hard hat. From left, former mill worker Bruce Shimpock and Lesley Dalme and Lanita Goodrum of Ladies of Lone Star look over artifacts.

I sat down with three members of the Ladies of Lone Star as well as Hodges and John Shivers, a former plant manager and vice president. For nearly two hours in the chapel on the grounds of the shuttered plant, I listened and learned about the steel industry, the plant's history and the impact it had on people, places and events far and wide.

The plant was built with federal funding during World War II in the small town of Lone Star, selected because of its strategic location. Nearby are ore, limestone and coal—the three essentials for steel production—and the Port of Houston is driving distance.

While the 600-acre plant came about because of the war, steel didn't start rolling out until the mid-1940s, after the war's end. In the early 1950s, the oil industry began booming and with it the market for pipe.

"An idea came about to buy surplus war project product

to manufacture oil pipe," Shivers says. "It took two years to adjust production and install necessary mills at a cost of \$76 million. The oil industry fluctuated, going from boom to bust. Likewise, LSS profited hugely and suffered severely."

LSS also played a role in the Vietnam War.

"We would make large-diameter tubes to be used as bomb casings, which would be cut to bomb length, shipped by rail or truck to an ammunition plant in Karnack, filled with ammo, a fin was attached, then they would be transported to the Port of Houston," Shivers says.

The steel mill had a wind tunnel that could simulate the vacuum of space using blast blowers. Known as the Ordnance Aerophysics Laboratory, the highly secure site operated from 1945 to 1968 and employed hundreds of scientists, technicians and engineers. Department of Defense contractors conducted thousands of tests for supersonic jet engines, guided missiles and spacecraft components for the military and NASA.

"The facility was well-known around the community, but because of security, it was not known around the country," Hodges says. "They researched and designed rocket engines here, including components used for the Saturn rocket. They would bring equipment in on a bread truck, and once inside the plant, securely situated behind closed metal doors, the bread truck doors would open, and parts would be unloaded."

Members of the project liked the area so much, amid the verdant Pineywoods and alongside the 1,500-acre reservoir



COURTESY LESLEY DALME

“We want to gather memories and record as much of the history of Lone Star Steel as possible for future generations.”

built for the steel plant, many of them stayed and went to work for LSS.

They brought with them a wealth of knowledge and talent that led to industry innovations. For example, a device that scrubbed smokestack emissions was developed at LSS, Shivers says.

“It cleaned better than anything on the market,” he says. “We sold it to other cities—Houston, Shreveport—a nuclear facility in Georgia, and other customers in the U.S. and abroad.”

However, economic downturns in the 1980s plagued the steel industry. In 1989, Lone Star Steel filed for bankruptcy.

“Our labor contract expired, and we worked two years without one,” Shivers says. “We just kept going, no contract and no complaints. It took a couple of years, but we came out of bankruptcy and paid off 85% of the debt, and a few years later were profitable again.”

In 2007, U.S. Steel purchased the plant for more than \$2 billion. Nine years later the mill was idled and then completely shuttered in 2020. At the height of production, the company reportedly employed more than 6,000. Now, other than security personnel, the facility is vacant. Equipment sits silent while rust and dust mount.

The Ladies of Lone Star are dedicated to preserving documents dating to the early 1940s and photographs showcasing the plant’s long and vibrant history. They also have begun meeting with former employees, recording and then transcribing their stories to be compiled into a book chronicling the mill’s story.

“The plant is being dismantled, and eventually it will be no more,” says Lanita Goodrum, one of the volunteers. “And it’s even more important that people know what made Lone Star, what those men did in that plant and the impact it had on our nation.”



JAY PATRICK

When our time together winds down, Hodges, who started at the steel plant in 1974, offers a trip to the senior center—an invite I eagerly accept. As we walk by each photo on the walls, he enthusiastically explains the images.

“I worked with World War II vets, young men with families—our plant was filled with people like that, hardworking parents who had to make a living regardless of the long hours, the hard and dangerous work,” he says. “In a world that was so divided, we were working for a common cause.”

On top of a piano is something that goes beyond mere nostalgia—Hodges’ father’s hard hat from his long career at the plant. “His first paycheck in 1953 is what paid for my mother to go and me to be born at a hospital,” Hodges says. “It was more than a job and career. We were family.”

And it was a family that survived, thrived, accomplished a lot and had an enormous impact. They are proud of LSS, still—its impact of 80 years, from Earth to the heavens, the industries it changed from oil to aerospace, and the lives it touched.

As Shivers says, “Our footprint ranges far beyond this steel plant.” ■

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Safety Starts With You

ELECTRICITY PLAYS many roles in our lives, powering baby monitors, cellphones and lighting and running air conditioners and appliances. No wonder we've gotten so comfortable with its instant availability that when we flip a switch, we expect our systems and devices to do the job.

Remember, every electrical device has a purpose and a lifespan. While we can extend their operations with maintenance and care, none are designed to last forever. Periodic inspections can prevent hazards from becoming dangerous.

GFCIs

Outdoor outlets and those in potentially damp locations like the kitchen, bathroom or laundry room typically include ground-fault circuit interrupters.



GFCIs are designed to detect abnormal current flows and break the circuit to prevent electric shocks.

The average GFCI outlet is designed to last about 10 years, but in areas prone to electrical storms or power surges, they can wear out in five years or less.

Check them frequently by pressing the test button. Make sure you hit the reset button when you're done. Contact a licensed electrician to replace any failing GFCI outlets.

Outlets and Switches

Unstable electrical outlets or wall switches with signs of heat damage or discoloration are early warnings of potential shock or electrical fire hazards. Loose connections can allow electrical arcing.

If you see these warning signs, it may be time to contact an electrician.

Surge Protectors

Power strips with surge protectors can help safeguard expensive equipment like TVs and computers from power spikes. Voltage spikes are measured in joules, and surge protectors are rated for the number of joules they can effectively absorb.

If your surge protector is rated at 1,000 joules, it should be replaced when it hits or passes that limit. When the limit is reached, protection stops and you're left with a basic power strip.

Some surge protectors include indicator lights that warn you when they've stopped working, but many don't. If your electrical system takes a major hit, or if you don't remember when you bought your surge protector, it might be time for a replacement.

Extension Cords

With a growing number of devices connecting your family to the electricity you get from CECA, having enough outlets in just the right spots can be challenging. Remember, extension cords are designed for temporary use.

If you use extension cords regularly, you may need to call an electrician to add more outlets.

Watch out for cords that get noticeably warm when in use; they might be undersized. If a cord shows any signs of frayed, cracked or heat-damaged insulation, it should be replaced.

If the grounding prong is missing, crimped or loose, it will not provide the protection it's designed to. And always make sure that extension cords used in outdoor or potentially damp locations are rated for exterior use.

Electricity is an essential necessity for modern living, and CECA is committed to providing safe, reliable and affordable power to all our members. We encourage you to keep these safety tips in mind so you can address potential hazards before damage occurs. ■



Register Your Child for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD to love reading by signing them up for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, a program for CECA members sponsored by Operation Round-Up.

The Imagination Library puts books into the hands and hearts of children worldwide by partnering with local communities to provide specially selected, high-quality books each month to participating children from birth to age 5.



Personalized with the recipients' names and mailed directly to their homes, these books create an exciting reading experience and encourage families to spend time enjoying books together.

Best of all, the program is available at no cost to all children under 5 who reside in CECA's service territory.

Each book is carefully chosen by a panel of childhood literacy experts and includes tips on the inside cover for enhancing engagement and interaction between the child and their caregiver. Additionally, the Imagination Library sends two Spanish-English bilingual titles per age group each year.

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity! To sign up your child, visit ceca.coop/imagination-library or scan the QR code above. ■

Give Your Washer and Dryer a Longer Life

YOU CAN EXTEND the life of your washer and dryer—and your clothes too—by treating your appliances with care on laundry day. Here's how.

Clean the dryer's lint filter after every use. Occasionally vacuum the chute that houses the filter.

Unfasten the duct from the dryer at least once a year and vacuum it.

Cut down on drying time if your clothes consistently come out wrinkled. That means you're overdrying.

On nice days, skip the dryer completely by installing and using a clothesline.

Avoid overloading your washing machine with comforters, rugs and large blankets. Look in your owner's manual to learn how much weight your washer's tub can handle.

Balance your load. Washers can fail when heavy loads bang around in an unbalanced machine.

Replace your water intake hoses every five years, even if they look OK. Older hoses are prone to bursting. ■



JAMES PAULIS | ISTOCK.COM



COOL POOL SAFETY TIPS

Follow these tips for safe pool-time fun:

Keep electric radios, TVs, grills, lights and other electrical appliances at least 10 feet from pools and wet surfaces. Use battery-powered appliances whenever possible.

Electric appliances should not be used outdoors unless they have a heavy-duty cord and three-pronged plug.

Outdoor electrical outlets should be weatherproof and equipped with a ground-fault circuit interrupter.

Swimming pools should be well away from overhead wires to avoid contact when using long-handled equipment.

If you think you're being shocked while in the water, move away from the source of the shock. Get out of the water, if possible, without using a metal ladder.

Stay safe this summer. Don't swim with shocks!

CECA encourages you to always practice safety.

PHOTO: DIGITAL VISION

Jalapeño Popper Bites

8 ounces cream cheese, softened
½ cup finely shredded cheddar cheese

½ cup chopped jalapeño peppers

⅓ cup cooked and crumbled bacon

½ teaspoon salt

Pinch cayenne pepper (optional)

30 phyllo shells

Pickled jalapeño slices, for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a bowl, combine cream cheese, cheddar, chopped jalapeños, bacon, salt and cayenne, if using, until smooth and uniformly mixed.
3. Use 2 spoons or a small cookie scoop to divide mixture among phyllo shells. Place filled shells on a rimmed baking sheet and bake 10 minutes or until shells are crisp and filling is just starting to brown.
4. Let cool slightly and top each shell with a slice of pickled jalapeño. Serve warm.

MAKES 30 POPPERS

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

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CECA Offers Residential Solar Solutions for Members

DID YOU KNOW THAT CECA sells and installs solar power arrays? We have trained professionals who can evaluate your electricity use and property to provide the perfect fit for your home or business based on your usage patterns. We encourage members to include CECA in their solar array installation plans from start to finish.

CECA offers various options, from backup generators and battery systems to roof- and ground-mount arrays. Energy efficiency has progressed with new technologies, allowing members to take a more active role in optimizing their energy consumption. We're beyond the days of just turning off the lights or adjusting the thermostat when leaving the house.

If you're interested in optimizing your household's energy consumption, please call Riley Hilliard at 1-800-915-2533 to set up a free energy audit and solar power analysis. Solar power may not be a good fit for everyone, but under the right circumstances, it can save CECA members money on their monthly bills.

There are many companies marketing the installation of solar panel arrays in every county CECA serves, and this has created confusion around solar buyback plans and raised concerns about fair pricing in a new and changing industry. We're here to help our members navigate this confusion, and if you feel solar may be a good option for you, we can handle the sale and installation as well.

CECA does require an application process be completed before interconnection with our system to ensure proper safety, liability and metering standards are met. Regardless of the solar power vendor you choose, please contact us before you start your project to be sure your plans are compliant and your project goes smoothly.

You can always discuss your solar project plans with CECA staff for general information or specific needs. Solar power can be a great energy efficiency tool, and we applaud our members who are working to conserve power. Call us at 1-800-915-2533 to learn more about how we can help. ■

Comanche Electric Cooperative Association

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Toll-Free 1-800-915-2533
Web ceca.coop

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ABOUT CECA

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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Headquarters

349 Industrial Blvd., Comanche, TX 76442
Monday–Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Early

1801 CR 338, Early, TX 76801
Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Closed from 1–2 p.m.

Eastland

1311 W. Main St., Eastland, TX 76448
Tuesday and Thursday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

VISIT US ONLINE

ceca.coop



Check us out at
TexasCoopPower.com/comanche

Community Calendar

Comanche

Comanche Market; June 7, July 5; 9 a.m.–1 p.m.; 1300 E. Central Ave. The market brings locals and travelers to the courthouse square for a variety of goods. For more information, call (325) 330-3666 or email texashandmadesuds@gmail.com.

Old-Fashioned Game Day at the Museum, June 19, 3 p.m., Comanche County Museum, 402 Moorman Road. Board games and card games. For questions, call (325) 356-5115 or email comanchecountytxmuseum@gmail.com.

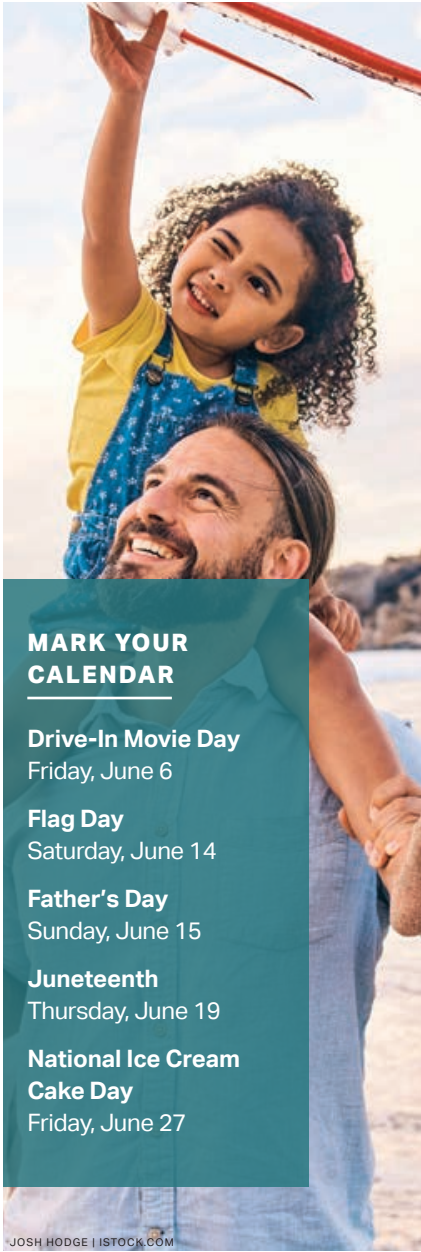
Granny Reads to Children at the Museum Day, July 10, 3 p.m., Comanche County Museum, 402 Moorman Road. For questions, call (325) 356-5115 or email comanchecountytxmuseum@gmail.com.

De Leon

De Leon Market; June 14, July 12; 9 a.m.–1 p.m.; Community Auditorium; 125 S. Texas St. Indoor venue with over 30 vendors. The market is the second Saturday of each month. For more information, email deleontxmarket@gmail.com or call Jerry Leonard at (817) 371-7869 or Mark Beaty at (432) 209-3275.

Early

Kids Fishing Tournament, June 7, 8 a.m., Early Town Center Park, 109 Kelcy Way. This event by the Kiwanis Club of Brownwood celebrates fishing for kids of all ages and skill levels. Whether you're taking your first steps into the world of angling or you're a seasoned pro, there's something for everyone to enjoy. This is a golden opportunity to connect with nature, forge new friendships and create lasting memories. For more information, contact dHUDSON-brian@earlytx.net.



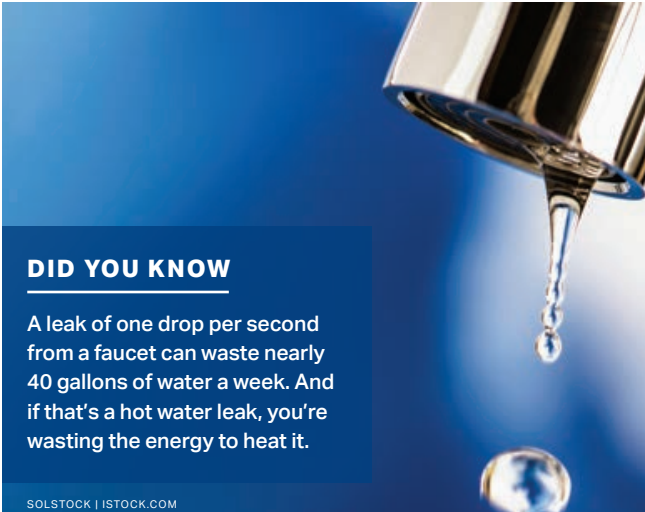
MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- Drive-In Movie Day**
Friday, June 6
- Flag Day**
Saturday, June 14
- Father's Day**
Sunday, June 15
- Juneteenth**
Thursday, June 19
- National Ice Cream Cake Day**
Friday, June 27

JOSH HODGE | ISTOCK.COM

Comanche Electric Cooperative Association welcomes your local event submissions.

If you have any events you would like listed in the Community Calendar, please contact Triston McGehee. Event information must be submitted two months in advance for the magazine. The calendar is published monthly and includes events scheduled for the month of publication and the following month. CECA reserves the right to edit or exclude events based on space availability and other considerations. We do not certify the accuracy or reliability of any information posted in the Community Calendar. To confirm event details, please contact the event organizers directly. Email tmcgehee@ceca.coop; write to CECA at P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442; or call 1-800-915-2533.



DID YOU KNOW

A leak of one drop per second from a faucet can waste nearly 40 gallons of water a week. And if that's a hot water leak, you're wasting the energy to heat it.

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POWER TIP

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Splash Into Summer Safely

IN THE POOL, at the beach or even in your bathroom, water can be dangerous for children if you don't take the right precautions. Drowning can happen any time of year, but parents need to be particularly vigilant during warmer months, when the number of drownings skyrockets.

Children can drown silently and in a matter of seconds. **Here are some tips to help prevent such a tragedy.**

Actively supervise your children around water (including pools, hot tubs, lakes and the bathtub). Always have a phone nearby to call for help in an emergency.

Never leave a child alone in or near a body of water—even if the water is less than a few inches deep.

For pool owners, make sure your pool is fully enclosed by fencing and has a self-closing, self-latching gate.

Hot tubs should be covered and locked when not in use.

Enroll your child in swim lessons. If you don't know how to swim, enroll in a parent-child swim class.

When at the lake or other deep water—or if your child is not a strong swimmer—have them wear a properly sized life jacket.

Learn CPR. In the event of a near-drowning, the victim will need immediate medical attention—before paramedics arrive. Performing CPR early can prevent brain damage and be the difference between life and death. ■

Keep Cool With Outdoor Ceiling Fans

YOUR FAMILY MIGHT use your covered outdoor porch or patio more often this summer if you keep the temperature cooler by installing a ceiling fan.

Outdoor ceiling fans come with ratings like "damp" or "wet" that indicate what kind of climate—like humid or rainy—they can operate in safely.

Look for outdoor fans made from durable materials since they will be exposed to elements such as extreme temperatures, humidity and dust. Weather-resistant materials include polymers and stainless steel.

Remember that outdoor fans are higher powered than most indoor fans, so they can move the outdoor air around noticeably.

Never install an indoor fan on your outdoor porch; it's not safe. Instead, choose one specifically made for outdoor use with all-weather blades, corrosion- and rust-resistant paint, and a motor casing featuring a waterproof seal.

Overhead fans are a great addition to a porch, sunroom or a garage. Even in outdoor rooms with extra sunlight, a fan can circulate the air, making anyone nearby feel cool and comfortable. ■





Texas Chilly

The cold truth about ice in the era before rural electrification

BY RANDY MALLORY

FROZEN WATER—SO SIMPLE, yet so taken for granted. It conquers a sizzling day like water extinguishes fire, and wherever there's electricity, there's ice—in just about every home, restaurant and grocery store.

The sweltering truth is that for most of Texas' history, there was precious little ice to tame the dog days of summer. In fact, until the mid-1800s, the only ice in Texas—except during winter—came from cold-climate northern states. It was cut from frozen lakes and rivers up north, then shipped to ports like Galveston.

The ice trade helped preserve food and drink for a growing coastal population. Inland families were left to rely on the time-tested preservation methods of drying, smoking, salt-curing and pickling the foods they raised.

During the Civil War, Union blockades of Confederate ports cut off the northern ice supplies. So in the early 1860s, desperate Texans smuggled in—via Mexico—an ice machine designed by French inventor Ferdinand Carré that used ammonia to absorb heat and freeze water. Around 1865, Daniel Holden redesigned and installed a more commercially promising Carré machine in San Antonio.

Icehouse workers at the loading dock in Silsbee.

The artificial ice cost 5 cents a pound, half the high rate of New England ice at the dock. But with beefsteaks selling for 2 cents a pound, artificial ice remained, according to a local newspaper, “one of the greatest luxuries of civilization.”

Shortly after the Civil War, ice in the Alamo City was so important that the city sported three of the nation’s eight ice plants. Texas’ passion for human-made ice led to many firsts in the artificial ice industry.

The first refrigerated slaughterhouse opened in 1871 in Fulton. The first commercial ammonia-compression plant was built in 1873 in Jefferson. That same year brought the first cross-country refrigerated meat shipment, by rail from Denison to New York.

During the late 1800s, as railroads cobwebbed across Texas, railcars began transporting perishables refrigerated by ice blocks enclosed in insulated corner bunkers. The melting ice had to be replenished, so ice plants and storage houses popped up all along the rail lines.

Assured of cold shipment to far-off buyers, Texas’ beef, fruit and vegetable industries expanded like never before.

Today, one of the few remaining southeast Texas icehouses sits beside the railroad tracks in Silsbee, north of Beaumont.

The original icehouse, incorporated in 1909, burned, but in 1915, it reorganized as Silsbee Ice, Light and Power Co. Gulf States Utilities Co. took it over in 1926 and constructed the current building. The Spanish Revival-style structure with a red-tile roof was described as “beyond a doubt the most modern structure in Silsbee.”

Now the distinctive facility is home to the Ice House Museum and Cultural Center, which tells the story of ice and illuminates other little-known topics of regional history.

It looks much as it did a century ago. Near the entrance sits the original well, well house and water lines that carried water to the icehouse. Other original lines lead toward the adjacent railroad sidetrack, where locomotives took on water for their steam engines, according to Susan Shine Kilcrease, museum director.

The building boasts the original loading docks where a dozen or so employees catered to local customers and loaded ice blocks into insulated railcars for shipment.

“It was a very busy place—a community gathering place, really,” says Kilcrease, a Silsbee native with deep local roots. “When I was a kid, I remember coming to the dock and ringing the service bell. I was fascinated when a huge block

of ice would slide out of the chute, and we’d load it onto our truck.”

In addition to selling ice and chilled bottled beverages, the icehouse also had hooks inside where locals could temporarily hang a side of beef or a deer. Seasonally the icehouse kept watermelons cold for sale, a rare treat before home refrigeration.

Inside today’s museum, information panels detail the artificial ice production process.

Well water was filtered and pumped into galvanized cans that could each hold 312 pounds of ice and required cranes and hoists to move. It took 36 hours to freeze the facility’s 336 cans. The process produced an average of 30 tons of ice a day.

To meet growing home demand for cold goods, icehouses began delivering ice blocks door-to-door to subscribers. Made of wood, lined with tin or zinc, and insulated with materials such as cork or sawdust, iceboxes contained one compartment for ice and another for food. A drip pan collected water and had to be dumped periodically.

Messy as it was, this appliance transformed ice from a luxury to a necessity. Its legacy lives on every time a Texan says “icebox” instead of refrigerator. In front windows, customers placed a square cardboard sign with numbers—10, 20, 30 or 40—informing the delivery crew how many pounds of ice to bring inside.

The iceman’s job could prove a slippery challenge, explained Darrell Shine, Kilcrease’s father, in a 2000 interview. As a boy, Shine delivered ice seven days a week each summer with his grandfather Jim Shine, who drove Silsbee Ice Co.’s delivery wagon.

Shine remembered that at 10 or 12 years old it was hard to carry a 50-pound block and work around the ice hook to get it into the icebox. “Sometimes you’d accidentally knock stuff out,” he said. “Many a time I’ve cleaned up milk spilled on the kitchen floor.”

Rural electrification and the widespread use of electric refrigerators eventually reduced the need for block ice. In response to the changing marketplace, ice manufacturers zeroed in on cubed and crushed ice.

Indeed, record-setting Texas heat still seems to fire up our collective gratitude for one of life’s most common luxuries—clear, cold ice! ■

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Amazing Grace Danforth

The trailblazing doctor was a champion of women's rights

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

THE DALLAS *Daily Times-Herald* tried to compliment Dr. Grace Danforth by saying she was “a woman with a man’s mind,” but the pioneering physician had a mind all her own.

Danforth was the first woman accepted as a member of the Dallas County Medical Association, the first woman to practice medicine in Williamson County and a founding member of the Texas Equal Rights Association.

Danforth was also a member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, which made her death from a drug overdose all the more puzzling.

Born in Wisconsin in 1849, she lived

most of her life in Texas, moving with her family to northeast Texas as a young child.

For a while it appeared she would follow in her father’s footsteps as a traveling music teacher, but she found the classroom too confining. She considered bookkeeping and pharmacy before deciding on medicine, studying at the Woman’s Medical College of Chicago, where she first became involved in the campaign for women’s voting rights.

She returned to Texas as a licensed physician and dedicated suffragist.

By 1889, she was practicing medicine in the small town of Granger, north of Austin, at a time when there were only

a few thousand female doctors in the U.S. She organized local suffrage groups and promoted their activities. She advocated for inviting visionary suffragist Susan B. Anthony to Texas.

We know now that Danforth suffered from cluster headaches, which are uncommon, unpredictable and debilitating. And even though Danforth may have prescribed laudanum, a tincture of opium dissolved in alcohol, to treat pain and other ailments in her patients, she didn’t take it herself.

It’s possible she only took it once, on the night of her 46th birthday, February 21, 1895, when she died of an overdose. Stories about her death vary. Some say she overdosed on the drug antipyrine; others say laudanum.

Armies and expeditions of the day didn’t leave home without laudanum. Lewis and Clark took the drug, along with some raw opium, on their voyage of discovery. Doctors in the 19th century prescribed laudanum for nearly everything: colds, meningitis and even heart diseases.

Laudanum, it seems, never failed to make patients feel better. Unless it killed them.

Wayne Bethard, a pharmacist and historian in Texas, wrote in his book *Lotions, Potions, and Deadly Elixirs* that laudanum, like today’s opiates, lowers a patient’s pain threshold. Over time it takes more medicine to treat the same pain, but someone who doesn’t take narcotic pain medication has no tolerance to the drug. A dose large enough to calm a cluster headache could be fatal.

“Dr. Danforth was one of the most remarkable women in Texas,” the *Daily Times-Herald* wrote the day after her death. She was buried in the Granger City Cemetery.

“There was a great prejudice existing against her sex entering the learned professions, and it is not likely she got much practice,” the newspaper wrote. “But she was a woman of a vigorous and active mind, and she soon took a leading part in all reforms.” ■

Summer Pastas

We say summer, but you'll be turning to these dishes all year

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

A pan of homemade lasagna bubbling away in the oven is so dreamy, but this food editor is busy, so I'm busting out a skillet to re-create the dream in under 30 minutes on the stovetop. I finish by quickly broiling the cheese—an optional step but so worth it.

Turkey Skillet Lasagna

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 pound ground turkey
½ medium onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 jar marinara sauce (24 ounces)
1½ cups chicken broth
1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
10 uncooked lasagna noodles, broken into 2-inch pieces
1 cup ricotta cheese
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

1. Heat olive oil in a 12-inch oven-safe skillet over medium-high heat. Add ground turkey and onion. Break up turkey with spoon and cook until turkey is fully cooked, about 8 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook an additional 2 minutes.
2. Add marinara sauce and broth. Bring to a boil.
3. Add mushrooms and lasagna noodles and stir to separate noodles. Return to a boil, then reduce heat, cover and cook 10–12 minutes or until noodles are tender, stirring occasionally. If using broiler, pre-heat it while the noodles cook.
4. In a bowl, stir together ricotta, Parmesan, Italian seasoning and salt.
5. Dollop cheese mixture by the spoonful on top of pasta. Cover and cook 5 minutes, until cheese is warmed through. Uncover skillet and top with mozzarella. If desired, broil 3 minutes or until cheese is melted and lightly browned. Serve warm.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Queso Mac and Cheese.





Summer Corn Pasta Salad

NANCY GRIFFITH
BANDERA EC

Griffith's dish is a tasty combination of fresh veggies and pantry staples, making it a new addition to my list of rotating meal plans. As the pasta cooks, I can quickly chop up the veggies, and the dressing is a snap to whisk together. I served it with baked chicken, but it would also be amazing with fried chicken or baked salmon.

- 16 ounces uncooked rotini
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ cup avocado oil
- 1 can black beans (15 ounces), rinsed and drained
- 1½ cups corn kernels
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup sliced black olives
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ cup diced green onions
- ¼ cup diced red onion

1. Cook rotini according to package directions.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together vinegar, oregano, cumin, salt and pepper. Whisk in avocado oil.
3. Add rotini to the dressing and stir to coat. Stir in beans, corn, tomatoes, bell pepper, olives, cilantro, green onions and red onion until thoroughly combined.
4. Cover and chill until ready to serve.

SERVES 8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Pickle Popper Pasta Salad

PATRICIA STEHLING
CENTRAL TEXAS EC



Pickle pasta, where have you been all my life? The way I devoured this pasta—it's so, so good and even easier to whip up. I mean, c'mon—pickles, ranch and bacon ... winner, winner.

- 12 ounces uncooked large elbow macaroni
 - 1 cup mayonnaise
 - ½ cup sour cream
 - ¼ cup pickle juice
 - 2 tablespoons ranch seasoning
 - ¼ cup diced dill pickles
 - 8–10 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
 - 2 cups cherry tomatoes, quartered
 - 2 tablespoons fresh dill, minced (optional)
1. Cook macaroni according to package directions and allow to cool.
 2. In a large bowl, stir together mayonnaise, sour cream, pickle juice and ranch seasoning.
 3. Add macaroni, pickles, bacon and tomatoes and stir until well combined.
 4. Serve garnished with fresh dill, if desired.

SERVES 6–8

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

TURKEY TIME DUE JUNE 10

We're already thinking about the holidays, and you could win \$500 if you do too. Tell us about your main dish or what you do with that mountain of leftover turkey. Enter by June 10.

UPCOMING: HOLIDAY BREAKFAST DUE JULY 10





Pasta With Prosciutto and Peas

KERRI RUSS
TRINITY VALLEY EC

I appreciate a pasta dish with texture. I want it to be crispy or crunchy, and this pasta gives it to me. I enjoyed this dish when I first made it but even more the next day for lunch.

12 ounces uncooked fusilli
10 ounces frozen peas
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil,
divided use

3 ounces prosciutto, diced
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
cheese, divided use
½ cup chopped fresh parsley,
divided use

1. Cook fusilli according to package directions and set aside.
2. Steam peas according to package directions and drain.
3. In a skillet, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-high heat. Add prosciutto to the skillet in a single layer and fry until crispy. Place on paper towels to drain.
4. Add remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil to skillet, along with garlic. Cook until garlic begins to brown.
5. Pour garlic mixture into a large bowl, and add prosciutto, fusilli, peas, lemon juice, salt and pepper to bowl. Stir to coat.

Water Wise

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Next time you're making spaghetti or fettuccine Alfredo, don't toss the water used for cooking pasta. Save a few cups before draining and reap the tasty benefits. It's loaded with rich starch from the pasta. Adding a cup or so of pasta water can help emulsify any sauce. It enhances flavor absorption, prevents pasta from drying out and helps sauce cling to pasta.

6. Stir in ¾ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano and ¼ cup parsley.
7. Serve garnished with remaining ¼ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano and ¼ cup parsley.

SERVES 4

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Enter the Bare Cage

Lace up for an eerie hike among former zoo pens in this boomtown

BY CHET GARNER

THE CAGES WERE all empty—at least what was left of them. But that didn't stop me from having the strange feeling that something was watching me as I hiked through the remnants of an abandoned zoo just outside Cisco.

This small town is about 100 miles west of Fort Worth and boasts a couple claims to fame. First is the Mobley Hotel—the initial hotel purchased by Conrad Hilton, in 1919—and second is an infamous 1927 bank robbery led by a man dressed as Santa Claus.

And third is the old zoo nature trails on the banks of Lake Cisco.

The zoo was built in 1923, during the height of an oil boom. It was to be the crown jewel of a tourist camp that also included a huge swimming pool just below the newly formed lake.

At its peak, the zoo had a number of cages built into the sandstone cliffs and held a strange menagerie of animals, including a bear, deer and flamingo. Sadly, its heyday was short-lived as animals died under “unusual circumstances,” and by the 1930s, everything was abandoned.

For decades, the ruins of the zoo were known to only a few, and it seems most of them were graffiti artists. It wasn't until 2021 that a local nonprofit got permission to clear the paths, haul out the garbage and turn the old zoo into a public nature trail.

Walking the paths and peering into the old cages makes for an interesting, albeit creepy, nature walk. Pieces of rusted metal mark the outlines of the former enclaves. The only sounds you'll hear are the wind and the occasional bird or squirrel scampering up a tree.

But it isn't hard to imagine the growls of bears and howls of monkeys or those beady little eyes peering back at you. ■

ABOVE The empty habitats of an abandoned zoo embolden Chet.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all Chet's Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

JUNE
7

Brenham Highwaymen Show: The Great American Outlaws, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Grapevine Dairy Day, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

13

Fredericksburg [13–14] Craft Beer Festival, fbcraftbeerfestival.com

14

East Bernard Czech Kolache-Klobase Festival, (979) 533-1902, kkfest.com

El Campo Kids Fishing Tournament, (979) 275-1600, eclostagoon.com

Slaton Texas Air Museum Airshow, (806) 779-7332, thetexasairmuseum.org

Granbury [14–15] Lone Star Street Rod Association State Run, (817) 573-5548, visitgranbury.com

Terrell [14–15] North Texas Antique Tractor and Engine Club Show and Pull, (214) 497-1611, north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net

16

Denton [16–21] Juneteenth Celebration, (940) 735-6311, dentonjuneteenth.com

21

Freeport Fort Velasco Day, (979) 233-0066, freeportmuseum.com

26

Luling [26-29] Watermelon Thump, (830) 875-3878, watermelonthump.com

28

Teague Putt Fore a Purpose, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Belton [28, July 2-5] 4th of July Celebration, (254) 939-3551, beltonchamber.com

Llano [28-Sept. 28] Canvas and Quilts: The Art of Ira and Kathy Kennedy, (325) 247-4839, llanofineartsguild.com

JULY

3

Waxahachie [3-4] Grape Myrtle Festival, (469) 309-4045, waxahachiecvb.com

4

Carthage Lake Murvaul Fourth of July Celebration, (903) 693-6562, panolacountytx.com

Corsicana Freedom Festival, (903) 654-4874, visitcorsicana.com

Grapevine 4th of July Extravaganza, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Port Arthur Fireworks on the Seawall, (409) 985-7822, visitportarthurtx.com

Tomball July 4th Celebration & Street Fest, (281) 290-1035, tomballtx.gov

Granbury [4-6] Hometown 4th of July Celebration, (817) 573-1622, granburrychamber.com

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We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your September event by July 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.



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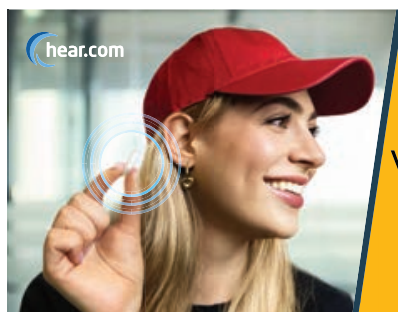
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Family Vacation

Whether going overseas or just over yonder, these readers love picnicking, beach combing, hiking, riding the rivers and cheering on their favorite teams as a family. Now pile in the family van, and let's have some fun!

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 BLAIR RINCONES, PEDERNALES EC

"The first time our kids experienced the Gulf Coast, the heart-shaped sunset made it truly a magical experience."

2 TARYN JENKINS, TRINITY VALLEY EC

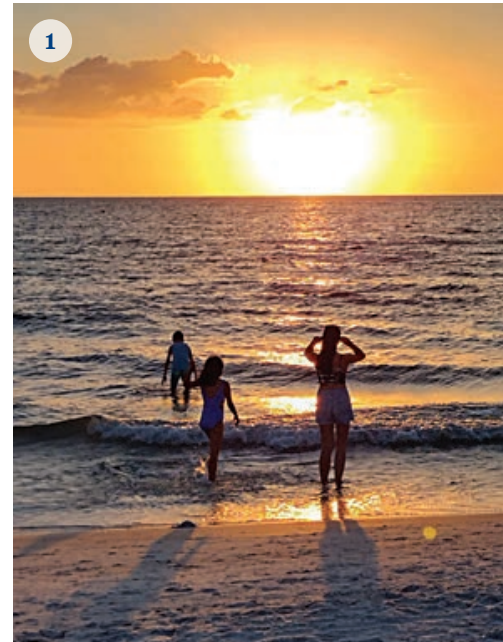
"A beach trip before a college send-off."

3 ELIZABETH WEBB, CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

"Climbing up to the summit of Enchanted Rock."

4 DANICA PETERS, PEDERNALES EC

"Summer lake days and jumping off the boat."



Upcoming Contests

DUE JUN 10 **Heroes**

DUE JUL 10 **Abstract**

DUE AUG 10 **Country Life**



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Family Vacation photos from readers.





Cutting Through

Sometimes it takes a chain saw to get through the undergrowth of life

BY PATTI JONES MORGAN
ILLUSTRATION BY
HEATHER GATLEY

ONE MORNING AS I walked along a nearby lane, a chain saw's rough growl cut through the early morning peace. Startled, I discovered its source was a trim-looking man bent almost double, systematically attacking dense undergrowth along his fence line.

"Good morning!" I called out.

Finally hearing my voice over the sound of the machine, the man straightened up. "Good morning!" he replied.

"You have a lot of work there!" I called back.

He took my greeting as a welcome excuse to take a break and struggled to disengage from a tangle of old wire fencing, clinging branches and thorny tendrils. Over time, they had wound around the trees and bushes, roots, and fence posts to create a near impenetrable barrier.

Slipping off the mask that had been protecting him from clouds of wood shavings and dust, he tipped back his broad-brimmed hat with a friendly smile. He had just bought the 10 acres, he explained, and planned to build a house on it for him and his wife.

"A lot of wires, mostly rusted, and old brush have wrapped around the fence posts," he said, waving at the stringy assortment of tethers once intended to define the acreage and warn away trespassers.

Left uncontrolled, however, nature had ravenously begun converting old and new companions into little more than an unmanageable thorny fortress. No wonder wire cutters and a chain saw were needed to hack through the knots and reveal what lay hidden.

We bid our goodbyes after the neighborly visit, and the chain saw resumed its noisy attack on the underbrush jungle.

But not before I saw my own tangle—of old literary aspirations in need of similar treatment. The cacophony inspired me to clear out yesterday's words and give light, air, time and space to new ones.

A long sweltering summer arrived, partnered with the pandemic. My neighbor's sporadic chain saw activity diminished to rock gathering and wheelbarrow work.

Curious neighbors, eager to chat, began stopping by. Robert Frost's oft-quoted line from his poem *Mending Wall* sprang to mind: "Good fences make good neighbors." A conversation hub during those communication-cramped months, the gathering place had served us all well.

Completed, his low rock wall continued to speak simply about what mattered: people, purpose and permanence.

It spoke my language too. Half-hidden beneath my writing clutter lay the lyrical sounds and familiar rhythms of my old love, poetry. Revealed anew, its purpose suddenly mattered more than ever.

The chain saw's discordant sound that first morning had, it seemed, pealed an unexpected welcome. Its clarion call was sweet music to my ears. ■



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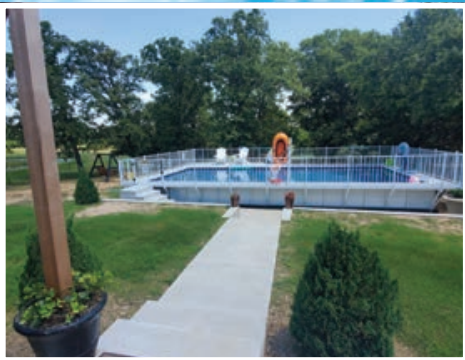
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