

MASON RESTORES
HISTORICAL GEMS

40 YEARS OF
NOT MESSING WITH TEXAS

BARBECUE SIDES
THAT DAZZLE

Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

MARCH 2026

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March 2026



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Dozens of invisible trails lead kayakers and canoers through scenic waterways.

*By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

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*By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers
Photos by Tiffany Hofeldt*

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ON THE COVER

Paddling Powderhorn Lake proves to be an amazing adventure.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

ABOVE

Jerry Bearden, left, and Jan Appleby at the restored Seaquist House in Mason.

Photo by Tiffany Hofeldt

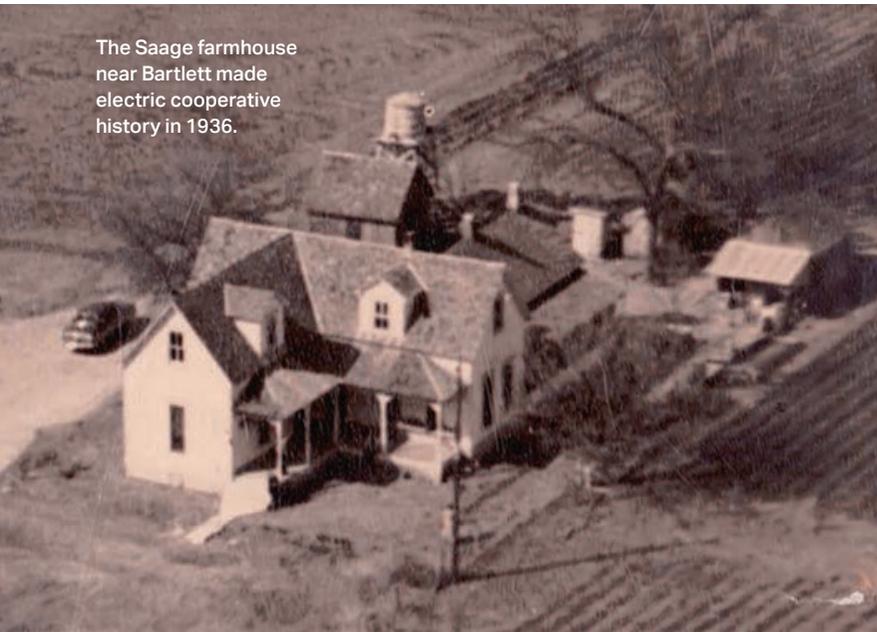
That First Light

COOPERATIVE ELECTRICITY, which today serves more than 3 million Texans, got its start 90 years ago this month at a farmhouse outside Bartlett.

After paying a \$5 deposit for an electric meter, Charles Saage yanked a string and turned on a light bulb March 7, 1936. That made Bartlett Electric Cooperative in Central Texas the first to bring Rural Electrification Administration-funded power to rural America.

Today, 77 electric co-ops serve Texans, and nationwide, nearly 900 serve 42 million Americans.

The Saage farmhouse near Bartlett made electric cooperative history in 1936.

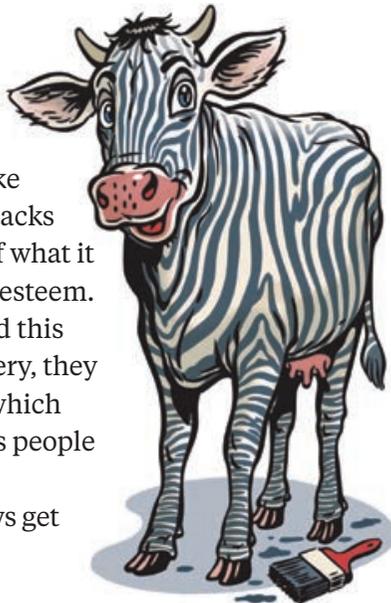


Strokes of Genius

Painting cows with zebra-like stripes reduces biting fly attacks by about 50%—regardless of what it might do to the cattle’s self-esteem.

Japanese scientists proved this in 2019, and for their discovery, they won a 2025 Ig Nobel Prize, which honors “research that makes people laugh ... then think.”

Go ahead. Joke. Zebra cows get the last laugh.



TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

After-School Snacks

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Seasoned Snaps: What well-trained eyes see



ENTER ONLINE

RECOMMENDED READING

Pam LeBlanc, author of this month’s story about paddling trails, tells of her worst paddling experience: “I laid down my paddle, sobbed a bit and barfed.” Read *Ending on a Sour Note* from June 2023.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My favorite Texas saying 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 January prompt: **I would love to have dinner with ...**

My dad one more time. So many questions to ask that I never thought of while he was still with us.

LORI DURANT
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
GRANBURY

My metabolism from 1992.

MARY CARUTH
PEDERNALES EC
FISCHER

Dolly Parton. Incomparable talent, beauty and just a darn good person. It would be my dream.

DAVID AUTREY
WISE EC
PARADISE

My four grandparents, three of whom were deceased before I was born.

SUSAN Z. MARBURGER
BLUEBONNET EC
BRENHAM

Myself at age 25, so I could advise me on what mistakes I should have avoided and what opportunities I should have taken.

MARSHALL COLLINS
FARMERS EC
POINT

Visit our website to see more responses.



A Bat's Buffet

At least a dozen bat-viewing sites in Texas allow for watching the mammals emerge for a night of dining on insects.

But some bats eat so much more than bugs. Bat Conservation International, based in Austin, notes their diets can include birds, fish, frogs, leaves, nectar, scorpions, sea lion blood and even other bats.

Courting Marine Life

The 1954 Queen Isabella Causeway, which connected Port Isabel to South Padre Island, is being demolished, and the resulting waste will create an artificial reef 10 miles offshore of the Brownsville Ship Channel entrance jetties at SPI.

The original roadway was replaced in 1974, and a new causeway will go up soon to replace that one.



125 Years Ago

On March 7, 1901, the Texas Legislature adopted the bluebonnet as the state flower.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Rodeo's First Lady



Tad Lucas, below, made a name for herself performing acrobatics and death-defying tricks on the back of a horse. After making her pro rodeo debut at age 14 in 1917, she went on to win just about every major rodeo prize available to women at the time.

The stories of Lucas and other women who left their mark in the arena are told at Fort Worth's National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. The museum is currently undergoing a \$19 million 16,000-square-foot expansion slated to open November 4.



Pulling His Leg?

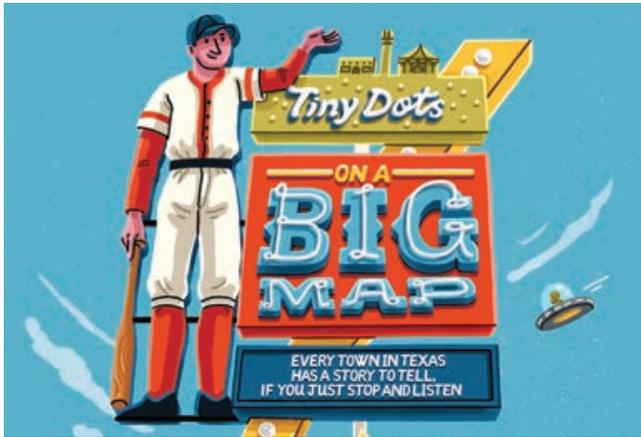


RARE IS THE DAY without a hitch for Tyler Schlickeisen.

And rare is the day he'll catch you having a good day. Schlickeisen drives a tow truck for Lee's Wrecker Service out of the Central Texas town of Florence. "Nobody likes to see a tow truck driver," he said.

But in between naps, Schlickeisen, 29, shows up at all hours for breakdowns, wrecks and other roadside emergencies. For his diligence, he was one of 32 wrecker operators inducted into the Order of Towman in November 2025 at a national ceremony in Baltimore.

The honor surprised Schlickeisen, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member, and at first he thought it was scam. Then he was humbled to realize "my work's being valued."



ELLY WALTON

JANUARY 2026 Tiny Dots on a Big Map

“I understand that Dan Blocker was associated with O’Donnell, but he was in fact born in De Kalb and is buried there.”

SID UNDERWOOD
LAMAR EC
PARIS

Doting on Our Dots

I am proud to have direct connections to three of the tiny towns [*Tiny Dots on a Big Map*, January 2026]. My mother attended Sul Ross State College with Dan Blocker, who she said was a funny and popular classmate. My wife and I had a vacation home on the Brazos River, with a patio made of Thurber bricks. Last but not least, I played football for Crystal City, which lost to Asherton. It truly is a small world.

Bob Kingsbery
PenTex Energy
Tioga

As a recent transplant, I am a big fan of history, but the history in your stories would not have been a Google experience. I need to add these places to my exploring of my new home. Shoutout to Elly Walton for illustrations catching a bit of each town.

Cathy Copeland
Sam Houston EC
Livingston

Three of the Deike brothers married three sisters.

At the last Deike-Hartmann wedding, the brothers’ father, Fritz Deike, told the sisters’ father, Emil Hartmann, that the remaining Hartmann daughters would need to look elsewhere for husbands because his family had run out of sons.

David Hartmann (nephew)
Central Texas EC
Fredericksburg

Signature Moment

My dad, Earl Forsythe, was a corporate lawyer and friends with Dallas Cowboys General Manager Tex Schramm [*A Dandy Debut*, January 2026]. I was about 8 years old and football crazy when Don Meredith appeared in our living room in Dallas to sign his contract.

He gladly autographed my football and couldn’t have been nicer. Wish I’d kept that football.

Andrew Forsythe
Pedernales EC
Spicewood



MARK FREDRICKSON

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

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BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

CHARTED WATERS

Dozens of invisible trails lead kayakers and canoers through scenic waterways

I'VE PADDLED my yellow plastic kayak deep into a maze of lime-colored reeds along the edge of Powderhorn Lake, a shallow estuary off Matagorda Bay on the Texas coast.

Around me, marble-sized snails shimmy up slender blades of seagrass. Somewhere out of sight, a great blue heron squawks like a kid in a playground squabble. Pelicans flap overhead, and mullet splash at the water's surface.

I've come here to explore a new paddling trail that opened in 2025—one of 90 waterway trails totaling more than 700 miles that now wind through rivers, lakes and shorelines across the state.

Unlike terrestrial trails, which unfurl along visible dirt or gravel paths, these trails are harder to see. But the watery routes offer a new perspective on some of the state's most beautiful places.

Texas State Parks officials designated a few paddling trails along the coast as one-off projects starting in 1999, hoping to help anglers find their way around marshy bays and lagoons. Soon, other communities near waterways started calling to see if they could get a trail, too.

In 2006, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department teamed up with the city of Luling to open its first inland paddling trail—a 6-mile stretch of the San Marcos River between U.S. Highway 90 and State Highway 80. That marked the official launch of the state's paddling trail program, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.



“We really wanted to take some of the mystery out of paddling and partner with communities to improve access,” says Shelly Plante, nature tourism manager for TPWD.

It doesn’t cost much to get into paddling. Outdoors stores sell basic kayaks for less than \$200, but if you don’t want to buy a boat, small businesses around the state rent them by the hour or day.

Paddlers can check the TPWD website for maps and descriptions of trails. The site includes information on how long it’ll take to paddle each route, plus details about where to put in and take out. An information kiosk is posted at each trailhead, and some of the trickier-to-navigate routes are marked with signs or buoys.

The trails themselves are as varied as the state’s landscape.

“You have the trails in the Mission Reach in San Antonio that have chutes, then you have the Upper Guadalupe River, with its stone river bottom, riffles and rapids,” Plante says. “That’s totally different than the slow-moving Lower Guadalupe. Then there’s Caddo Lake—a mysterious, Spanish-mossy, swampy area that looks otherworldly.”

Author Pam LeBlanc and Jimmy Harvey navigate the reeds of Powderhorn Lake, site of some of the state’s newest paddling trails.



The Powderhorn Paddling Trails were officially unveiled in April 2025. The trails' collective 32 miles are split into four routes—Boggy Bayou Trail, Matagorda Bay Shoreline Trail, Coloma Creek Trail and Powderhorn Lake Loop Trail.

My friends and I opted for the lake loop. We started by slathering on sunscreen and topping off our water containers, then shoved off from Powderhorn RV Park, one of four designated put-in points.

We glided past a row of seagulls perched on wooden posts, then paddled into the lake, which measures just 2–5 feet deep in most places. The lake is popular with anglers who come to catch redfish and trout, and minutes after my friend Jimmy Harvey cast his rod, he reeled in a speckled trout.

We meandered along the shoreline for a while, then crossed to the opposite side of the lake, near the future site of Powderhorn State Park. From there we skipped down the shoreline, passing a few old earthen jetties left over from when this land was an operating ranch, then scudded along a muddy shoreline.

When we turned into a lush, grassy inlet, we found the real magic: narrow channels and reeds over our heads. Four and a half hours after we started, we turned back to the RV park, working hard against the wind.

If you're looking for a more protected route, consider the 5.4-mile Boggy Bayou option, where you might see roseate spoonbills and ospreys, or the Coloma Creek Trail, which starts at the west end of the lake.

The next day, we came back for more.

SIT THE TRAILS

Texas Parks and Wildlife's paddling trails program includes 90 routes across the state's 3,700 named streams, 15 major rivers and 3,300 miles of tidal shoreline. Here are a few of Pam's favorites.

Caddo Lake: Ten separate paddling trails covering a total of 50 miles twist through primordial-feeling swamps, sloughs and bayous where bullfrogs croak and bald cypress wear beards of Spanish moss. Watch for beavers, owls, turtles and the occasional alligator as you follow color-coded signs that mark the trails.

Guadalupe/San Marcos rivers: The Guadalupe runs cool and clear through Central Texas on its way to the coast. Choose between trails above Canyon Lake, where the river cuts beneath

remote limestone cliffs, or sections farther downstream, like the family-friendly Luling Zedler Mill Trail, the Come and Take It Trail near Gonzales or the Guadalupe Valley Trail through Cuero.

Inks Lake Paddling Trails: At Inks Lake in Central Texas, paddle among granite outcroppings on a constant-level lake. Three trails, including one that takes you to the Devil's Waterhole at Inks Lake State Park, vary in length from 1 to 3.4 miles. Canoe and kayak rentals are available at the state park headquarters.

Lady Bird Lake Paddling Trail: Kayak or canoe up to 11 miles on this urban paddling trail, which delivers views of Austin's ever-growing skyline. As a bonus on summer nights, watch the

city's population of Mexican free-tailed bats emerge from beneath the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge.

Lighthouse Lakes Paddling Trail: This was the state's first official paddling trail, mapped in 1999 near Port Aransas. Four loops—nearly 20 miles in all—weave through black mangroves and seagrass flats around Lydia Ann Lighthouse on North Harbor Island. State parks officials say the lighthouse's old Fresnel lens is still submerged somewhere in the muck.

Toledo Bend Reservoir: Four new trails, for a collective 30 miles, opened in late August 2025 at the reservoir, which is on the Texas-Louisiana border and is the official bass fishing capital of Texas.



OPPOSITE Powderhorn Lake sits along Matagorda Bay on the Texas coast.

ABOVE Harvey, left, and Chris LeBlanc get set to put in at the Powderhorn RV Park.

Unlike our first outing, when the wind had ruffled the water like batter in a mixing bowl on high speed, the lake looked like glass. A dolphin breached the silvery surface as we headed to the same thicket of seagrasses we'd found earlier.

This time we ducked even farther into the maze, until grasses brushed against both sides of my kayak, and I wondered if I would come face to face with a toothy alligator around a bend. (I didn't, thankfully.)

I've paddled rivers around the state—including the Devils, Pecos, Guadalupe and San Marcos—but this salty oasis looks and feels entirely different. And now that I've explored Powderhorn Lake, I'm eager to check out more trails, including the new route that opened recently on Greens Bayou in northeast Houston.

Besides making it easier for paddlers to discover natural areas in a state that's largely privately owned, the paddling trails have shown communities that the water in their backyards can bring in tourism dollars.

"What the paddling trails do is give people access or ideas of places to go," Harvey said. "And for me, a day on the water with my friends is better than a day anywhere else." ■

DON'T FIND YOURSELF UP A CREEK

Stay safe with these tips.

- Always pack a personal flotation device, as required by Texas law.
- Check the weather forecast and river flow rates before you go.
- Don't paddle alone, and tell someone where you're going.
- Watch for logjams and debris, especially after storms. You may need to portage around obstacles.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Wear sunscreen and bring insect repellent.
- Leave no trace.
- Carry a whistle for emergencies.
- Use a light after dark or in reduced visibility conditions, like fog.
- Carry a map and cellphone in a dry bag.
- Give anglers a wide berth.
- Wear bright colors during hunting season.
- Watch for powerboats, and don't stop in high-traffic areas.
- Don't trespass on private property.
- Don't harass the wildlife.

IN ALL THEIR *Glory*

*Mason rallies to preserve and restore
ornate historical gems of the Hill Country*

It's the first Saturday of the month, and visitors have arrived to tour the three-story Seaquist House in Mason. Adorned with pillars, gables, balconies, a tower and turret, and four chimneys, the sandstone mansion graces Broad Street.

Three blocks south, on the town square, stands the Mason County Courthouse, also built of sandstone. With massive white columns on all four sides, it's crowned with a domed clock tower.

Both historical landmarks were nearly lost, one to neglect and the other to fire. But with small-town resiliency, Mason residents pulled together to save their architectural heritage through two projects that required enormous helpings of time and funding.

On the Seaquist's front porch this morning, a docent welcomes everyone with a brief history of the 1887 Victorian Italianate home. Another volunteer on hand is Jan Appleby, a retired teacher who spearheaded efforts to rescue the Seaquist.

"It was up to us to save this house," she says. "Nobody had lived in it for seven years. You couldn't see the front of the house because of all the ligustrums. There were broken windows and screens. The inside was in bad shape with no electricity or running water. Plaster was falling from the walls, and the smell was horrific."

In Good Hands

For a time, the future appeared bleak for the abandoned house, a social hot spot in its heyday. Historical records show that master stonemason and minister Thomas Broad bought the land in June 1886 and soon thereafter started building a two-story stone residence with a massive basement. In 1891, banker Edward Reynolds bought the unfinished house and hired German architect Richard Grosse to add a third floor with a ballroom as well as wraparound porches and balconies.

In 1899, Reynolds went to prison for embezzlement and never returned to Mason. His wife, Jennie, and their children lived in the house until 1919 when she sold it to bootmaker Oscar Seaquist. The home remained in his family for two more generations. In 1974, it was awarded a Texas Historical Marker and placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Unable to maintain the house, the family moved out in 2005. Seven years later, the property went up for sale.

Soon, Appleby—chair of the Mason County Historical Commission at the time—started a campaign to save it.

Rescue efforts gained traction when Preservation Texas, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting historic landmarks from demolition, placed the Seaquist on its Most Endangered Places List in 2014. The publicity spurred formation of the nonprofit Seaquist House Foundation, which purchased the home in January 2015

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
A hand-carved wooden finial on the stairs is original to the Seaquist House. Jan Appleby at the front of the house. Floral motifs embellish limestone blocks on exterior walls. Stained glass adorns a door in the 1887 mansion. Appleby is a retired teacher who spearheaded efforts to rescue the Seaquist.







Jerry Bearden, with Appleby, points out details in the grand ballroom of the Seaquist.

for \$400,000. Enough was raised to pay off the note by October 2017.

Since then, countless supporters have donated labor and thousands of dollars to restore the Seaquist's interior, richly accented in walnut: doors, staircases, window frames and shutters, beadboard walls and ceilings, and railings and newel posts. Volunteers pulled down wallpaper, pulled up carpeting, scraped away plaster, replaced electrical wiring and plumbing, painted walls, and refinished long-leaf pine floors and other woodwork, to name only a fraction of the fixes.

When built 139 years ago, immigrant masons using primitive tools crafted ornate details throughout the Seaquist, which boasts 22 rooms and 15 fireplaces. On exterior walls, hand-carved floral motifs and other patterns embellish limestone blocks. A bathroom wall features a panel of S-curved wainscoting fashioned from walnut.

The spacious third-floor ballroom draws the most gasps. Dark walnut panels stretch across towering walls and vaulted ceilings hung with chandeliers. Behind a paneled door, narrow stairs lead to a small balcony, which overlooks the dance floor and once held musicians who performed

for social gatherings. In other panel-encased rooms, guests played cards and billiards while waiters served libations from the bar.

Festive occasions have since returned to the Seaquist, which can be rented for weddings, receptions and other events. In the meantime, renovations continue. One last major project will focus on repairing and repainting the home's exterior.

From the Ashes

For his part, volunteer Jerry Bearden, a Central Texas Electric Cooperative member, serves as president of the Seaquist House Foundation. He was also heavily involved in restoring the 1910 Classical Revival courthouse. The Mason County judge for 20 years before he retired in 2022, Bearden was there the awful night of February 4, 2021, soon after an arsonist torched the building.

Within minutes, the roof and clock tower collapsed. On the lawn, Bearden dropped to his knees as the ceiling above his first-floor office caved in and engulfed his desk.

"The heat was so intense that it cracked sandstone blocks made by the original artisans," Bearden says. "A piece of metal bent by the heat is displayed at our city library."

Law officials apprehended Nicholas Miller of Mason the next day and charged him with two felony counts of arson. In February 2024, he was found guilty and given two 75-year prison sentences for burning the courthouse and a family home.

Amid the ashes, some good news bolstered spirits. For one thing, county records had been moved out in preparation for interior renovations funded by the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. Then engineers who examined the building's four exterior sandstone walls and 16 columns declared them structurally sound for use in rebuilding the courthouse. After crews worked a month to

TAKE A GANDER

Public tours of the Seaquist House are led the first Saturday of each month, 10 a.m.–1:30 p.m. Admission is \$15 for adults. Mail donations to Seaquist House Foundation, P.O. Box 1496, Mason, TX 76856.

The Mason County Courthouse is open 8 a.m.–4 p.m. Monday–Friday.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Original floor tiles bear singe marks from the 2021 fire at the Mason County Courthouse. Jerry Bearden, a former Mason County judge, shows photos from the night the courthouse burned. Bearden in front of the rebuilt courthouse.

remove truckloads of charred debris, recovery began.

But to rebuild, Mason County faced a price tag of nearly \$20 million. Toward that goal, \$3.6 million still remained from the original state grant. Friends of the Mason County Courthouse raised \$5.5 million. The Texas Association of Counties awarded \$7 million in insurance money, and the Legislature approved \$6 million toward the project.

“We came up with enough money to rebuild this courthouse,” Bearden says. “It didn’t cost taxpayers a dime.” Remaining funds were placed in a foundation to fund future courthouse maintenance.

As project manager, CPM Texas of Austin drew from historical records and paint scrapings taken prior to the fire to restore the courthouse to its 1910 appearance.

Corridors display floors of red-stained cement and original square white tiles, many of which bear singe marks from the blaze. Eight metal fireplaces, once used to heat rooms, are painted in original colors, such as golden yellow, emerald green and burgundy red. Seven heavy vault doors gleam with black paint and gold etchings of filigrees and maker name Diebold Safe & Locks Co.

Throughout the courthouse, destroyed furnishings, such as the original district judge’s bench, courtroom pews, jury box and witness stand, were replaced with historical replicas. So, too, was the domed clock tower. The new cupola—made of sheet metal that took thousands of hours to fabricate—houses an electronic clock and chimes, modern versions of the old iron bell and clock mechanism that were gutted by the fire.

Three years after that fire, the Mason County Courthouse reopened for business. On July 13, 2024, more than 750 people applauded and cheered when Bearden, standing on the courthouse steps with other dignitaries, cut a red ribbon during a rededication ceremony. Just as Bearden

Within minutes, the roof and clock tower collapsed. On the lawn, Bearden dropped to his knees as the ceiling above his first-floor office caved in and engulfed his desk.



had publicly vowed, their courthouse phoenix had risen from ashes.

Three blocks away, the Seaquist House had survived near ruin too.

“Politics and religion can divide people,” Appleby says. “But they’ll come together for something important like the Seaquist House and the courthouse. And that’s amazing.” ■



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/CEO KATHI CALVERT

Step By Step ...

Houston County EC continues Uri recovery

FIVE YEARS AGO, Houston County Electric Cooperative, along with many of our members, was reeling from the effects of Winter Storm Uri. We endured rolling blackouts and frozen pipes. Additionally, fuel supply was scarce. The remnants of the storm brought a blanket of ice, creating treacherous roadways and snapping power lines like twigs. It was an event that will forever shape the Texas power industry.

Houston County EC learned many lessons. Safe, affordable and reliable power is not ever to be taken for granted. Every action we take must align with our purpose of:

- ▶ Creating a safer community
- ▶ Protecting our members' cost for electricity
- ▶ Ensuring your lights come on every time you flip the switch

In the aftermath of our infamous winter storm, protecting your cost was our highest priority. No matter what it took, we were going to do our best to

shield our members from further financial hardship. Each year I provide an update on our Winter Storm Uri cost recovery efforts. Our initial power bill for electricity during Uri was \$24.9 million, which was higher than our normal power cost for an entire year. We are now well below \$5 million left on our storm debt. Little by little, step by step, we are getting closer to fully recovering from Winter Storm Uri.

I am so proud of our Houston County EC members for standing with us. I am so proud of the East Texas grit and determination I see in our members to make the best of any situation and work through it.

Additional Note:

Fortunately, our area did not sustain significant ice damage from Winter Storm Fern in January this year. While power costs were high due to high demand for electricity, lessons learned from Uri protected our members. ■





SEVERE WEATHER: ARE YOU READY?

Follow these safety tips during stormy weather.

Go inside a building and stay away from windows and doors.

Avoid electric appliances and metal plumbing and stay off the phone.

Do not seek shelter under a tree—they are easy targets.

Move to low ground and avoid open fields.

Whether at the beach or in a swimming pool, get out of the water immediately.

Do not touch metal objects, such as golf clubs or bicycles.

Inside a car is relatively safe, but do not touch interior metal.

If your hair stands on end, you may be a target. Crouch low on the balls of your feet and keep your knees and hands off the ground.

**Houston County EC encourages you
to always practice safety.**

PHOTO: PAUL LAMPARD | ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

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Do I Really Need To Call?

IF YOU PLAN to dig, yes! Don't make a judgment call; make an 811 call. Homeowners often make risky assumptions about whether or not they should get their utility lines marked, but every digging job requires a phone call—even small projects.

I'm only planting a small flower bed or bush.

Many utilities are buried just a few inches below ground. You can easily hit a line when digging for simple gardening projects, like planting flowers or small shrubs. Make the call to 811 anytime you're putting a shovel in the ground—to help keep yourself and your community safe.

I'm just installing a mailbox.

Buried utility lines are everywhere. Installing mailboxes and fences are examples of projects that absolutely require a call to 811 to know what's below before digging. Hitting a line can knock out service to your home and neighborhood or result in fines, damage and serious injury.

I'm digging in a spot that was previously marked.

Erosion and root system growth can alter the depth and location of buried lines, or your utility companies might have completed work on their lines since the last time you dug—so you must call 811 before you dig—each and every time.

I hired a contractor or landscaper to do the digging project.

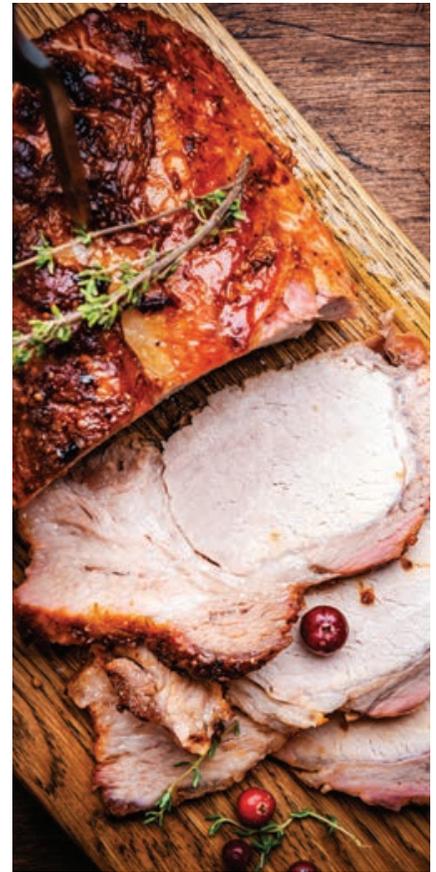
Be sure to check with your contractor or landscaper to make sure the call to 811 is made before digging begins—whether you make the call or your contractor does. Never let digging begin without calling 811. It's not worth the risk.

I'm only digging in a small area and don't want my entire yard marked.

If you're planning to dig only in a small portion of your yard, you can outline the area with white paint or white flags available at home improvement stores to ensure that only the utilities in that part of your yard are located and marked. Let your 811 operator know about your plans, and they will help ensure the proper area is marked by utility locators. ■



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Cranberry-Orange Pork Roast

**1 boneless pork loin roast
(2½–3 pounds)**

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

**1 can whole-berry cranberry sauce
(14 ounces)**

½ cup orange marmalade

¼ cup honey

⅛ teaspoon ground cloves

⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg

1. Cut roast in half and place in a slow cooker. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.
2. In a bowl, combine cranberry sauce, marmalade, honey, cloves and nutmeg and pour over roast.
3. Cover and cook on low 4 to 5 hours. Let stand 10 minutes before slicing.

SERVES 12

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



SUMALA CHIDHOJI | ISTOCK.COM

The Factors Driving Demand for Electricity

ACROSS THE U.S., the demand for power is climbing at one of the fastest rates in decades. As the economy becomes more reliant on electricity and data centers continue to sprout up in many parts of the country, electric cooperatives are preparing to meet the challenges that skyrocketing demand brings.

Extreme weather is among the factors driving increased demand that create more challenges for electric utilities, including cooperatives, in their mission to provide reliable power around the clock. Several of those key factors include economic growth, expanded manufacturing, data center development and increased electrification in transportation.

Together, these trends are reshaping how much electricity we consume and how quickly utilities like Houston County Electric Cooperative must adapt to meet future needs.

One of the biggest drivers of rising demand is increased electrification. More homes and businesses are transitioning to electricity for home and water heating and transportation. Electric vehicles are becoming more common on the road as some states offer incentives to help consumers make the switch. Additionally, electric heat pumps are replacing traditional furnaces in many homes due to their efficiency.

These transitions mean more energy use and pressure placed on the electric grid.

Data centers are another major contributor to rising demand. As artificial intelligence, cloud computing and cryptocurrency technologies grow, so has the need for data processing and storage. Data centers require huge amounts of power to operate servers and cooling systems 24/7. Tech companies are building new facilities nationwide—many in areas served by electric co-ops—and these regions are experiencing multi-year surges in electricity demand as a result.

Economic and manufacturing growth are also contributing to higher electricity use. As businesses expand and new industries take root, especially in rural and suburban areas, the demand for reliable, high-capacity power is increasing.

The resurgence of domestic manufacturing has led to major facility construction. These facilities often require substantial energy loads, and many operate continuously to keep production lines running. This growth brings jobs and investment, but it also puts new pressures on the electric grid.

Population growth and housing development also contribute to rising demand in many areas, and everyday life is becoming more energy dependent, too. Smart appliances, connected devices, home offices and entertainment systems are adding to overall consumption, even as efficiency improves.

While increased demand presents new challenges for electric utilities, it also has the potential to create significant opportunities for co-ops and the communities they serve, with job growth, steady revenue and improved infrastructure.

Electric co-ops are responding by planning carefully for the future—investing in grid modernization and offering programs and services to help co-op members conserve energy. Strategic planning is critical to ensuring the grid can support everything from EV charging to large-scale manufacturing plants.

Electricity powers nearly every aspect of today's economy, and its role will only grow. As electrification accelerates, long-term planning becomes more important than ever.

Houston County EC is ready to meet rising demand in our local communities. Through innovation, investment and collaboration, we are preparing for a more reliable and resilient energy future. ■

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Capital Improvements

The Brazos River birthplace of Texas has never beckoned more in its 190 years

BY SAMANTHA BRYANT • PHOTOS BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY that a ghost town comes back to life. But that's what's happening in Washington, a town along the Brazos River resurrected so visitors can experience a linchpin in Texas' history.

Touted as the birthplace of Texas, it was here that delegates signed the declaration of independence, 190 years ago March 2, that created the Republic of Texas. It was also here, in one of the short-lived nation's interim capitals, that the Texas Congress voted for annexation by the U.S. in 1845.

"We are the place where Texas became Texas," said Jonathan Failor, director of the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, "where people came together and stood against a tyrannical dictator and set their sights on something greater, something better, and eventually joined the United States 10 years later."

Those two historic decisions took place in buildings that sat roughly 300 feet apart, but over the course of decades, those buildings—along with the rest of the original town—south of College Station, disappeared into farmland after locals bet on steamboat trade and let the railroad bypass them.

"The affluence went to the railroad towns like Brenham and Navasota," said Michael Moore, project manager for the historic townsite. "The brick buildings here were sometimes dismantled and the bricks moved to Navasota to build a new building. Washington was left forgotten and kind of vanished into the landscape."

It became a park and historic site in 1916, and a replica building of Independence Hall, where the 59 delegates met, was constructed in the 1920s and rebuilt in 1969.

"That for the longest time was the only thing out here," Failor said. "This was one building that told the story of Texas independence in a town of which there was at one time 1,000 people."

But now people are once again strolling down Main, Austin and Ferry streets beneath the shade of pecan and live oak trees, meandering in and out of a drugstore, an apothecary shop, Sam Houston's presidential office and a blacksmith shop thanks to a \$57 million renovation project, mostly funded by the state. Ten replica structures dot the original townsite, which reopened in November after two years of extensive archaeological exploration,

construction and renovations.

Moore and his team researched and re-created buildings as near to their original locations as possible while balancing the preservation of ruins.

Inside Hatfield's Exchange, visitors can walk past a bar and upstairs to where the Texas Congress met while Washington was the capital, 1842–45. They can stop at a carpentry shop, watch demonstrations and hear the stories of the delegates who lodged there during the 1836 convention. For children, the townsite offers an immersive experience.

"They come and have fun, but also they can connect something visual, something tangible, to what they're learning in school," Moore said.

The visitors center and Star of the Republic Museum located on the same nearly 300-acre property managed by the Texas Historical Commission were also updated. The star-shaped museum, originally opened in 1970, underwent upgrades in technology and accessibility. Its six galleries contain artifacts, films and exhibits that walk visitors through the story of Texas, from its pre-Republic era through annexation and beyond.

The complex includes Barrington Living History Farm, which was the homestead of Dr. Anson Jones, who was the last president of Texas. Hall and Lott Tavern, the newest replica building, opens this spring. Davy Crockett spent the night here on his way to the Alamo, a place that every Texas schoolchild is admonished to remember.

Improvements to Washington are meant to leave a lasting impression as well.

"We know Texas existed as its own country," Failor said. "It's a point of pride, it's something that Texans know and non-Texans know. But where can Texans who've been here for seven, eight, nine generations and folks who have just got here, where can they go get that story? We want that to be here." ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Historical reenactors at Independence Hall and the 1899 marker at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, where the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed March 2, 1836. A reenactor tends a garden. A visitor approaches a reconstructed cabin. A reenactor deposits freshly picked cotton into a wagon.



Urgent: Special Summer Driving Notice

To some, sunglasses are a fashion accessory...

But When Driving, These Sunglasses May Save Your Life!

Drivers' Alert: Driving can expose you to more dangerous glare than any sunny day at the beach can... do you know how to protect yourself?

The sun rises and sets at peak travel periods, during the early morning and afternoon rush hours and many drivers find themselves temporarily blinded while driving directly into the glare of the sun. Deadly accidents are regularly caused by such blinding glare with danger arising from reflected light off another vehicle, the pavement, or even from waxed and oily windshields that can make matters worse. Early morning dew can exacerbate this situation. Yet, motorists struggle on despite being blinded by the sun's glare that can cause countless accidents every year.

Not all sunglasses are created equal. Protecting your eyes is serious business. With all the fancy fashion frames out there it can be easy to overlook what really matters—the lenses. So we did our research and looked to the very best in optic innovation and technology.

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lens technology was first discovered when NASA scientists looked to nature for a means to superior eye protection—specifically, by studying the eyes of eagles, known for their extreme visual acuity. This discovery resulted in what is now known as Eagle Eyes®.

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A Tidy Revolution

Litterbugs were put on notice 40 years ago with four iconic words

BY BOB MCCULLOUGH • ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN OLBRYSH

LIKE A LOT of kids, Tim McClure received regular reminders from his mom to clean his bedroom. The advertising executive, who grew up in Corsicana and now lives in Austin, vividly recalled those admonitions in 1985 when he developed one of the most memorable taglines of all time: “Don’t mess with Texas.”

The award-winning ad campaign urging careless folks to stop littering on Texas highways just marked its 40th anniversary. Its iconic slogan dawned on McClure during an early-morning stroll when he observed roadside refuse in his neighborhood that made him think of his messy room.

“‘Don’t mess with Texas’ was a battle cry that reached into the DNA of all Tex-

ans,” McClure says, “reminding them that they take great pride in their state. Litter is the antithesis of that sense of pride. Once reminded, Texans did what Texans do—we changed our behavior to reflect our commitment.”

“Don’t mess” enjoyed overnight success thanks to bumper stickers followed by a slew of TV spots starring Texan celebrities eager to enlist in the battle against litter.

In December 1985, stickers with just those four iconic words and a small Texas flag mysteriously appeared on pickup trucks across the Lone Star State. The stickers targeted a key demographic: young Texan men accustomed to jettisoning trash out of their pickups instead

of stashing it in proper receptacles.

Then on New Year’s Day 1986, in a TV spot that resembled a music video that aired during the Cotton Bowl, blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan played a rousing rendition of *The Eyes of Texas*, then punctuated it with those simple but powerful words: “Don’t mess with Texas.”

Almost immediately, viewers called their local stations wanting more.

That was the beginning of dozens of “Don’t mess” messages. “I’m very proud of them all, but the first, featuring Stevie Ray Vaughan, is my sentimental favorite,” says McClure, the M in GSD&M, the Austin powerhouse ad agency that led the campaign.

Other notable Texans who appeared in “Don’t mess” commercials included Johnny Dee and the Rocket 88’s, Dallas Cowboys Randy White and Ed “Too Tall” Jones, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Little Joe y La Familia, Willie Nelson, and the Texas Tornados. An animated spot starring SeaWorld orca Shamu and three penguin sidekicks—the Texas Tuxedos—urged kids not to litter.

Today, the Texas Department of Transportation carries on “Don’t mess,” with downloadable activity books for kids at dontmesswithtexas.org, lesson plans for teachers and scholarships for students who take on environmental projects.

“Litter on Texas roads was reduced by 63% from 2013 to 2023,” says Marc D. Williams, TxDOT executive director. “This shows our messaging is working, especially as the population grows. But we still have work to do. More than 360 million pieces of litter accumulate on Texas roads every year, with cigarette butts and beverage containers among the most common items.”

McClure believes Texas pride continues to be at the heart of the four-decade success of “Don’t mess.”

“We Texans are a proud bunch,” he says. “Proud of our state. Proud of our colorful past. Excited about the future ahead of us. Some things you simply don’t mess with!” ■

Barbecue Sides

Meet the dishes that dazzle when the smoke clears

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

As a newlywed I brought a version of this recipe to my in-laws' barbecue. My mother-in-law instantly fell in love with it. She asked for the recipe and proceeded to tweak, tweak and tweak until it became her recipe, a tradition at every barbecue. We still make it in her honor. We miss you, Grandma.

Grandma's Creamy Cucumber Salad

¼ cup lemon juice
2 teaspoons sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup sour cream
¼ cup fresh dill, finely chopped, divided use
2 large cucumbers, thinly sliced
½ red onion, thinly sliced

1. In a large bowl, stir together lemon juice and sugar until sugar dissolves.
2. Add salt, sour cream and all but 1 teaspoon dill. Stir to combine.
3. Gently stir in cucumbers and red onion. Refrigerate at least 1 hour.
4. Stir before serving and top with remaining dill.

SERVES 8

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Pan de Elote.





Pickled Coleslaw

EVA WARD
TRI-COUNTY EC

Coleslaw is the ultimate barbecue side dish that just keeps giving. Its tang cuts through the richness of the meat, and it's even better the next day piled high on a sandwich. I appreciated the ease of this recipe, which delivered crunch and bold flavor.

- 1 medium head cabbage, shredded**
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced**
- 2 medium carrots, shredded**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon dry mustard**
- ½ teaspoon celery seed**
- ½ cup olive oil**
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar**

1. In a large bowl, combine cabbage, red onion and carrots.
2. In a saucepan, bring sugar, salt, dry mustard, celery seed, oil and vinegar to a boil, stirring to dissolve sugar.
3. Pour vinegar mixture over cabbage mixture and combine well. Allow to cool.
4. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving.

SERVES 8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

C's Macaroni Salad

CAROLYN USSERY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC



If there's pasta salad at the barbecue, find me there. I love a great pasta salad loaded with crunch, bite, saltiness and cheese. Ussery's salad has a bit of tang to it, which I really enjoyed, and it's loaded with color and flavor.

- 16 ounces veggie rotini**
- 6 ounces colby jack cheese, cubed**
- ½ cup diced red onion**
- ¾ cup diced celery**
- ½ cup diced red bell pepper**
- 1 cup frozen peas**
- ½ cup mayonnaise**
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar**
- ¼ cup fresh dill, finely chopped,**
or 2 tablespoons dried dill weed
- 2 tablespoons sugar**
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**

1. Cook pasta according to package directions, drain well and place in a large bowl to cool.
2. Once pasta has cooled, stir in cheese, onion, celery, bell pepper and peas.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, vinegar, dill, sugar, mustard, salt and pepper.
4. Add mayonnaise mixture to pasta and stir to coat. Refrigerate at least 1 hour before serving.

SERVES 6-10

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

AFTER-SCHOOL SNACKS DUE MAR 10

How do you answer the bell when school's out? We want to know what your kids love. Best recipe gets an A-plus, \$500 and a spot in the August issue.

UPCOMING: PANCAKES AND WAFFLES DUE APR 10



Cauliflower and Green Beans

SOUAD EL ALAMI
FARMERS EC

On a table full of barbecue, potato salad, and mac and cheese, a simple vegetable dish shouldn't be an afterthought. El Alami's dish is a delight. The pop of freshness from the parsley, cilantro and lemon juice makes a truly spectacular side dish for chicken or beef.

- 1 large head cauliflower**
- 1 pound green beans**
- 4 cups water**
- 1¼ tablespoons salt, divided use**
- 6 cloves garlic, not peeled**
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley**
- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro**
- ½ tablespoon lemon juice**



- 1.** Slice cauliflower into quarters. Use your hands or a knife to remove florets from core. Cut florets as needed to create uniform pieces.
- 2.** Trim the ends of green beans and discard. Slice beans in half.
- 3.** In a large pot, bring water and 1 table-

spoon salt to a boil. Add green beans, reduce heat to medium, and cook 5–8 minutes or until tender. Remove green beans from pot and place into an ice bath for 20 minutes. Drain.

- 4.** Steam cauliflower and garlic cloves in a steamer until tender, about 8–10 minutes. Allow to cool.
- 5.** Heat butter and oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Squeeze garlic out of peel into skillet and cook 40 seconds, stirring. Stir in green beans and cook an additional minute.
- 6.** Add cauliflower and stir to incorporate. Stir in remaining ¼ tablespoon salt, pepper, parsley and cilantro. Cook an additional minute. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice.

SERVES 4–6

TCP Remember that you can find hundreds of recipes on our website. Use the search function with keywords and specific ingredients to discover ideas for your next meal.



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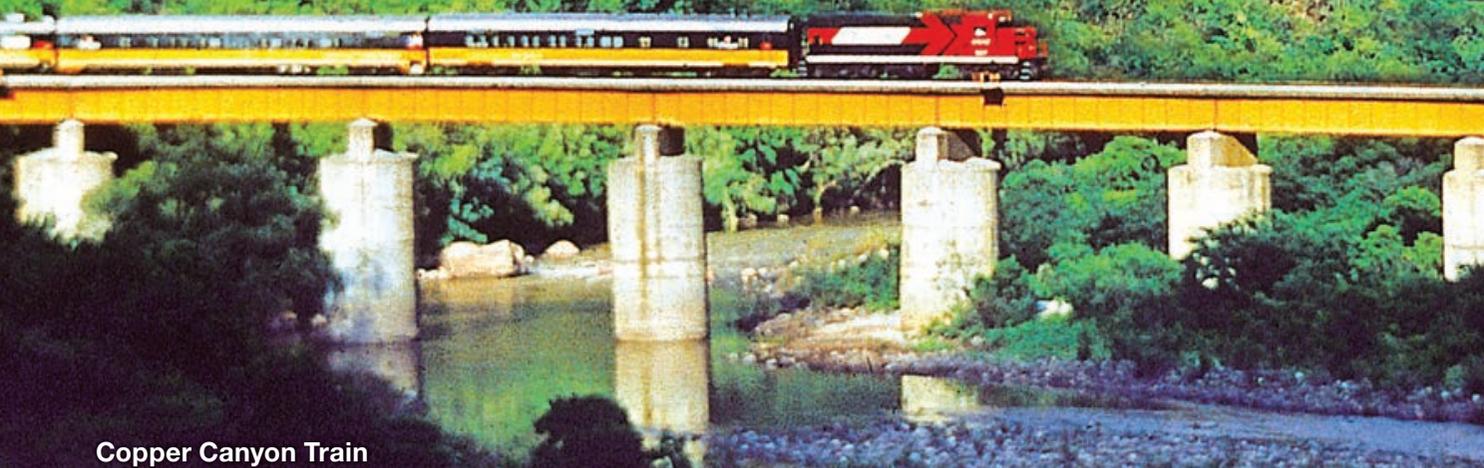
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Long Drives in Big Bend

Live the luxe life in a surprising locale: Lajitas

BY CHET GARNER

THERE'S OFF THE BEATEN PATH and then there's Lajitas—a spot so remote that it feels like you've driven off the edge of the map. But just when you're sure you've missed civilization completely, the desert opens up to reveal a high-end resort with golf carts, spa robes and a goat that drinks beer. Welcome to the most luxurious ghost town in Texas.

The legend of Lajitas begins with the land itself—a sunbaked stretch of the Chihuahuan Desert along the Rio Grande sandwiched between Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park.

The town was once known for bandits, miners and cattle drives, but today it's most famous for its unusual mayor. His name's Clay Henry IV, and he's a goat whose claim to fame is guzzling beer straight from the bottle like his father and his father and his father before that. He's the world's most carefree politician, doing his civic duty one gulp at a time.

The only thing more unexpected than the goat in charge is the Lajitas Golf Resort, a desert oasis that feels wildly out of place and yet somehow perfect. Its crown jewel is Black Jack's Crossing, a golf course named for U.S. Army Gen. John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, who pursued Pancho Villa across the Rio Grande in 1916. There's even a hole where players can see how far they can smack a ball across the river into Mexico.

As the day faded away, I settled into my dinner on the resort's terrace. The mesquite-grilled rib eye and the smell of creosote in the air were only upstaged by the sun setting behind distant mountains like a slow-burning ember. Out here, fine dining and frontier grit somehow share the same table, and I was happy to be their dinner guest. ■

ABOVE Chet finds that golf is just part of the Chihuahuan Desert oasis experience that is the town of Lajitas.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all of 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.

MARCH

7

Kerrville Classical Music Festival, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

Salado Texas Pizza Festival, (254) 947-3544, barrowbrewing.com

10

Lufkin Swan Lake, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

12

Dublin [12-14] St. Patrick's Day Festival, (254) 445-3422, dublintxchamber.com

13

Round Top [13-14] Plant Sale, (713) 503-9981, herbsocietypioneer.org

Granbury [13-15] Founders' Day Jubilee & Cook-Off, (682) 936-4550, facebook.com/hmagranburysquare

14

Willis Arbor Day Tree Giveaway, (936) 539-7824, mcmga.com

15

Fredericksburg Seraph Brass Quintet, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

16

Grapevine [16-22] Picnic on the Prairie, (817) 410-3185, grapevintexasusa.com

20

Kerrville Concerts by the River & Family Game Night, (830) 257-7300, kerrvilletx.gov

21

Grapevine Sweet Baby James: James Taylor Tribute, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

22

Lufkin Wizard of Oz on Ice, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

24

Fort Worth [24-29] Back to the Future: The Musical, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

27

Georgetown [27-28] Quilt Show, (512) 869-1812, handcraftsunlimited.com

Rockport [27-28] Crawfish Festival, (361) 205-9595, rockportcrawfishfest.com

28

Burnet Hill Country Lawn & Garden Show, (512) 756-3059, burnetcountyhighlandlakesmastergardener.org

Sabinal [28-29] Wild Hog Festival & Craft Fair, (830) 486-8549, sabinalwildhogfestival.com

APRIL

2

Levelland [2-4] ABC Pro Rodeo, (806) 777-1510, abcrodeo.com

4

Fairfield Easter Eggstravaganza, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Waxahachie [4-May 25] Scarborough Renaissance Festival, (972) 938-3247, srfestival.com

TCP Submit Your Event

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



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Still Life

When the light hits something just right, time stands still. These readers capture that moment for us spectacularly. See what happens when we slow down and let life filter in.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 RAYMOND TESTA
FARMERS EC

"A homegrown daylily in a simple vase."

2 FAITH CAUGHRON
TRINITY VALLEY EC

Caughron used this photo on social media to announce the upcoming event America Reads the Bible.

3 CARA STIMSON
COSERV

"Still life (or death) in an Alpine graveyard. My son took this photo on a family trip to Big Bend."

4 JOEY CARGILL
FORT BELKNAP EC

"My daughter Riley took a photo that represents her hobbies of reading and dancing."



Upcoming Contests

- DUE MAR 10 Seasoned Snaps
- DUE APR 10 Underwater Life
- DUE MAY 10 Rodeo



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Still Life photos from readers.



Nature Nurtures— And It Buzzes

Embrace the bugs in your yard and watch them work their magic

BY JENNIFER DANNY
ILLUSTRATION BY HEIDI SCHMIDT

THE FIRST TIME I learned about cicadas, I was visiting family in North Texas. As I was getting my luggage out of the car, I heard rustling and buzzing in the trees. I asked my daughter what that noise was.

Somewhat concerned, I said, “Do they sting?”

“I’m not sure,” she said. “You probably won’t even get to see them, but you’ll hear them.”

And hear them I did. I was fascinated by these creatures, and I started to research everything I could about them.

You see, I have a history with life’s littlest creatures. For the past few years, I’ve planted milkweed for monarch butterflies, and each summer, I had the pleasure of watching them lay their eggs that then turned into caterpillars, which built cocoons and eventually

emerged as butterflies.

There is something so beautiful about monarchs, the way they flap their wings as if to thank you for providing a home and milkweed before they begin their migration.

I also would buy praying mantis eggs from the local gardening store. When they hatched, I would disperse them throughout my yard. They’re very tiny when they first come out of the egg, and often I would see a few grow to maturity. I find their praying hands to be a symbol of hope and happiness.

Ah, but it doesn’t stop there. One day I saw a carpenter bee near a little wood sculpture in my yard. I watched it go inside through a tiny hole. And it turns out for many years, the carpenter bees and their next generation lived inside the sculpture. They had quite a distinctive buzz, much louder than the honeybees that would visit and pollinate my flowers.

One day, after my husband and I moved to Texas from Southern California in August 2023, a beautiful yellow butterfly was in my daughter’s yard, just sitting on her window screen, its wings opening and closing almost as if it were welcoming me to Texas.

Finally, I was able to sit outside every evening and watch the trees and the leaves bustle with the cicadas’ buzzing.

I’ve always appreciated nature, and to have it right in my own backyard is so comforting.

I believe that nature nurtures. If we slow down and really take a look, there is so much beauty to behold.

Just last week, I saw a monarch butterfly hanging out in our new yard. I went outside and took a photo and welcomed it. The following day, I went to the local nursery and bought a milkweed plant in the hopes that the monarch would lay its eggs.

Summer will be here soon, and I’m excited to hear the cicadas once again. ■

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