

FATHERS' LIVES
ON THE LINES

PUTTING TOADSUCK
ON THE MAP

REMINISCING IN
BLUEBONNETS

Texas Coop Power

FOR CECA MEMBERS

JUNE 2024

A Feat on Foot

One man's quest
to visit all of our
state parks
in one year



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June 2024



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Trailblazer

How a college professor became the first Texan to visit every state park in a year.

By Anna Mazurek

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Photo by Chase A. Fountain | TPWD

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Photo by Anna Mazurek

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Growing Influence

JUNETEENTH, commemorating June 19, 1865, when African Americans in Texas learned of their emancipation from slavery, continues to spread across the U.S. as a public holiday.

At least 28 states and the District of Columbia recognize Juneteenth as a holiday. Texas was the first to do so, in 1980. President Joe Biden signed the legislation that made Juneteenth a federal holiday in June 2021.

Read an excerpt from *On Juneteenth* by Annette Gordon Reed on our website.

June 14

World Blood Donor Day

Blood donation centers continue their call for the lifesaving resource—noting that just 3% of the eligible U.S. population donates blood each year. Learn more at redcrossblood.org.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The Next Book You Should Read Is ...

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: **Wow! The eclipse was ...**

One of those events that reminds us how magnificent our little corner of the universe really is.

SUSAN SINGLETARY
TRINITY VALLEY EC
ATHENS

Cool, literally.

LESLIE KRAICH
TRI-COUNTY EC
GOODWELL, OKLAHOMA

Way cooler than I expected. I was really looking forward to it, but when it actually happened, I almost cried.

CAROL DUNAGAN
VIA FACEBOOK

Totally amazing. I love how the sun united people together for this lifetime event.

MOCEDADES ESQUIVEL
FARMERS EC
LAVON

Visit our website to see more responses.

TCP Contests and More

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Climbing High

RECOMMENDED READING

On National Olive Day, June 1, we hope you'll remember Texas' place in the harvesting of this ancient fruit. Read *Texas Olive Oil: Pressed for Success* from August 2008.



DAVE SHAFER

Don't Forget Obedience

I appreciated your article on dog agility [Top Dogs, March 2024]. My only issue with the list of dog sports was that no mention of basic obedience or competitive obedience was made.

Obedience is the foundation of all the sports mentioned. If a dog does not have the most basic of obedience commands in its repertoire, all the other things become much harder to teach.

Cindy Hyde
San Bernard EC
Columbus

Around and Around

I skied at Sea-Arama Marineworld in Galveston in the 1970s [The Green Carpet, January 2024]. Occasionally we put on a show at the Shamrock Hilton—in the swimming pool. It required a pretty constant left turn.



TOM HUSSEY

Planting Ideas

Native flora and fauna should be of great interest to all of us, so it is heartening to hear of people rescuing and protecting them [Thorny Task, April 2024]. And Sheryl Smith-Rodgers' *Seedy Behavior* [April 2024] was both entertaining and inspiring. I once rescued a pint of rain lily seeds just days before the city mowed them down.

Paula Stone
Central Texas EC
Fredericksburg

A Budding Friendship

The April issue was a "blooming success." I loved reading about the employees who went to Guatemala [Currents, *Wiring the American Dream*], the urgent need to care for our declining native plants [Thorny Task], caring for the less fortunate in Banderita [Holding Promise] and seeing the pictures of pollinators [Focus on Texas].

Your magazine puts the focus squarely on what there is to love about Texas: the place; people; and the vital, tenuous and beautiful connections between them.

Michael Davis
CoServ
Wylie

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.

Texas Co-op Power

APRIL 2024 Thorny Task

"I have many night-blooming cereus plants in pots. I bring them indoors before it freezes every year. I get new plants from cuttings."

KATHERINE ALLEN
PEDERNALES EC
BURNET

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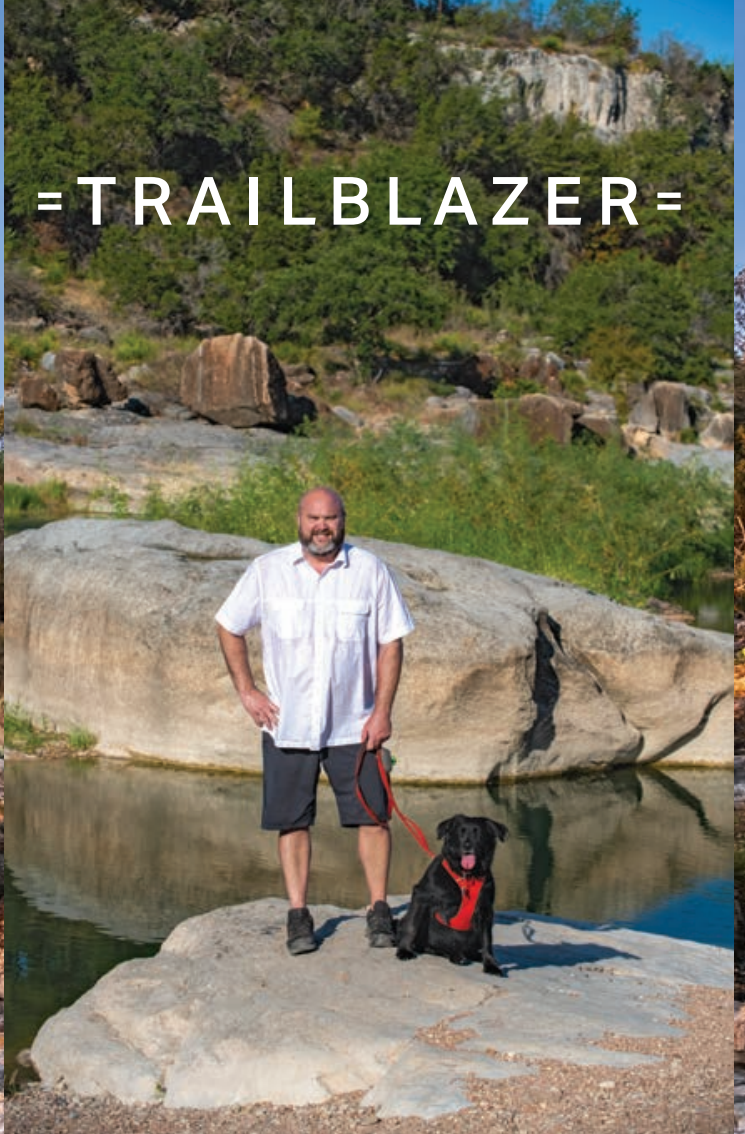
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=TRAILBLAZER=



BY ANNA MAZUREK

He was the first to visit every state park in a year, and he can tell you where to start your own adventure

WHILE Dale Blasingame was waiting in the car line to enter Hamilton Pool Preserve in July 2014, a ranger walked over with bad news—the popular Hill Country swimming hole was full. Sensing his disappointment, the ranger suggested an alternative, nearby Pedernales Falls State Park.

“Would you like a day pass or an annual pass?” A simple question at the entrance to Pedernales Falls prompted Blasingame to inquire about the number of state parks. The ranger’s reply—95 at the time—inspired Blasingame to respond immediately with “I’m going to buy the annual pass, and I’m going to do them all in one year.”

LEFT Pedernales Falls State Park, where the idea to visit every state park in one year first struck Dale Blasingame. ABOVE Blasingame and Lucy, his hiking companion.



This spontaneous decision would transform his life and spill over into his career.

With his annual pass in hand, Blasingame, an associate professor of digital media and journalism at Texas State University in San Marcos, started ticking state park properties off his list, beginning with those in Central Texas and followed by ones near Dallas and Houston.

While he had never considered himself outdoorsy, a bad breakup in 2013 led him to spend more time in nature, starting with a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico, with his brother. That inspired a solo road trip to Montana through Yellowstone National Park and the Rocky Mountains.

Halfway through his state park quest, he met a man hiking with his dog at Buescher State Park in Bastrop County.

"I asked him if he liked hiking with the dog, and he was like, 'Oh man, you'll never regret it,'" Blasingame says. "The whole way home, I was just thinking about [how] it would

be really great to have a dog to hike with."

Coincidentally, the PetSmart near Blasingame's home was having an adoption event that same day. He brought home a medium-sized black rescue pup he renamed Lucy, who resembles a mix between a black golden retriever and a border collie. Since then, the pair have been inseparable.

Blasingame decided Lucy needed to be the first dog to visit every Texas state park. Since hiking and photography were the main draws for him at the parks, the pair focused on long day hikes, mostly ranging from 11 to 14 miles.

In July 2015, as his annual pass expired, Blasingame visited his 95th state park—becoming the first known

FROM LEFT A family enjoys horseback riding at Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Swampy Caddo Lake State Park captivated Blasingame.

PALO DURO: CHASE A. FOUNTAIN | TPWD. CADDO LAKE: MEGAN LANHAM | TPWD



person to hit all of them in one year.

“I do have to be totally honest,” he says. “It actually took me 367 days. I was two days late.” The final park, Cedar Hill State Park, near Dallas, had been closed due to flooding, so he had to wait for it to reopen.

Lucy completed her goal in December 2018 after finishing a West Texas route that included a private visit to Balmorhea State Park, where dogs are normally not allowed. When they reached the last park, Blasingame let Lucy off her leash, and she went nuts. “It was like she knew that was a celebration of something,” he says.

His newfound love of the outdoors led Blasingame to create a park-focused storytelling class at Texas State University in 2017 that has evolved to include visits to state and national parks across the U.S. “It’s one thing to get to know students over the course of the semester and a regular class,” Blasingame says, “but when you’re traveling on the

road with students, you really do make lifelong friends.”

Now Blasingame has a new goal: “I decided to do every national park property, which is different from saying ‘I’m going to do every national park,’ ” he explains, pointing out that this includes park designations like national historic sites and battlefields.

So far, he’s set foot on 251 of the 429 national park properties.

While Blasingame’s Texas adventures have been filled with awe-inspiring moments, like observing the Milky Way from West Texas, and downright scary ones, like being chased by wild boars at Lake Somerville State Park and Trailway, it’s impossible for him to have only one favorite state park.

Here are some of his top picks by region.

=THE PANHANDLE=

PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK is special to Blasingame because of its landscape and a family connection. Located



near Amarillo, it's home to steep, multicolored mesas and the second-largest canyon in the country, known as the Grand Canyon of Texas. Since his parents lived nearby, he often took them to the park.

"My dad loved to go there and just sit in the car and wait for me and Lucy to finish hiking and being able to share those moments," he says. When Blasingame's parents died in late 2020 and early 2021, friends had a memorial bench built for them overlooking the Lighthouse, the park's iconic rock formation.

Despite roughly 30 visits to nearby Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway, Blasingame hasn't witnessed large crowds and never tires of the scenic views and hikes through the red rocks.

"It's got the state bison herd, which are always just incredible to watch," he says. The animals have free range over 10,000 of the park's 15,313-acre prairie.

=EAST TEXAS=

"**CADDO LAKE** is one of my favorite parks out in East Texas," Blasingame says, reminiscing about the swampy environment where he captured some of his favorite nature photographs of Spanish moss-covered trees on a sunrise boat ride. "The great thing about the environment in Texas is we have every element. We've got beaches. We've got mountains. We've got canyons. We've got lakes."

Dense fog on his first trip to Martin Dies, Jr. State Park, located at the confluence of the Neches and Angelina rivers, was also memorable. "It literally [felt] like I was just sitting on a cloud and looking out over all these trees coming up out of the fog."

ABOVE Gorman Falls at Colorado Bend State Park has made Blasingame a repeat visitor. OPPOSITE He loves the sparkling water of the world's largest spring-fed pool at Balmorhea State Park.



=CENTRAL TEXAS=

CLOSER TO HOME, Blasingame's favorite park is Colorado Bend State Park, along the Colorado River. A 70-foot spring-fed waterfall is a highlight of every visit.

"Gorman Falls is one of the most unique spots in all of Texas—a slice of the rainforest about an hour outside of Austin," he says.

=WEST TEXAS=

BLASINGAME'S first glimpse of the Milky Way from West Texas in 2013 was one of the moments that molded him into an outdoorsman.

The region's parks have remained a favorite, including Balmorhea, home to the world's largest spring-fed swimming pool, and the lesser-known Big Bend Ranch State Park, the largest state park in Texas. Big Bend Ranch is adjacent to Big Bend National Park and has only one paved road, River

Road (FM 170), along the southern boundary. Even if people can't get into the "very rugged" park interior, Blasingame encourages them to just drive River Road.

"You're driving along the Rio Grande the entire time with huge cliffs behind it," he says. "It feels like a roller coaster, too, based on all the dips and turns the road takes. My single favorite part is the big overlook, which seemingly goes on forever."

THE NUMBER OF STATE PARKS has fluctuated since Blasingame hit his record of 95 and currently stands at 88 (including state parks, historic sites and natural areas). Several more are scheduled to open in the next 12–15 years.

He hopes to get a sneak peek of the newest park, Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, between Abilene and Fort Worth, when it opens this year or next. "I'm sure we'll be some of the first visitors there," Blasingame says. "New parks don't happen every day in Texas, so this is big." ■



Following in Dad's Bootsteps

Three generations of West Texas lineworkers keep the lights on

SOMETIMES CHILDHOOD dreams come true. Other times they veer down an unexpected path.

Three generations of Nixon men in the South Plains ended up on the same path, leaving earlier ambitions in the dust.

Danny Nixon, 66, grew up wanting to be an anesthesiologist. But he fell in love and ran out of money, and he left Texas Tech University after one semester. Soon thereafter he began a career at Lighthouse Electric Cooperative that has lasted nearly 47 years, the first 20-plus spent as a lineworker.

Son Scott, 40, who grew up in Floydada with a dad often away on call, wanted to be a firefighter, but by the time he went off to college, he planned to pursue a career in agriculture. He left Tarleton State University after two years and has been a lineworker at neighboring South Plains Electric Cooperative for 20 years.

Camden, 21, a tall, strapping grandson and son in this family, was sure he'd be a pro baseball player. Did he come close? "Not very," he admits.

Camden remembers how his dad, Scott, missed too many of his childhood games as co-op duties called. "He's not ever at any of my baseball games. What the heck?" Camden says he wondered. "But then my mom talked to me about it, and she was like, he's at work. I was like, well, he's always at work."

Fast-forward to 2024, and Camden is often—if not always—at work, 2½ years into his career as an apprentice lineworker at another neighboring co-op, Lyntegar Electric Cooperative.

Their shared mission of serving co-op members from atop a pole, especially when storms knock out power, is a great source of satisfaction for the patriarch.

"Am I proud? Yes. I'm extremely proud," says Danny, who in 1999 became superintendent at Lighthouse EC and has since been promoted to operations manager.

Camden, the youngster, is proud, too, but he's quick to point out it's not always easy bearing the Nixon name in the West Texas co-op world. He looks first at his dad and then at the man he calls Pops. "A lot of people know him, but *everybody* knows *him*," Camden says. "I say my last name and they're like, oh, OK.

"You don't want to mess up," Camden says. "You don't want to do something wrong. I mean, everybody's going to do something wrong, but you don't want it to be bad enough to where they tell my granddad or tell my dad and we're going to have to talk about this at Christmas."

Of course, they might not be together at Christmas. The crews who keep the power on don't get to schedule when storm recovery and other mishaps call them out on jobs. Thus, the Nixons sometimes find it all but impossible to get together for birthdays and holidays—like Father's Day. It's been that way since Danny started his career, and Scott grew up knowing that.

But he also saw the rewards of the job.

"Dad made a good living and provided us with nice things," Scott says. "I got to do a lot of stuff and go on nice vacations and such that most kids didn't get. It makes it worth the hardships to get to provide my wife and kids with the same things.

"It's also kind of a pride thing. I'm proud to be a lineman. There are not very many people in the world who can do my job."

Danny Nixon—with grandson Camden, left, and son Scott—remembers once telling a member who was stunned to see a crew out in a nasty storm, "Ma'am, when it's the worst, that's when we're at our best."

"I'm proud to be a lineman. There are not very many people in the world who can do my job."

As parents tend to do, Danny remembers hoping Scott would find his own way in the world.

"Did I put my wishes and dreams on him? No, I did not," Danny says. "I wished for both of these young men anything but becoming a lineman. And I don't mean that in a bad way, but I'd rather him been a doctor or a lawyer or an animal husbandry guy or a vet.

"Both of these guys. You always want better for your kids and certainly your grandkids."

Scott certainly wanted better for the final home football game in Camden's high school career. Senior night is always a big deal—even more so because the Shallowater Mustangs were closing out an undefeated regular season. But an early winter storm socked West Texas that week in October 2020, coating most everything in ice and whipping power lines with wind gusts up to 50 mph.

South Plains EC crews, including Scott, were working on short rest to restore power, and it seemed impossible that he could get away to walk onto Todd Field with his wife and Camden for the traditional senior tribute.

"We worked 16-hour shifts in this ice storm, and I begged my supervisor to [let me] walk out on the field with him—and then I'd get in that truck and go to work," Scott says. With permission granted, Scott, dressed in his fire-retardant work clothes, briefly joined his family in the stadium.

"My bucket truck was sitting in the parking lot—running, ready to roll," he says. "I didn't get to see him play."

By that age, Camden understood—as co-op families do—that Dad had a responsibility to the community. "I was just glad he was able to be there for a little bit," Camden says. "It meant a lot."

The Nixons agree: Working for a co-op is a calling.

"It does set us apart from Acme brand," Danny says.

"We don't go home till the lights are on," Scott says.

"For the members," Camden says.

Yes, Camden walks the path of Scott and Pops. And as has been the case since September 1977, a Nixon is quite likely to rush down that path when a storm strikes the South Plains. ■

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MESSAGE
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ALAN
LESLEY

We're Prepared for Summer Storms

SUMMER IS HERE, school is out and families are gearing up for a few months of fun and relaxation. Summer brings fun in the sun, but it can also bring the occasional severe storm. In the event of a power outage, you can trust that CECA is ready to respond.

The major cause of most power outages is damage to power lines caused by falling trees and branches. Through right-of-way clearing, we work year-round to ensure that power lines in our service territory stand little risk of being damaged by trees, branches or other vegetation.

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

We start by mobilizing our line crews and other critical staff. Every phone line available is used to take your outage report calls. The big problems are handled first—such as damage to transmission lines, which serve thousands of people—before we can focus on other areas where more localized damage might have occurred.

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

Next line crews check the service lines that deliver power into individual neighborhoods and communities. Crews will then repair the damaged lines, restoring power to dozens of people. If you continue to experience an outage, there might be damage to a tap line outside your home or business. Make sure you notify CECA so crews can inspect these lines.

We will do our best to avoid power outages, but sometimes Mother Nature has other plans. During a power outage, be sure to check our Facebook page for the latest updates. ■

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Flag Day
Friday, June 14

Father's Day
Sunday, June 16

Juneteenth
Wednesday,
June 19

Hug Holiday
Saturday, June 29

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Keep Appliances Working and Safe

THE ELECTRICAL COMPONENTS in our homes that provide so much convenience need periodic attention to keep them from becoming hazards. Here are home appliance safety checks and measures to prevent shocks, burns and fires.

Inspect small appliances—like coffee makers, microwave ovens and electric pressure cookers—and electrical cords to make sure they're in good repair. Don't use appliances with cracked or frayed cords.

Don't place electrical cords under carpets or rugs or in high-traffic areas. Don't nail or staple them to walls, floors or anything else.

If an appliance has a three-pronged plug, use it only in a three-slot outlet. Never remove the grounding pin or force it to fit into a two-slot outlet or extension cord.

Immediately unplug any appliance or tool if it overheats, shorts out, gives off smoke or sparks, or causes even small electrical shocks. Have the appliance repaired or replaced.

Make sure outlets near sinks are equipped with properly tested ground-fault circuit interrupters to prevent shocks. Test them monthly to ensure they're working properly.

Don't use lightbulbs with wattage that is too high for the fixture. Make sure they're screwed in securely so that they don't overheat.

Use surge protectors to protect expensive electronics.

Be sure all electrical equipment bears a label from Underwriters Laboratory or a similarly reputable testing lab.

Make sure unused electrical outlets have safety covers on them if children are present, to reduce the risk of electric shock.

To prevent overheating, allow space around heat-producing appliances such as TVs, gaming systems, computers and powerful lamps.

Unplug small bathroom appliances such as hair dryers, curling irons and electric razors when not in use, to remove shock hazards should they fall in water. ■



DID YOU KNOW?

Making energy conservation a game helps kids establish good habits. Set a timer and see how fast they can turn off all the lights in the house.

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POWER TIP

Smart plugs can help you power off or schedule devices through a smartphone app or voice control, saving time, energy and money.

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CECA Offers Residential Solar Solutions for Members

DID YOU KNOW THAT CECA installs and sells 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, 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 members money on their monthly bills.

There are many companies out there 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 they feel solar may be a good option for them, we can handle the sale and installation as well.

CECA does require that 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 that your plans are compliant and that 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. ■



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Grill-Roasted Chicken

Large whole chicken
Italian seasoning
Garlic salt
2 cans beer (12 ounces each)

1. Prepare grill by lighting charcoal and then adding wood, using side burner if possible.
2. Remove neck and giblets from chicken cavity and discard.
3. Generously cover chicken on all sides with Italian seasoning and garlic salt.
4. Place chicken on a rack inside a baking pan so chicken is not resting on pan. Add beer to pan. Cover chicken and pan with aluminum foil so chicken stays moist.
5. Place pan on grill and close lid. If your grill doesn't have a side burner, use indirect heat. (The charcoal/wood embers should be to the side or surrounding the pan but not directly underneath it.)
6. Roast chicken 2–4 hours, depending on intensity of heat. If grill thermometer reads close to 400 degrees, chicken will be fully cooked in 2 hours. If thermometer reads 200–250 degrees, chicken will require 3½ to 4 hours. Roast uncovered for final half hour or hour for crispier skin. Add charcoal/wood as necessary to maintain grilling temperature.

SERVES 8

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

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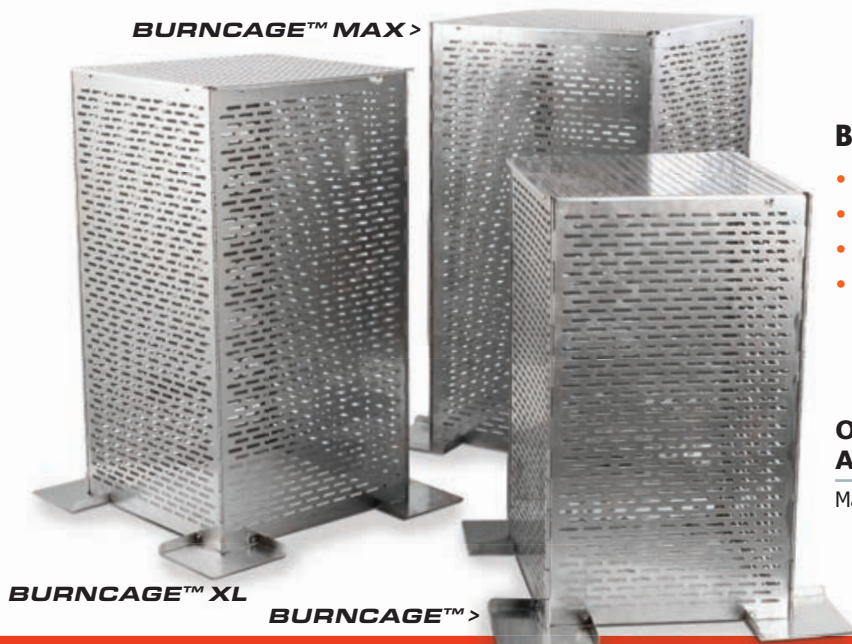
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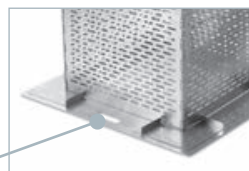


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Enraptured

Birds of prey travel Texas for thrilling demonstrations that educate audiences

BY EILEEN MATTEI • PHOTO BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

VICTOR LAWRENCE asks the kookaburra perched on his fist why the vulture crossed the road.

“Because the chicken didn’t make it!” he says. The corny joke makes the Australian bird erupt in its unmistakable raucous laugh, which triggers roars of laughter from the audience at the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in Harlingen.

The kookaburra is one of 33 birds of prey that live and work with the nonprofit Wildlife Revealed, traveling across Texas and the U.S. as ambassadors of the bird kingdom. Lawrence, who is a falconer, and his colleagues at Wildlife Revealed act as interpreters, letting audiences observe the birds’ talents, intelligence and quirks. The presentations educate audiences on the importance of wild birds and why they need protection for their important roles in global ecosystems.

Each bird is different. Some birds demonstrate their flight abilities. Cyrene, the Eurasian eagle-owl, is quiet as a shadow. Some, like Pierre, the crested caracara, simply look handsome. While Obee, a white-necked raven, snatches proffered dollar bills and hides them away, Grimley, a black vulture, waddle-hops around the Harlingen audience, looking for food in all the wrong places.

A catlike “mrrrow” comes from Cyrene. Massive and regal, with a wingspan around 5 feet, the captive-bred owl looks like it could swallow a small cat. Onlookers guess that she weighs 25–75 pounds, but she’s just 5 pounds.

Raptors—such as owls, falcons, hawks—capture and kill their food thanks to incredible eyesight, hooked beaks, and strong feet and talons. Lawrence considers birds of prey a broader category that includes all carnivorous birds from kingfishers like the kookaburra to pelicans, vultures, ravens and crows.

The roots of Wildlife Revealed, based near Bastrop, east of Austin, reach back 35 years. On a Cub Scout trip to the Houston Zoo in the 1980s, young Kevin Gaines stood just feet away from a red-tailed hawk on a zookeeper’s arm. “I thought it was the coolest thing in the world,” he recalls.

While earning an engineering degree at Texas A&M University, Gaines volunteered in bird rehabilitation. He learned about injuries and rehab, diet, training, flight, and presentation while working with educational bird programs.

He became a permitted falconer, and when the opportunity arose to give a school presentation, he showed up with three of his own birds. By 2007, Gaines had established Wildlife Revealed, which is funded by donations and performance fees.

“By making it memorable with live birds, they will remember why vultures are important to the environment,” he says. “And when people see a falcon dive across an audience, they are blown away.”

The falcons, along with other birds of prey, perform at Renaissance festivals and at hundreds of schools, birding and wildlife festivals, museums, and special events.

“This is something you do for the love of the job, not the money,” says Gaines, a member of Blue-bonnet Electric Cooperative. “It’s a challenge but super fun.” He directs three teams of falconers, assistants and volunteers.

Working a few hours a day, the avian ambassadors earn their keep. Their keep isn’t cheap. A shipment of frozen mice that lasts 2–3 months costs \$1,600. Birds of prey need to eat the whole mouse or rat to get a nutritionally complete diet.

About half of Gaines’ birds come from animal rescue and rehab centers and can’t be released into the wild. Pierre the caracara, for example, can’t fly after a collision with a car. The rest of the birds, exotics like kookaburras and eagle-owls, come from licensed captive breeding programs.

Training and forming a bond with a bird can take from six weeks to a year and is an ongoing process. “It depends on the bird’s personality, too,” Gaines says. “Owls are hard to train. They are very distractible. Harris’ hawks are quick learners. Caracaras are smart but resistant to complying.”

Lawrence admits the ravens and similar birds such as crows and magpies have his full attention and admiration for their intelligence.

“If Obee gets loose, the next thing on his agenda is world domination,” he says. It’s not hard to imagine kettles of hawks, parliaments of owls and riots of kookaburras flying in to aid the raven.

The planet would be better off if they didn’t. ■

Kevin Gaines, founder and director of Wildlife Revealed, with Vegas, an aplomado falcon.



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TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



However, the word ‘suck’ was also commonly used in the region as a term for a whirlpool in a river. Hence, the town name may have simply meant ‘toad whirlpool.’”

Bill Cannon, who wrote *Tales from Toadsuck Texas*, tells the story of William “Alfalfa Bill” Henry Davis Murray, who was born in Toadsuck in 1869. Murray would go on to become a colorful governor of Oklahoma in 1930. When he was running for president two years later, he returned to the place of his birth for William Murray Day.

The town of Toadsuck had a statue of Murray ready for dedication, but Alfalfa Bill was so drunk he could barely speak, Cannon wrote. You might say he was “swole up like a toad.” The townsfolk were so exasperated and embarrassed that they had a team of horses pull the statue down and break it into pieces. Then they buried it.

Toadsuck faded into history when the Texas and Pacific Railway built its line west of the town in 1880, according to the TSHA. By 1887, most of its businesses and residents had moved to the tracks. The new town was named Collinsville when it was incorporated in the 1890s.

Thus, sadly, Toadsuck was no more. But the beautiful memory of that august name remains. ■

A Town Called Toadsuck

Long removed from maps, it was home for a governor as colorful as its name

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TRACI DABERKO

TEXAS HAS PERHAPS more than its share of cities and towns with unusual names. There’s Cut and Shoot, Dime Box, Bug Tussle.

But perhaps the strangest was Toadsuck. You won’t find it on a map today because it eventually became Collinsville, near the Oklahoma border in western Grayson County. For a relatively brief and shining period, though, Toadsuck was a real Texas town.

How did it get that strange name? I learned the story mostly from the Texas State Historical Association’s Handbook of Texas, which is a priceless resource.

Toadsuck got its start as the name of a saloon near the eventual eponymous town. Settlers arrived in the area in the late 1850s, and in 1869, a townsite was surveyed near the saloon, about a half-mile southeast of Collinsville today.

“The town of Toadsuck took the name of the saloon,” the handbook says. “It may have been named by John Jones, an early settler and mill owner, after the city of Toad Suck, Arkansas” (which, by the way, does still exist).

“According to legend, the name was originally a reference to men consuming liquor until they swelled up like toads.

Simply Salads

Keep cool in the kitchen with these tasty garden mixes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

I always find myself craving a Cobb salad when temperatures begin to rise. It's a hearty dinner with abundant toppings that deliver a variety of flavors in every bite. My Texas Cobb Salad is a fun twist on the classic that is so simple to make.



Texas Cobb Salad

SALAD

- 1 head romaine lettuce, coarsely chopped**
- 6 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and halved**
- 8 slices bacon, fully cooked and cut into bite-size pieces**
- 2 avocados, sliced**
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed**
- 2 ears corn, roasted and sliced off the cob**
- 16 ounces cooked beef fajitas, sliced**

DRESSING

- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- 1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, minced, sauce reserved**
- 2 teaspoons reserved adobo sauce**
- 1 small shallot, thinly sliced**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**

1. SALAD Spread lettuce evenly across a large platter.

2. Arrange eggs in one row across the lettuce. Continue arranging each topping in its own row: bacon, avocado, beans and roasted corn. End by adding fajitas to edge of platter.

3. DRESSING In a small bowl, combine all dressing ingredients and stir to combine. Serve dressing with the salad.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Tomato Cucumber Panela Salad.



Strawberry Salad

KATHRYN SULLIVAN
BANDERA EC

Beautiful, simple and elegant, this salad will leave an impression. Whip up Sullivan's salad for your mother-in-law, a first date or for a gathering. Summer sweet berries stun when paired with creamy goat cheese and a balsamic dressing.

SALAD

- 1 package 50/50 blend baby spinach and spring salad mix (10 ounces)**
- 1 carton strawberries (16 ounces), hulled and sliced**
- 1 pint blueberries**
- 4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled**
- 6 slices bacon, fully cooked and broken into pieces**
- ½ cup chopped pecans**

DRESSING

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar**
- ¼ teaspoon Dijon mustard**

- 1. SALAD** In a large bowl, combine all salad ingredients.
- 2. DRESSING** In another bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients.
- 3.** Pour dressing over salad. With a serving spoon, gently toss to coat.

SERVES 4-6

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

\$500 WINNER

Thai Peanut Summer Salad

REESE JOHNSON
TRINITY VALLEY EC



This salad from Reese, 14, has me grinning from ear to ear. The recipe, developed by Reese and her mother, packs in flavor, texture and tang. "I love to cook and bake," Reese says. "It all started when I was about 7. I had started making breakfast for myself as well as my family."

SERVES 10



SALAD

- 4 cups chopped napa cabbage**
- 2 cups thinly chopped red cabbage**
- ½ red bell pepper, thinly sliced**
- ½ yellow bell pepper, thinly sliced**
- 1 medium carrot, julienned**
- ½ medium cucumber, cut in half lengthwise and thinly sliced**
- ¼ red onion, thinly sliced**
- ½ cup honey-roasted peanuts**
- ½ cup chopped cilantro**
- 6 radishes, thinly sliced, reserving a few slices for garnish**

DRESSING

- ½ cup peanut butter**
- Juice of 1 lime**
- 2½ teaspoons sesame oil**
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce**
- 3 tablespoons honey**
- 2 cloves garlic**
- 1 tablespoon fresh peeled and minced ginger**
- ½ cup chopped cilantro**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 2 teaspoons Sriracha sauce, or more to taste**
- 1 tablespoon seasoned rice vinegar**

- 1. SALAD** In a large bowl, combine all salad ingredients.
- 2. DRESSING** Add all dressing ingredients to a blender. Blend until smooth.
- 3.** Pour half the dressing over the salad. With a serving spoon, mix to coat. Add more dressing as desired and garnish with reserved radish slices.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

HOLIDAY BITES DUE JUNE 10

We want the best from Co-op Country kitchens for our November issue. Send us your holiday favorites by June 10 for a chance to win \$500.





Texas Tabbouleh

CINDY BROWN
PEDERNALES EC

Chilled salads are the ultimate summer meal. Prep, tuck away in the fridge and you're set for lunch or dinner. Brown's tabbouleh can be served alone or topped with fish or baked chicken. It's yummy the first day and even better the next.

SALAD

- ½ cup bulgur wheat
- 1½ cups water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 ears corn, sliced off the cob
- ¾ cup diced carrots
- 1 bunch green onions, diced
- 1 large red bell pepper, stem and seeds removed, diced
- 4 stalks celery, diced
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1 bunch parsley, finely chopped
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed

DRESSING

- Juice of 2 lemons or limes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

1. SALAD Place bulgur wheat in a heatproof bowl. Bring water to a boil over

medium-high heat. Carefully pour boiling water over bulgur wheat. Let stand for 45 minutes, then drain well.

2. Heat olive oil in a medium skillet over high heat. Sauté corn and carrots until tender, about 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat.

3. In a large bowl, combine bulgur wheat, corn, carrots, green onions, bell pepper, celery, cucumber, parsley and beans. Stir to combine.

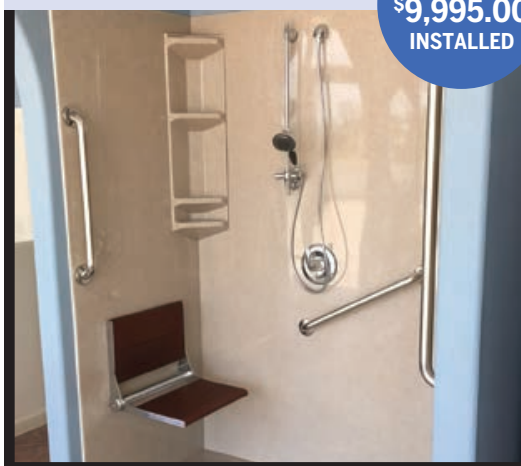
4. DRESSING In a separate bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients.

5. Pour dressing over salad, stir to combine.

6. Refrigerate 24 hours. Serve chilled.

SERVES 6

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

We Brake for Steak

There's no need for menus at the Leona General Store

BY CHET GARNER

IN MY LINE OF WORK, it's normal to pass through a small town with ailing buildings and few visible signs of life. It isn't normal for one of those old wooden storefronts to have a line 150 Texans long, stretching clear into the next parking lot. I pulled over to find out what was happening at the Leona General Store, and after someone told me it was steak night, I had no choice but to get in line.

This special event on Friday and Saturday nights draws hordes from hundreds of miles to this vintage storefront on Texas 75 in Leona, less than a mile off Interstate 45, midway between Dallas and Houston. When the doors opened, the small store swallowed the entire line as folks spread across the creaking wooden floor. The walls are covered with knickknacks and farming equipment, just as you'd expect inside a 100-year-old general store.

Part of the magic of "the best little steakhouse in Texas" is its simplicity. There's no written menu since they're known for one entrée: rib-eye steaks. Each one is hand cut and cooked over hot coals. Everyone gets the same sides and salad bar.

The only choice customers make is how big they want their steak. The smallest is 10 ounces, and the largest ever eaten was more than 90 ounces. I decided to let that record stand and ordered a 12-ounce steak, which was at least 16 ounces. They admittedly don't weigh anything in the back, which works to the customer's benefit.

Owners Jerry and Cynthia House made laps through the building, making sure everyone was happy and well-fed. The steak was certainly one of the best I've ever eaten, but it's the small-town hospitality that will keep me and hundreds of my closest friends coming back. ■

ABOVE Chet is about to savor the Leona General Store's trademark steak.

TCP Join Chet as he visits "the best little steakhouse in Texas." And see all his 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
08

Corsicana Endless Summer, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

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

Terrell [8-9] North Texas Antique Tractor and Engine Club's Show and Pull, (214) 497-1611, north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net

13

Lockhart [13-15] Chisholm Trail Roundup, (512) 398-2818, lockhartchamber.com

Brenham [13-16, 20-23, 27-30] The Star-Spangled Girl, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

14

Mount Pleasant Juneteenth Family Celebration, (903) 575-4000, mpcity.net

Aransas Pass [14-16] Shrimporee, (361) 758-2750, aransaspass.org

Kerrville [14-15, 21-23, 28-30] The Charitable Sisterhood of the Second Trinity Victory Church, (830) 896-9393, caillouxperformingarts.com

19

Odessa [19-23] Juneteenth Celebration, (432) 888-9276, odessabcc.org

21

Stonewall [21-22] Peach JAMBoree, (830) 644-2735, stonewalltexas.com

Albany [21-22, 28-29] Fort Griffin Fandangle, (325) 762-3838, fortgriffinfandangle.com

22

McKinney Night Out at the Heard, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

25

Corsicana [25, 27-30] Of Mice and Men, (903) 872-5421, thewlac.com

27

Luling [27-30] Watermelon Thump, (830) 875-3878, watermelonthump.com

28

New Braunfels [28-29] Red, White and Tuna, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

Pottsboro [28-29] Fink Fest, (903) 786-6000, facebook.com/finktexas

29

Brenham The Grand Ol' Americana Show, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

JULY

03

Waxahachie [3-4] Grape Myrtle Festival and Parade, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

04

Chappell Hill Independence Day Parade, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

New Braunfels July 4 Patriotic Parade and Program, (830) 629-1572, sophienburg.com

Amarillo [4-6] Will Rogers Range Riders Rodeo, (806) 584-0733, wrrangeriders.com

Rockdale [4-15] Sesquicentennial Event, (512) 446-2511, rockdale150.com

TCP Submit Your Event

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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—From *Texas Cookin'* by Guy Clark

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1

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2 ALLISON HEBERT
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3 MICHELE BENNETT
GVEC

Fall cookies.

4 KRISTEN BROWN
PEDERNALES EC

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2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

DUE JUN 10 Climbing High

DUE JUL 10 Mascots

DUE AUG 10 Young Photographers



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many
more Food and Cooking photos from readers.



Renewal in Blue

Bucolic summers in the Piney Woods leave an indelible mark

BY CLAUDIA SULLIVAN
ILLUSTRATION BY
JAMES O'BRIEN

EVERY SUMMER of my youth, I eagerly packed my bags, left the big city behind and traveled to the Piney Woods to live the life of a farm girl with my grandparents.

Those East Texas summer days were idyllic. Mornings began with the smell of bacon or ham cooking on the stove and skillet-fried toast with homemade apple or plum jelly. Lunch was always accompanied with rice, yellow and thick, made rich with butter and milk. The meal wasn't complete without blackberry cobbler made from berries we picked ourselves, battling thorns and yellow jackets while gathering the tart, wild fruit.

Promptly at 12:30 p.m., Mema settled in to shell peas and watch her "stories" on TV while Pa took his afternoon nap. I spent those sultry afternoons outside

whispering secrets to Boy, the old bird dog, and to Lady Bird, the orphaned calf we raised on a bottle, or rocking in the tractor tire swing hung under the huge pecan tree.

Mema, Pa and I spent nights in the screened-in sleeping porch, cool and bathed in moonlight. Lying in my bed, I heard the whine of diesel trucks on the distant highway and the whirring of the summer breeze through the woven, mesh screen. The night air smelled of rose blossoms and honeysuckle.

It was the scent of summer.

The memories of those summer days have not faded. Mema and Pa are gone now and so is the old farmhouse. Some years ago, on a cold night not long after midnight, the house went up in flames. Some said it was itinerants carelessly discarding a cigarette. Others said it was lightning, though no one recalls a storm that night.

I believe the old house caught ablaze all by itself. The warmth of all those memories heated to spontaneous combustion. The house saved up all those memories until one night there was nothing but glowing embers—except for what lived on in the minds and hearts of those who were sheltered and loved there.

Nothing stands now except two large pecan trees and the old tractor tire swing.

But each spring something wondrous and beautiful happens. In the place where my grandparents' house once stood, a dense blanket of bluebonnets blooms.

Like the color of the sky or the gingham dresses little girls used to wear, the wave of flowers defines the layout of the house. No one recalls ever seeing bluebonnets in that part of town.

Maybe the heat of the fire raised dormant seeds to life. Or perhaps that little patch of earth needed something cheery and pretty to grace its sudden emptiness.

Whatever the reason, I know Mema and Pa would be pleased. ■

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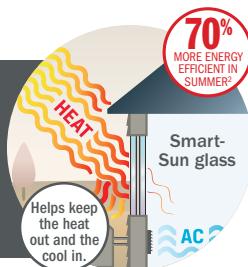
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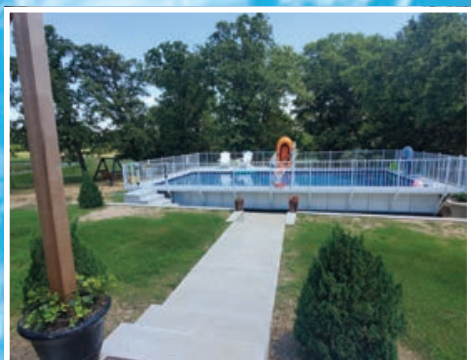
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