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ENDURANCE CHALLENGES

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September 2021



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08 Second to None

Texas Tech University's long-awaited veterinary school begins mission of bolstering rural communities.

*By Chris Burrows
Photos by Dave Shafer*

ON THE COVER

Paris veterinarian Wally Kraft with his sons—Jack, left, who is in veterinary school at Oklahoma State University, and Trey, also a vet.

Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE

West Hansen negotiates boulders in the Río Gashan in Peru.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

Current Events His Way

When West Hansen needs an escape from society, he just goes with the flow.

*By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

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By Babs Rodriguez

Ocean Currents

UNDERWATER VOLCANOES generate so much energy that they could power entire continents. But there's a catch, say the British scientists researching such eruptions.

"I would say there is effectively zero chance of capturing the energy for all sorts of reasons, such as we don't know when or where the eruptions will happen, very tricky to access, etc.," volcanologist David Ferguson, of the University of Leeds, told Vice. "The point of the comparison was really just to illustrate how powerful/energetic these things are."



“I never think of the future. It comes soon enough.”

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

THE SWEETEST SOUND IN THE WORLD 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. Below are some of the responses to our July prompt: **I should have paid more attention ...**

To my mother's way of preparing hearty and flavorful meals with simple ingredients on a shoestring budget for our family of seven.

DEBORA MARINO
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
KOPPERL

To my retirement 30 years beforehand.

THOMAS ALAN MOORE
VIA FACEBOOK

To my parents telling me to enjoy childhood because once you're an adult, you're an adult FOREVER.

KAY RAY
VIA FACEBOOK

To the fine print.

GARY L. GALLOWAY
TRI-COUNTY EC
WEATHERFORD

When he said "sign here" at the draft board.

ED FAHSOLTZ
VIA FACEBOOK

To see more responses, read Currents online.



STEP UP TO SAFETY

Aluminum ladders can conduct electricity and so can nonmetallic fiberglass ladders when they're dirty or wet. When working outdoors with a ladder, keep it at least 10 feet away from power lines and always carry it horizontally to avoid hitting a line.



Earliest Inconvenience

ON HIS PREGNANT WIFE'S BIRTHDAY last year, Casey Walls wasn't celebrating. Instead, the Wood County Electric Cooperative lineworker was packing his bags August 28, preparing for long days of hard work after Hurricane Laura left tens of thousands of East Texas electric cooperative members in the dark.

Walls wasn't worried either because Shea wasn't due until November.

But around 5 a.m. about four days into his trip, Walls was awakened by his cellphone, which showed dozens of missed calls. His father was on the line. Shea had gone into labor hours earlier. Walls rushed to Tyler, where Shea gave birth just 20 minutes after he arrived.

Twins Braxten, above left, and Casen celebrate their first birthdays September 1.



Fungi to the Rescue

Don't ever underestimate the power of a fungus, the extraordinarily versatile life-form that produces mushrooms. Fungi can be trained to eat cigarette butts, used diapers, oil spills and even radiation.



TCP *Contests and More*

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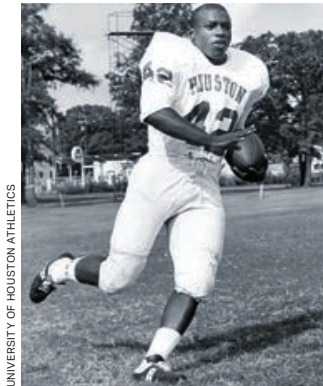


More About McVea

Groundbreaking Cougar [Currents, July 2021] reminded me of a game Warren McVea played in 1963. San Antonio Brackenridge faced crosstown Robert E. Lee in one of the most entertaining high school football games ever played. My dad and I watched it together at Alamo Stadium.

It had two of the most explosive running backs in the country, McVea and Lee's Linus Baer. Each team scored just about every time they got the football—McVea dancing and speeding around Lee defenders, and Baer running through and over Brackenridge defenders. Lee won, 55-48.

Rick Covington
Pedernales EC
Cedar Park



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ATHLETICS



I loved the story and the illustration [Parent Imperfect, June 2021]. Martha Deeringer wrote a wonderful tribute to her father while also reminding us to forgive ourselves for having once been teenagers embarrassed by a parent or grandparent.

LINDA PIAZZA
VIA FACEBOOK

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An Unlikely Blueprint

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DANIEL SVETLIK
PEDERNALES EC
VICTORIA

Slice of Heaven

We agree Dala Burk's Tangy Tomato Slices [June 2021] are a winner.

We used Big Beef tomatoes, Texas 1015 onions, fresh basil and parsley—all grown in our garden.

We read *Texas Co-op Power's* recipes enthusiastically every issue and have for the past 25 years. However, we had never made any of them. But with a counter full of tomatoes from the garden this year, we couldn't resist.

We could not wait for the dish to marinate in the refrigerator and had to try it once done. OMG!

Marilynn Schmidt
Bluebonnet EC
Somerville

Minor Typo, Major Figure

Chet Garner's article about the funeral museum was interesting, but I need to correct one thing [A *Serious Undertaking*, July 2021]. The millions of Catholics in Texas will know that we buried our beloved Pope John Paul II. We haven't had a III yet.

Theresa Phinney
Bryan Texas Utilities
College Station

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

Texas Co-op Power

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Paris veterinarian Wally Kraft, with help from his son Jack, wraps a quick-set cast on a horse. OPPOSITE As Texas Tech University graduates new vets, relief from long workdays could be on the horizon for rural vets like the Krafts.

Second to *None*

Texas Tech University's long-awaited veterinary school begins mission of bolstering rural communities



family, but working 50–60 hours a week made that a challenge. “I was like, ‘If we go into rural practice, we are never going to have a life.’”

Solomon Schilling and 31 other faculty members began reshaping that reality in August, when they welcomed the inaugural class to the Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine in Amarillo—Texas’ first new vet school in more than a century. Decades in the making, Tech established

BY CHRIS BURROWS • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

Bethany Solomon Schilling still cringes when she hears the ring tone. The ring tone that years ago interrupted dinners, events and sleep to let her know there was an emergency at one of the Central Texas clinics where she worked as a veterinarian.

She grew up surrounded by animals on a ranch and earned a scholarship to help pay for her veterinary schooling. The field combined everything she loved: science, medicine and agriculture.

But then Solomon Schilling went to work caring for animals at those clinics in Lockhart and Luling, where workweeks ran into weekends and that ring tone stretched workdays into nights. Gone were the “referral zebras” of her university’s teaching hospital, she said, replaced by the everyday rigors of mixed-animal veterinary medicine, where demand far outpaces supply in many parts of Texas, leading to burnout among vets.

“At some point you think, ‘Is this sustainable?’” Solomon Schilling said. She and her husband were trying to start a

the school with the specific intent of recruiting passionate students from small towns and forming them into career-ready practitioners prepared to help address the shortage of veterinarians, especially in rural Texas.

“There’s a high demand in Texas, but it’s not being met in these rural communities where we need them,” said Clayton Cobb, another professor. “That’s where Tech comes in.”

Texas counts 6,600 practicing veterinarians but needs 1,300 more to reach the national average for the state’s population, according to Tech. Fewer than 200 of those vets work exclusively on livestock in rural parts of the state that has nearly double the number of cattle of any other state and hundreds of thousands more horses and almost a million more goats than any other state.

But many Texas vets say a new veterinary school—especially one focused on rural students and underserved communities—is long overdue.

“If you’re going to select all the kids out of Houston, Dallas and places like that, you’ve got very little hope of getting very many of those to ever go out past those metropolitan areas,” said Kynan Sturgess, a Panhandle veterinarian whose clinic is



served by Deaf Smith Electric Cooperative. “They didn’t grow up around farming and ranching; there’s no guarantee they’re going to stick around. But you’ve got a lot better shot of taking a kid from Dimmitt, Texas, and maybe expecting him to go back to some area like that.”

Sturgess is one of just four veterinarians permanently based in Deaf Smith County, where more than 600,000 cattle outnumber humans about 33 to 1. The Panhandle has the highest density of cattle in the country, but three veterinary schools in three other states are closer than Texas’ only other vet school—at Texas A&M University.

Sturgess has had to advertise openings at his Hereford clinic in other states—one reason he’s advocated for a school like Tech’s for years.

“The whole state, from a rural standpoint, is having problems,” he said. “I have colleagues all over the state that are constantly looking for somebody.”

About 40% of Texas’ working vets earned their degree outside the state; the rest went through Texas A&M University’s College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences—founded in 1916 and one of the best and largest vet schools in the nation.

As the second school in the state, Tech has the advantage of a specialized focus. “We don’t have to cater to everybody,” Cobb said.

Cobb grew up on a ranch in Northeast Texas and as an

‘A slow day is kind of unusual. We pretty much have to take care of everybody who walks in the front door. If you don’t love it, you’re not going to do it.’

undergraduate at Tech about 20 years ago, he advocated for a veterinary program before moving on to vet school at A&M. So when he heard about the Legislature including just that in the state’s 2019 budget, allocating \$17.35 million in operational support for the program (which donors supplemented with \$90 million for construction costs), he was thrilled. Then he got the call to come work there.

“When they said, ‘We’d like to extend you an offer. When do you think you could start?’ I told them, ‘Six hours and 36 minutes. Give me time to get there. We are starting today,’” Cobb said.

With firsthand experience in rural animal care, Cobb has tremendous respect for those who do it—and especially for Wally Kraft, his childhood vet, who still treats animals of all sizes at his Paris clinic.

“A slow day is kind of unusual,” said Kraft, 76, a member of Lamar Electric, who still pulls calves, sews up horses,



LEFT Kraft, assisted by vet tech Emily Odell, removes a benign tumor from a Doberman pinscher. BELOW In August, Texas Tech welcomed the first 64 students to its Amarillo campus—the 33rd veterinary school in the country.



“If you want to go into dairy, we’ll send you to dairies. If you want to go into feedlots, we’ll send you to feedlots,” Cobb said. It’s a way to immerse students in the life and lifestyle of rural animal care, preparing them for the everyday rigors and rewards of the job.

That’s part of what Solomon Schilling was missing from her own vet school experience.

“I felt very prepared intellectually but not for things that I saw day in and day out,” she said. “Communication, training, interpersonal relations, stress management, work-life balance, financial management ... things like that are the reasons people leave the profession or leave practice. It’s not the medicine that runs them off.”

Tech’s model aims to turn out confident, competent vets who are ready for that late-night phone call—because they’ve already experienced it.

“When you’re at a teaching hospital, certain services will only see a handful of patients a day, whereas in a very busy private practice, you can see 25, 30 patients a day per doctor,” Solomon Schilling said. “It’s a lot more volume and a lot more exposure.”

The 64 students who comprise Tech’s first class started their studies in Amarillo at the newly completed School of Veterinary Medicine, which houses 185,000 square feet of labs, offices and classrooms. A large-animal clinical

skills facility is about 2 miles northwest.

Access to the state-of-the-art facility won’t cost the class of 2025 as much as some schools. The average in-state veterinary medicine degree costs more than \$200,000, according to the VIN Foundation, but Tech students will pay \$88,000 for tuition (plus more for books and supplies). The hope is that saddling vets with less debt will allow them to work wherever they’re needed.

“A lot of people think we’re just raising country vets to work cows,” Cobb said. “That is not true at all. We could graduate our first four classes of veterinarians and send them all to El Paso and Laredo, and they would still be underserved communities.

“The people in those clinics and those communities out there are in desperate need. Nobody is really looking at them and trying to help them. That’s exactly the point of what we’re doing.” ■

and vaccinates and treats more and more dogs and cats as the Metroplex creeps toward the country. “We pretty much have to take care of everybody who walks in the front door. If you don’t love it, you’re not going to do it.”

Two of Kraft’s veterinarian sons are on their way to one day taking over his practice, but most of Texas’ aging vets don’t have that kind of security—even while demand swells. Texas added 4 million people since 2010—more than any other state—according to census data, but 41% of vets in rural Texas are older than 60.

“Everything has grown,” Sturgess said. “I’ve taken on more feedlots; I’ve got more horse clients and way more small animal clients.”

Tech is hoping to stem that tide using what it calls a distributed veterinary learning community to turn out well-rounded, practice-ready generalists. Unlike traditional vet schools like A&M, where fourth-year vet students practice at a teaching hospital, Tech students will do 4- to 6-week rotations at private practices across the state in their final year.

TCP WEB EXTRA See a timeline of veterinary education in Texas.

Current Events **His Way**



RIGHT Austin adventurer West Hansen at the San Marcos River. BELOW Hansen, right, and a guide navigate Mantaro River rapids in Peru. OPPOSITE Hansen makes a satellite phone call after his team's raft flipped in white water.



When **West Hansen** needs an escape from society, he just goes with the flow

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL



n a warm fall afternoon,

West Hansen glides a sleek, narrow racing canoe beneath a row of towering cypress trees on the San Marcos River.

He dips in a paddle, steers nimbly around a partially submerged log, then rides a riffle of blue-green water over a natural rock spillway as he makes his way from the tiny town of Martindale to the even tinier community of Staples, downstream from San Marcos.

The 6-mile, leisurely cruise takes less than two hours—barely a blip on the odometer for Hansen, 59, an endurance paddler who led an expedition 4,200 miles down the entire Amazon River in 2012 and paddled 2,100 miles down the Volga River in Russia two years later. As he pulls ashore, he tips back his cowboy hat—a trademark piece of attire for the leader of the Arctic Cowboys, who next year plan to become the first paddlers to kayak 1,900 miles through the Northwest Passage in the Arctic Archipelago.

“As our world has gotten busier and technology has evolved and we have 24/7 news cycles, it’s nice to get away,” he says.

Hansen, a social worker who helps seniors navigate the ins and outs of health care through his family’s home health care business in Port Arthur, is opinionated and bull-headed, traits that serve him well as an expedition leader. He tucks a notepad and pen in his front pocket, scribbling thoughts wherever he goes. In 2018 he ran unsuccessfully for U.S. Congress in the 25th district of Texas and won’t rule out the possibility of running again.

Hansen started paddling in the early 1980s when he took a whitewater kayaking class at what was then Southwest Texas State University. A few years later, he learned about the Texas Water Safari, a 260-mile paddling race from San Marcos to Seadrift on the Texas coast. Since then he’s finished the event—during which sleep-deprived paddlers navigate rapids, drag their boats over bobbing logjams, endure heat and exhaustion, and dodge alligators—21 times. He is also a

four-time winner of a 340-mile paddling race down the swift Missouri River. He endures miseries like chafing, sucking mud, nausea and biting insects, he says, because he enjoys the camaraderie and the escape from modern life.

“In every race, I think about quitting, even the ones I’ve won,” he says. “But I know how bad it’ll feel to pull out.”

Hansen funds his trips through donations and hard work, taking on odd carpentry jobs on weekends and raising money through his nonprofit organization, Worldwide Waterways.

In 2008, Hansen, who lives in Austin with his wife, Lizet, traveled to Iquitos, Peru, for the Great River Amazon Raft Race, where teams use eight 16-foot balsa logs to build a raft and sprint nearly 100 miles. Until that year, competitors lined all their logs side by side to make a wide raft. Hansen’s team instead spliced two rows of logs end to end. They won and set an overall record of 12 hours and 19 minutes.

More importantly, Hansen was hooked.

“The [Amazon] river really is the biggest river on the planet. It’s shocking to see that amount of anything in motion,” he says. “It was just so powerful, and it really moved me.”

On the flight home, one of his race partners lent him Joe Kane’s book, *Running the Amazon*. “Before I got back to Houston, I had pretty much read the entire thing,” he says. “By the time I landed in Austin, I thought, ‘OK, I can do this. I can paddle the entire Amazon River.’”

Hansen spent the next few years researching the river and lining up sponsors. He made a scouting trip to Peru in 2011. In 2012 he launched his expedition—the first to paddle the Amazon from a newly determined source high in the Andes Mountains to the sea. His wife and daughter, Isabella, who graduated from Georgetown University last spring, traveled there to watch for a few days.

“It’s very shallow, just a stream [at the start],” he said. “A lot of times we had to get out and drag our boats. A lot of times we were in whiteout snow conditions.”

Hansen wrote a book about the experience, *The Amazon From Source to Sea: The Farthest Journey Down the World’s Longest River*, which details the 111-day adventure, including the day they spotted a sloth swimming across the river and other days when they saw frolicking pink dolphins. They were held at gunpoint five times, discovered floating bales of marijuana and dodged boulders as big as refrigerators that rained from canyon walls where crews were building a dam.

Longtime friend Jeff Wueste was part of the Amazon team and Hansen’s only partner on the Volga trek. They met in 1992 and have teamed up for the Texas Water Safari several times. Wueste, who will paddle the Northwest Passage with the Arctic Cowboys, describes Hansen as determined and well prepared, someone who does the due diligence needed to accomplish big things.

'I love to be far away from everybody and the stimulus that's constantly coming at us.'



"He's good to the core," Wueste says. "Ultimately, he's driven to an end goal. But as many expedition leaders are, they're as egotistical as they can be. You're not going to find any wallflowers leading expeditions."

When the originally planned trip through the Northwest Passage in 2020 was postponed because of the pandemic, Hansen and four others set out to paddle 420 miles up the Texas coast instead.

They started at the state's sandy tail on South Padre Island and chugged to its refinery-studded tip at the Louisiana border, enduring tent-wrecking storms, campsites covered in enough ooze to host a mud-wrestling competition and swells so big they lost sight of one another. Their fingernails grew soggy and loose, and they labored to find a proper rhythm,



but they also paddled alongside pods of dolphins; pitched tents on small barrier islands covered in lush, lime-colored grass; and watched serene sunrises and sunsets.

When they finally pulled their 18-foot Epic sea kayaks ashore at Walter Umphrey State Park in Port Arthur, Hansen announced: "Well, that's done."

Underwater explorer and filmmaker Nancy McGee, who knows Hansen through the Explorers Club, a global organization whose members include astronauts, mountain climbers and aviators, describes him as the epitome of the 21st-century explorer.

"His goals are the stuff of dreams," she says, adding that he "has helped create a deeper understanding of the cultures he has encountered and the physical geography he has mastered."

For Hansen, who is already working on a second book, which will detail a history of Amazon expeditions, those accomplishments are only part of the motivation to explore.

"I love to be far away from everybody and the stimulus that's constantly coming at us," Hansen says. "I like doing things that haven't been done before, and that list is getting smaller and smaller." ■

ABOVE Hansen paddles down the Mantaro River. LEFT Hansen cruises the San Marcos River with author Pam LeBlanc.

TCP WEB EXTRA Check out more photos from West Hansen's 2012 Amazon River expedition.

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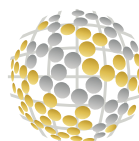
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Time is running out for timeless turquoise. Just because turquoise is timeless, doesn't mean supplies of it will last forever. Turquoise is only found a few places on Earth. Typically unearthed in arid climates like the American Southwest and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, turquoise requires a delicate balance of minerals and water to achieve its gorgeous range of blues. But even when conditions are optimal for turquoise to form, finding stones of gem-worthy quality is a challenge. There are very few turquoise mines left, and then, less than 5% of turquoise mined worldwide is of jewelry condition, making it rarer to come by than even diamonds.

There are turquoise and sterling silver pendants out there for over \$1,200. And while genuine turquoise can garner a pretty penny, there's no reason to be paying a designer price when we can bring you designer pieces for a remarkable price.

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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER

KATHI CALVERT

EACH SEPTEMBER we celebrate Labor Day, a national tribute to the contributions American workers make to the strength and prosperity of our country.

The word labor is defined as an expenditure of physical or mental effort, especially when difficult or compulsory. That definition is not lost on the employees of Houston County Electric Cooperative. When the lights go off—whether due to thunderstorms, wildfires, hurricanes or ice storms—our linemen leave their families to work tirelessly in harsh and dangerous conditions to restore your power. Other employees handle your phone calls and dispatch crews to get electricity flowing to your home as quickly and safely as possible.

But that doesn't mean the job is a laborious punishment. It's a labor of love.

When the weather goes awry and the calls come in, employees who were safe at home often check in to see if there's anything they can do to help. We've had employees simply show up to help answer members' calls during a crisis. This is because they care about what they do. They care about the membership. And nothing is more important than making sure that every member is safe and sound—with the power humming—even during inclement weather.

And it's not just when the lights are off that our employees are working hard. In a recent employee survey, a question was asked: "What what is one thing you like most about working for Houston County EC?"

Some answered, "helping members." That is when you know you have a great team, and their dedication is evident every day.

Your Houston County EC employees strive to work with you and for you in all they do. Whether you are a new member applicant or we have had the privilege of serving you for 50 years, our goal is to listen to you and respond to your requests to the best of our ability. We will provide sound information if you are considering solar installations. We will guide you when you seek to change or expand service. We will respond to your service requests. And, we will answer your questions.

We don't do this because it's our job. We do it because we care about you, our members, who are our friends, family and neighbors.

Today I want to ask you, our member-owners, to thank a co-op employee if you see one. Thank them for their commitment, their talent, their hard work and their service to the membership of this cooperative. After all, even though our offices will be closed for Labor Day on September 6, if your power goes out, we'll be on our way to fix it, holiday or no holiday. ■

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936-544-5641 (LOCAL) | 800-657-2445 (TOLL-FREE)



The paperless billing contest begins September 1, 2021 and will end on September 30, 2021. Members who already utilize paperless billing will automatically be entered into the drawing. HCEC employees and immediate family members will not be eligible. Only one prize will be awarded per member account number.



LISA BRONITTI | ISTOCK.COM

Understanding Power Blinks and Surges

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED your lights blink during a thunderstorm? Or perhaps you've returned home to find your microwave clock blinking despite a sunny day. When this happens, your home has likely experienced a brief disruption to your electric service, which could result from a power blink. While the symptoms of blinks and surges can appear similar, what's happening behind the scenes can be quite different.

Power Blinks

Power blinks are brief service interruptions typically caused by a fault (short circuit) on a power line or a protective device that's working in reaction to the fault. Faults are caused by a variety of disturbances, like squirrels, birds or other small animals contacting an energized power line; tree branches touching a power line; or lightning. In fact, when it comes to power disruptions caused by critters, squirrels reign supreme. In 2019 alone, squirrels were responsible for more than 1,200 outages.

You may also experience a brief interruption when protective devices are working to detect the fault. Believe it or not, these brief power blinks caused by protective devices are actually good because that means the equipment is working as it should to prevent a prolonged outage.

Regardless of the outage cause, Houston County Electric Cooperative crews will be on their way to inspect the damage and make necessary repairs. Any time you experience repeated power disruptions, please let us know so we can help you determine the cause and minimize future issues.

Power Surges

A blink is not a power surge. Power surges are brief overvoltage spikes or disturbances that can damage, degrade or destroy electronic equipment at your home or business. Most electronics are designed to handle small variations in voltage. We, as a distribution cooperative, do not generate electricity, nor can we create surges in electricity. We deliver it to your home at voltages defined by the National Electric Safety Code.

Surges are most often caused by external factors such as lightning which damages power lines and transformers. We encourage all members to install surge protective devices to safeguard your sensitive electronics. ■

Houston County Electric Cooperative

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ABOUT HOUSTON COUNTY EC

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MEMBER SERVICE

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To report an outage, press 1.
To update your contact information, press 2.
To check your account balance or make a payment using the automated system, press 3.
To speak to a member services representative regarding your account, press 4.
Para hablar con un representante de habla español, presione 5.
To connect, disconnect or transfer service, press 6.
To report outdoor lighting issues or other nonemergencies regarding your electric service, press 7.

VISIT US ONLINE

houstoncountyelec.com



We're Back ... Together!

PROXY

As a member of Houston County Electric Cooperative, Inc. ("Cooperative"), I hereby appoint the board of directors of the Cooperative as my agent and proxy to represent me at the Cooperative's annual meeting of the members to be held at the Crockett Civic Center on Loop 304 in Crockett, Texas at 6 p.m., Thursday, October 28, 2021. I authorize the Cooperative's board of directors, as my agent and proxy, to cast my vote on all matters coming before the Cooperative's annual meeting of the members.

SAMPLE

PRINT Printer name of HCEC member must be here.

SIGNED Signature of HCEC member must be the same name as printed above.

DATE

PHONE NUMBER

After a year of being apart, we're happy to welcome back our members to the 82nd annual meeting of members!

Next month's issue of *Texas Co-op Power* will look slightly different. Included on the outside of the issue will be a dust cover with important information about the Houston County Electric Cooperative annual meeting. The dust cover will have a proxy card attached that we ask you to sign and return if you're unable to attend this year's annual meeting.

Houston County ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

82nd Annual Meeting

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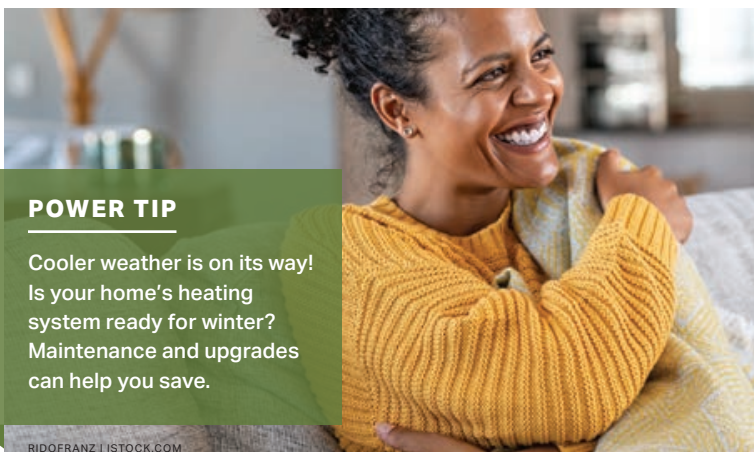
LAURI PATTERSON | ISTOCK.COM

Beach House Pasta

- 2 teaspoons dried shrimp
- 1 pound angel hair pasta or linguine
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- Pinch crumbled chile pequin
- 1 pound rock shrimp or other small shrimp, peeled and deveined, cut into small pieces
- Kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon chopped tarragon
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice, plus more to finish
- 3 tablespoons cold butter, diced
- 2 scallions, sliced

1. Grind dried shrimp with mortar and pestle; set aside.
2. Cook pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water until al dente. Drain it, reserving 1½ cups liquid.
3. Meanwhile, heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and chile and cook, stirring, about 1–2 minutes. Add rock shrimp, season with salt and cook, tossing, 1–2 minutes. Add the tarragon, parsley, lemon zest and juice, pasta, ¾ cup pasta cooking liquid, and butter, and toss to coat. Cook, tossing and adding more of the cooking liquid as needed, until sauce is glossy and coats pasta, and shrimp are cooked, about 3 minutes. Season with salt if needed.
4. Divide pasta among bowls and top with scallions and reserved dried shrimp.

TCP Find this and more delicious recipes online at TexasCoopPower.com.



POWER TIP

Cooler weather is on its way! Is your home's heating system ready for winter? Maintenance and upgrades can help you save.

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Raising the Stakes

Hill Country ranchers set fences generations ago that are as straight as they are sturdy

BY JOHN TALIAFERRO
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN TOMAC

WHERE DO FENCES COME FROM? This was a question that crossed my mind as I picked my way through a fractured, untracked, 2,000-acre “pasture” in Edwards County, persuasively one of the more remote corners of the Hill Country. The limestone strata rippled and crumbled beneath my boots like a quinceañera cake dropped in a dumpster a few thousand years ago. Tasajillo, agarita, prickly pear, mesquite and other underbrush pestered my pant legs and sleeves. Walking in a straight line was impossible. And yet, here, stubbornly striding across the ridge, 3 miles from the nearest excuse for a road, another 5 from an actual road, was a straight line: a fence.

This was once goat country, good for little else. Not enough forage to put meat on cattle but enough to put wool—mohair—on Angora goats, historic denizens of Central Asia. A century or so ago, some sunburnt savior had the wild idea that the Edwards Plateau looked a lot like Anatolia; and then came the First World War, when the Ottomans joined up with the Germans and kept their wool to themselves.

With lightweight, warm Turkish mohair in short supply for doughboy

socks and bedrolls, Angoras, now encouraged by Uncle Sam in the interest of national defense, became a windfall for Texans who otherwise struggled to scratch a living from the harsh escarpment from which the Concho, Llano, San Saba, Nueces, Frio, San Antonio, Pedernales and Guadalupe rivers escape, taking most of the soil with them. Edwards County—whose seat is Rocksprings, home of the fighting Angoras—was for a time the largest producer of mohair of any county in the United States. Goats grazed the gouged valleys and pocked hills, irregularly tended because the country was so damn difficult to navigate. Still, there had to be property lines and larger divisions of grazing ground so that, come shearing time, the animals could be gathered, sorted and relieved of their cash crop.

The hardest work was done by Mexicans and Mexican Americans, especially in the strong years of mohair ranching, when many Mexican nationals made their way across the Rio Grande to work seasonally, often for Anglo landowners. Shearing required the most hands, but there were other, less team-oriented tasks every bit as backbreaking. Take fencing, for instance. Take, specifically, the fence I happened upon in the backcountry whose most vital coordinates were up (a scorching sky) and down (the path of flash floods).

A Hill Country fence post is a marvel to behold. Think about it. The good news is that the raw material is close at hand; you can't swing a cat (er, armadillo) in Central Texas without hitting a cedar (true name Ashe juniper). The bad news is that cedar is as thick and tough as petrified jerky; its resin keeps it from rotting, but its density plays hell with an ax blade. The fence under study stretches for a couple of miles roughly east-west, by my estimation, and for the pasture to be a pasture, it likely has four sides to it. Say, for discussion, that this pasture has 10 miles of fence. With a cedar post every 20 yards or so, that could mean more than 800 cedar posts, *más o menos*.

A man heads into the hills. Can't get there in a pickup (or astride today's all-terrain vehicles). A horse isn't much help, either, in this chaos of sticks and stones. And so our fencer goes afoot, carrying with him an ax, a machete, an iron bar (known by some as a San Angelo bar) and another time-honored piece of equipment, a coffee can.

No point, literally, in a shovel; nothing to dig hereabouts. His boss has laid out the approximate route the fence is to follow, and he begins by clearing the course of unwanted cedar and brush and selecting worthy cedars nearby. He

must cut away outer branches to get to straighter limbs and trunks—the latter, 10–12 inches in diameter, serving as periodic brace and corner posts. Then with ax and machete, he trims and shapes his tree till it is a proper post. Now to work with his bar, breaking rock in the hot sun. He must chisel through limestone, sometimes bite-size but sometimes unmercifully solid, to make a hole at least a foot deep; the old rule for brace posts is deep as a man can reach. He removes the rock bits with his trusty can. Finally, sink the post and tamp it solid.

For a steady hand, this might take two hours per post. Times 800. Times however many pastures on the ranch. During my hike along this particular fence line, I kicked up quite a few cans, left over from untold lunches in the field. Forget heading back to headquarters for grub when you're miles of hard hoofing from home. There are more posts to cut and set. Not to mention to string with barbed wire—four strands to hold goats, with wooden sticks, or stickers, cut and carved, stiffening the spans at regular intervals between posts. Hauling wire into these hinterlands must have been hellacious, downright herculean. Ten miles of fence is a lot of sweat and beans. Months' worth. All said and done, a lifetime of hard labor.

The fence I admired is perhaps 70 years old. The goats have long gone, thanks to overgrazing, overseas competition, tougher immigration enforcement, fickle fashion and the rude withdrawal of the 1950s federal subsidy on mohair. The fencers are pretty much gone, too. Few goats, few jobs. Much of the wire has pulled its staples and droops with rust. The ravages of feral hogs are evident everywhere.

Still the cedar posts stand. Calling them works of art might be a stretch. Yet each is a work of craft, of pride—proof of honest, dedicated effort, skills befitting time and place. When next you drive through the Hill Country, by all means appraise the handiwork of evolution and erosion. But don't overlook the fenceposts. You're gazing at the artifacts of an earnest economy built by able men. Here is where fences come from. ■

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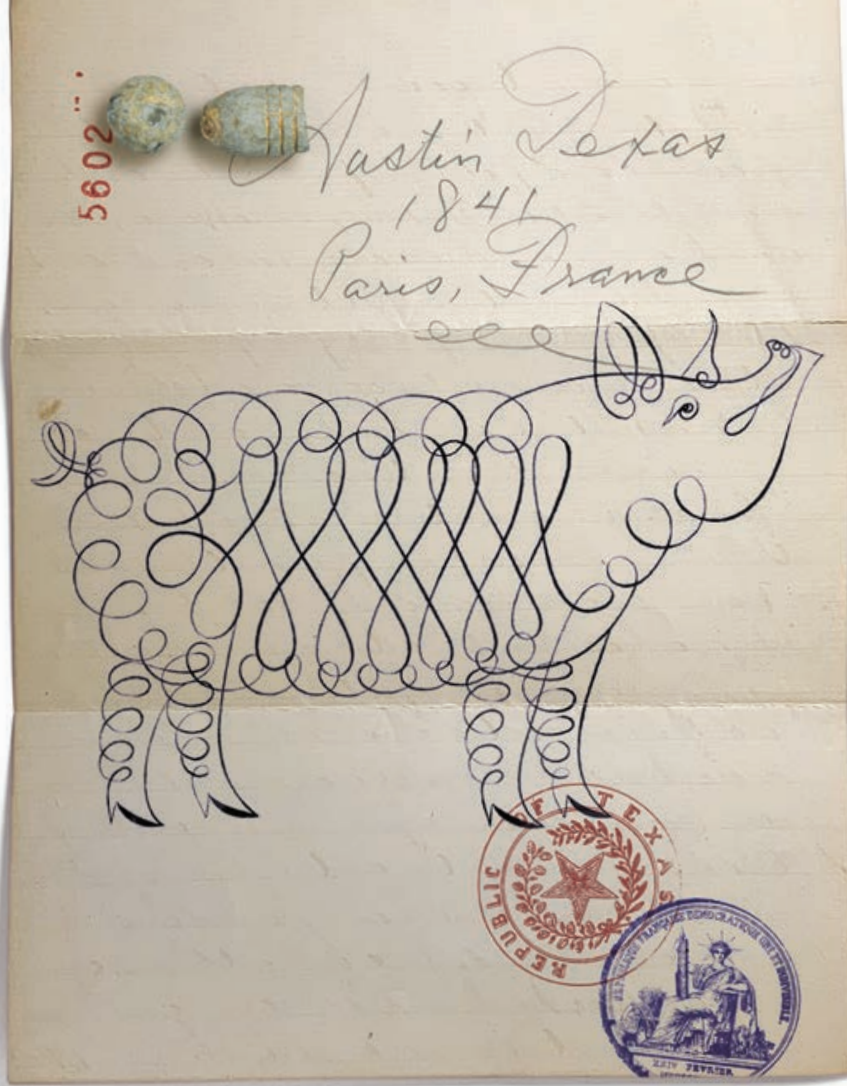
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France's Beef? Pigs

Ill-mannered hogs ruin France's attempt at a relationship with the newly independent Texas

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY MOLLOY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AFTER SECURING independence at San Jacinto, Texas was an independent country but one with no money and a shaky government. With no military force to secure its vast territory, Texas needed friends on the international stage and needed them quickly.

Texas turned first to the United States. Just months earlier, Stephen F. Austin had written, "We ought to get united to the United States as soon as possible."

Though the U.S. was not ready to pursue annexation, it was the first country to formally recognize the new sovereign nation. Congress made that move because it feared Britain or France might gain an inside track to the wealth of Texas.

The next country to recognize Texas

was France. A commercial treaty was signed September 25, 182 years ago, and it established import duties on Texas cotton in France and reduced import duties on French wines, brandies and silks in Texas ports. The French Legation was opened in Austin, and the Texas Legation was opened in Paris.

This recognition from France was of enormous significance because most European countries saw the Texas Revolution as internal unrest within Mexico and believed that Santa Anna might crush the rebellion and reclaim the wayward state.

Once recognized internationally, Texas needed support for its banking system. In 1841, Gen. James Hamilton, the Texas commissioner of loans, walked

TCP WEB EXTRA

Listen to W.F. Strong read this story.

into a French minister's office in Paris and asked for a \$5 million loan. The minister asked if he had any collateral, and the Texan said, "a territory as big as the kingdom of France."

At the time Texas was actually about 50% larger than France. It looked like this loan would sail through the French bureaucracy. Then some Texas pigs caused an international incident.

Back in Austin, hogs owned by the innkeeper Richard Bullock wandered onto the grounds of the French Legation and ate corn in the stable, tore up gardens and invaded the house. Dubois de Saligny, the chargé d'affaires of the legation, ordered his servant to shoot the pigs. An outraged Bullock wanted Saligny arrested, but Saligny claimed diplomatic immunity.

Bullock caught the servant outside the legation, beat him up and threatened to do the same to Saligny. The Frenchman cut off diplomatic relations with Texas before traveling to New Orleans. A year later, he returned to his post, but the pig war had effectively killed the loan.

Even so, Saligny's glowing reports of the unfathomable wealth and prosperity for which Texas was destined fueled France's interest in the nation.

By keeping close ties with Texas, France wanted to make a grab at the last foothold available for it in North America. Negotiations for a French colonization and stationing of 30,000 French troops along the Texas frontier continued un consummated until Texas was annexed by the U.S. in 1845.

France sacked Saligny for his ineptitude, and the trouble was all traced back to those pigs. As one French minister said of Saligny, "We can make mistakes, but we can't afford to look ridiculous." ■

Sweet Potatoes

Traditional holiday staple proves plenty versatile—from waffles to brownies

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Sweet potatoes are an ingredient that doesn't often get much love outside of the holidays, but these versatile spuds deserve a spot in your regular rotation. I try to make them at least once a week, changing up the preparation to keep my family from having dish fatigue. Mashed sweet potatoes are a great preparation, but we tend to have lots of leftovers each time. Enter sweet potato waffles, a lightly spiced way to brighten up any weekend breakfast.

Sweet Potato Waffles

2 cups flour
¼ cup packed dark brown sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
1½ cups milk
1 cup mashed sweet potatoes
¼ cup vegetable oil
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Spray oil, as needed

COOK'S TIP If you don't have a waffle maker, this recipe works beautifully for pancakes too.

- 1.** In a large bowl, combine flour, brown sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, ginger and nutmeg.
- 2.** In another bowl, whisk together milk, sweet potatoes, oil, eggs and vanilla until smooth.
- 3.** Pour wet mixture into dry and stir until completely incorporated and no dry bits remain.
- 4.** Preheat your waffle maker. Once hot, spray cooking plates with oil if needed, then scoop batter onto plates, close and cook according to the manufacturer's instructions. Keep waffles warm on a sheet pan in an oven set to low heat while you repeat with remaining batter.

SERVES 4

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Persimmon Sweet Potato Soup.





Oven-Roasted Sweet Potato Medley

BECKY POE
WOOD COUNTY EC

This easy side dish is excellent served with grilled proteins such as sausage or fish. Fresh cherry tomatoes added just before serving lend a pop of juicy sweetness, while the fresh jalapeño layers in heat.

- 1 pound sweet potatoes, cubed**
- 1 large poblano pepper, diced**
- 1 small red onion, cut into slivers**
- 1 cup cubed fresh pineapple, or 1 can (8 ounces) pineapple tidbits, drained**
- 2 tablespoons olive or avocado oil**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced**
- Juice of half a lime**
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, quartered**

1. Place a 12-by-18-inch rimmed baking sheet in the oven and preheat to 425 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, combine sweet potatoes, poblano, onion and pineapple. Add oil, salt and pepper and stir well to coat. Remove baking sheet from oven. Spread sweet potato medley onto heated baking sheet and roast 25 minutes, stirring halfway through.
3. Remove pan from oven and stir in cilantro and jalapeño. Drizzle with lime juice, then add cherry tomatoes and season to taste.

SERVES 4

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Texas Turkey Hash

HEATHER CARPENTER
TAYLOR EC



Spicy with a bit of sweetness, this hash makes an excellent breakfast, brunch or even dinner. Carpenter created the dish based on a favorite at an Abilene restaurant, making a few healthy substitutions along the way. Serve with a poached or fried egg for a more complete meal.

SERVES 4

- 2 cups cubed sweet potatoes, or 20 ounces frozen sweet potato cubes**
- 1 onion, chopped**
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped**
- 2 jalapeño peppers, sliced**
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt**
- 4 tablespoons grapeseed or olive oil, divided use**
- 1 pound turkey breakfast sausage**
- 2 pinches crushed red pepper flakes (optional)**
- 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Toss sweet potatoes, onion, garlic, jalapeños and garlic salt together with 2 tablespoons oil and spread onto a rimmed baking sheet. Roast in the oven 25–35 minutes or until fork-tender.
3. In a large skillet over medium heat, brown turkey sausage with red pepper flakes, if using. Transfer sausage to a bowl and set aside.
4. Using the same skillet, increase heat to medium high and add remaining oil and roasted vegetables. Add the maple syrup and stir once. Let potatoes cook, undisturbed, for a few minutes. Turn over a few pieces to check for browning; you want a crispy, brown potato.
5. Once potatoes are browned, stir in sausage and serve.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

PASTA DUE SEPTEMBER 10

From angel hair to ziti and manicotti to macaroni, pasta is a pantry staple. What's your prized dish? Enter at TexasCoopPower.com/contests by September 10 for a chance to win \$500.



Volcanic Sweet Potato Brownies

KANINA HADEL
PENTEX ENERGY

These brownies will surprise everyone at the dessert table. Supremely fudgy and rich, they're excellent topped with a dollop of whipped cream. This recipe makes a large batch but can easily be halved.

- 3 pounds sweet potatoes
- Butter, for the pan
- 2¾ cups (about 24 ounces) smooth almond butter
- ⅔–¾ cup molasses or pure maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup cocoa powder
- ½ cup almond flour
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt

COOK'S TIP For a less gooey brownie, refrigerate overnight before serving.

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees and place sweet potatoes on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake 50 minutes or until sweet potatoes are soft when pressed. Let cool.
2. Lower oven temperature to 350 degrees and butter a 9-by-13-inch pan.
3. In a large-capacity blender or food processor, purée sweet potatoes until smooth. Add almond butter and blend to mix well. Add molasses or maple syrup and vanilla and blend to mix.

4. In a medium bowl, stir together cocoa powder, almond flour, baking soda and salt. Add dry ingredients into sweet potato mixture and blend until uniform.
5. Pour batter into prepared pan and bake 40–45 minutes. Let cool completely before serving.

MAKES 32 BROWNIES

TCP WEB EXTRA We have more than 900 searchable recipes at TexasCoopPower.com, including a salad, casserole and stew that feature sweet potatoes. Just search for "sweet potatoes."

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This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

La Grange's Tribute

Monument Hill tomb honors Texans killed in two notable clashes

BY CHET GARNER

WE CELEBRATE THE Battle of San Jacinto as the grand finale of the Texas Revolution. In reality, the struggle was far from over in 1836. Mexico never officially ratified Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna's treaty of surrender and made numerous attempts to retake Texas.

I tripped to the Central Texas town of La Grange to learn more about a group of men who gave their lives in the name of Texas sovereignty.

La Grange is a charming town with an impressive 19th-century courthouse and plenty of places to grab an authentic Czech kolach. I discovered the best views just south of the square, on a bluff overlooking the Colorado River. At this scenic spot sits the Monument Hill State Historic Site along with the ruins of the Kreische Brewery, one of the state's first commercial beer producers. I wasn't looking for a historic pint; I wanted to learn more about the stories that had intrigued me since childhood.

Just past the visitors center, I found an above-ground tomb and a 48-foot-tall shellstone obelisk engraved with the story of the men laid to rest here. Many were killed outside San Antonio in the 1842 Dawson Massacre, after Mexican forces had successfully retaken control of the city. Others were from the 1843 Mier expedition in Mexico. Known as the Black Bean episode, 176 captured Texians had to draw beans to determine their fates. Those who drew one of the 17 black beans immediately faced a firing squad.

In 1848 residents of La Grange exhumed the remains of the fallen men from both sites and reinterred them in a tomb on this bluff. Even Sam Houston attended the ceremony. I paused for a solemn moment. Looking out over the Texas landscape, I pondered the lives lost to claim Texas. ■

ABOVE Chet at the Kreische Brewery State Historic Site.

TCP WEB EXTRA Join Chet in his latest video, which takes in this site overlooking the Colorado River. See all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Call or check an event's website for scheduling details.

SEPTEMBER

09

Addison Vitruvian Nights Live: Bidi Bidi Banda, (972) 590-8866, [udr.com/vitruvian-park-events](http://udr.com/vitruvian-park/vitruvian-park-events)

10

Fredericksburg [10-12] Fall Planting Days Kick-Off, 1-800-848-0078, wildseedfarms.com

11

Conroe American Cancer Society Relay For Life/Bark For Life, (936) 520-0718, relayforlife.org/mocotx

Luckenbach LuckenRod Car Show & Music Festival, (830) 997-3224, luckenbachtexas.com

New Braunfels Gruene 10K/5K, 1-877-806-3987, athleteguild.com

New Braunfels Lady A: What A Song Can Do Tour 2021, (830) 964-3800, whitewaterrocks.com

Gainesville [11-19] Gainesville Area Visual Arts Fall Art Exhibition, (940) 613-6939, gainesvilleareavisualarts.org

Palestine [11, 17-18, 24-25] Texas State Railroad Diesel Roundtrip, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

16

New Braunfels Come and Taste It, (830) 606-0093, grapevinegruene.com

Grapevine [16-19] Grape-Fest, 1-800-457-6338, grapevinetexasusa.com/grapefest

17

Grandview [17-19] Antique Alley Texas, (817) 666-5024, antiquealleytexas.com

Amarillo [17-25] Tri-State Fair and Rodeo, (806) 376-7767, tristatefair.com

18

Bay City Jason Anderson Memorial Golf Tournament, (979) 240-4575, jamgt.com

Blanco Classic Car Show, (512) 632-0648, blancoclassiccarshow.com

Bullard Wine on Main, (903) 894-4238, m6winery.com

Flower Mound Christ Child Fiesta, (972) 816-3862, christchildsocietydfw.org

Ponder Labor Day Roping, (940) 479-2043, dentoncountycowboychurch.org

Huntsville [18-19] Antique Show, (936) 661-2545, facebook.com/huntsville.antiqueshow

New Braunfels [18-19] Old Gruene Market Days, (830) 832-1721, playinnewbraunfels.com

21

Kerrville [21-25] Paint Kerrville, (830) 895-2911, kacckerrville.com

24

Brenham Aaron Barker and Allen Shamblin, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

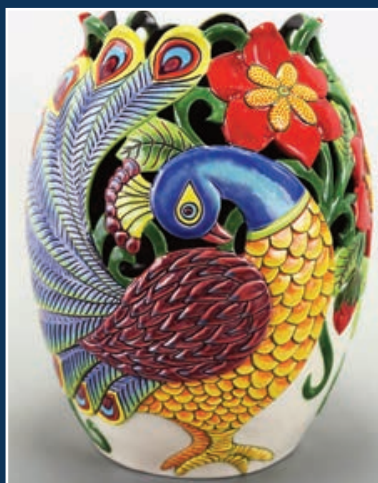
Austin [24-25] Capital of Texas Vintage Postcard & Paper Show and Sale, (512) 775-6796, ctxpc.org

[MORE EVENTS >](#)

TCP *Submit Your Event*

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

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Sept 25-26
txartsandcraftsfair.com



Kerrville Outdoor Painters Event
Sept 22-26
kacckerrville.com



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Fredericksburg

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Pick of the Month

Leander Educational Excellence Foundation MUDstacle & Family Fun Run

Cedar Park, September 18
(512) 570-0027
leef.tx.gov/mudstacle

The name is a mouthful, and the event itself can be too if you're not careful. Participants pass through seven levels of a mud forest and a sea of swirly noodles and then walk the plank before reaching the finish line.

SEPTEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

24

Galveston [24-25] Galveston Island Shrimp Festival, (409) 770-0999, galvestonislandshrimpfestival.com

Harper [24-25] Frontier Days Celebration, (830) 864-5048, harpercommunitypark.org

Victoria [24-25] Memories in the Making Quilt Show, (281) 506-8465, quiltguildvictoria.org

25

Lakehills Medina Lake Cajun Festival, (830) 460-0600, cajunfestival-medinalake.com

Mason Old Yeller Day, (325) 347-5758, masontxcoc.com

Paradise Main Street Festival, (940) 389-2654, paradisehistoricalsociety.org

Ingram [25-26] Texas Arts and Crafts Fair, (830) 367-5121, txartsandcraftsfair.com

26

Rosanky St. Mary of the Assumption Homecoming Festival, (512) 359-2448, stmarysp.church

30

New Braunfels [30-Oct. 2] Hollydays Market, (281) 788-4297, homefortheholidaysgiftmarket.com

OCTOBER

01

Arlington [1-3] Ramblin' Roads Music Festival, (817) 303-2800, ramblinroadsfest.com

Fredericksburg [1-3] Lone Star Gourd Festival, (512) 964-5540, texasgourdsociety.org

Fredericksburg [1-3] Oktoberfest, (830) 997-4810, oktoberfestinfbg.com

Georgetown [1-3] Popptoberfest, 1-800-436-8696, popptoberfest.georgetown.org

Kerrville [1-11] Kerrville Folk Festival, (830) 257-3600, kerrvillefolkfestival.org

02

Boerne Book and Arts Festival, (830) 249-3053, boernebookfest.com

DeKalb Oktoberfest, (903) 277-3519, facebook.com/dekalb.oktoberfest

Kerrville Kerr County 4-H Wild Game Dinner, (830) 257-6568, kerr.agrilife.org

Mason Mason County Republican Women's Home Tour, (325) 294-4016, masontxcoc.com

Rust and Decay

Some say it's better to wear out than to rust out. But our readers see more than an old rust bucket. We're nowhere near the Rust Belt, but just look at these beauties, weathered by the elements and taken over by nature.

BY GRACE FULTZ

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT

BRITNEY CASTILLO
CENTRAL TEXAS EC
Overgrown.

BETTY ALVARADO
COSERV

An old tractor near a city park in Round Rock.

KAY BELL
NUECES EC

"This car lies where it died, and the desert is slowly reclaiming the rusting hulk."

RAY LITTLE
KARNES EC

Granddaddy's Jeep.



Upcoming Contests

DUE SEP 10 **Fired Up!**

DUE OCT 10 **Public Art**

DUE NOV 10 **The Texas Experience**

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Sowing Perspective

Getting outdoors grants long-awaited inner peace

BY BABS RODRIGUEZ
ILLUSTRATION BY MITCH BLUNT

LIKE SO MANY Americans, as I've gotten older and with grown and flown children, I've found myself filling my time with more hours of my "day" job. When the pandemic had me stuck at home, I almost never left my desk. It was as if I came to believe that my industry—manacning nouns to verbs—was needed to keep the world ticking on.

Meanwhile, the backyard I worked so hard to tame when I first bought my house was manicured by a crew of strangers and less and less often enjoyed by loved ones. After winter's brutal last blast, I decided it was time to change all of that. I forced myself to put my phone down, turn off the cable news channel and wander outside.

I found the dandelion digger, es-chewed gardening gloves and, for two hours, stretched my back, legs and

arms pulling and twisting handfuls of weeds from the beds of drought-resistant natives. I was grateful for the gentle surrender the damp, soft soil afforded. I spoke to the pink buds of my Mexican buckeye and welcomed back the desert willow while whispering words of encouragement to the freeze-traumatized American beautyberry.

I did not curse the agave when it stabbed me, and I took the time to salute the bright yellow dandelion blossoms and profusion of purple buds on the hen-bit. I apologized that they had to go and acknowledged that in another world or age or garden, they might be the stars. Being assigned the status of weed seems subjective, after all. "Clover," I said, "the luck is not yours today." It offered up no four-leaf rebuttal.

And when my labor was done, I sat in my most seasoned lawn chair and listened to the birds. I tilted my head back and, with my eyes closed, I watched the patterns of clouds dart across my inner eyelids. I heard an ambulance siren in the distance and, without thinking, said the prayer the nuns taught me 50 years ago to say for those in need.

I took deep breaths and sat still for a long time, grateful that I have such a spot in which to gather myself. And I followed that mental garden path to plant seeds of gratitude for lessons learned in this past year, corners turned, memories recovered and priorities reorganized.

Now I am vowing to reap daily the harvest fruits of that day's labor, whether for 10 minutes or an hour of outdoor time on my creaky deck, watering my herbs, learning the names of the birds who visit. Sowing perspective has me harvesting an inner peace that had proved elusive while I labored so long without looking up. ■

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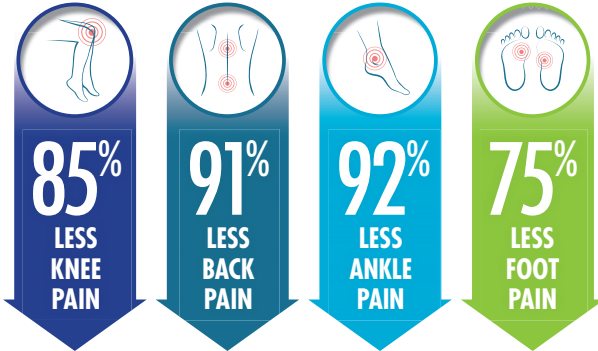


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