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Eduardo Garza of Mission was one of the big winners at the 2019 Big Squeeze youth accordion competition.

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By Joe Nick Patoski

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By Joe Nick Patoski



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GARZA: COURTESY TEXAS FOLKLIFE. RATTLESNAKE: FIVESPOTS | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



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**ON THE COVER** Flaco Jiménez brought the conjunto accordion to Amsterdam in 1989. Photo by Frans Schellekens | Getty Images

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*Twist in the Wind*  
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**NEXT MONTH**

**A Snake To Love** An outdoors journalist comes to admire rattlesnakes, which are not the evil beings of legend and myth.

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**\$99.99** **NOW \$49.99**

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MODEL: SC1

ITEM 69955/64284/42292 shown



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## SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

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Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$199.99** **NOW \$169.99**

COMPARE TO KLUTCH **\$299.99** **SAVE \$130**

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ITEM 63464/63457/45951 shown



13750193

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## SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

**POWDER-FREE NITRILE GLOVES PACK OF 100**

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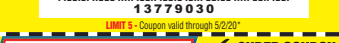
Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$7.99** **NOW \$5.99**

COMPARE TO VENOM **\$14.97** **SAVE 59%**

MODEL: VEN4145

ITEM 37050, 64417, 61363, 68496, 68497, 61360, 61359, 68498, 64418 shown



13779030

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- Boom extends from 34" to 45"
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Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$189.99** **NOW \$139.99**

COMPARE TO GOPLUS **\$229.99** **SAVE \$90**

MODEL: GP-101049150

ITEM 69512/61858 shown



13793962

LIMIT 1 - Coupon valid through 5/2/20

## SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

**4 PIECE, 1" x 15 FT. RATCHETING TIE DOWNS**

- 400 lb. working load

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$12.99** **NOW \$6.99**

COMPARE TO KEEPER **\$22.80** **SAVE 69%**

MODEL: S505

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LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 5/2/20

## SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

**ALKALINE PLUS BATTERIES AA, AAA - 18 PK**

- Also available in C - 4 pk, D - 4 pk, and 9 volt - 2 pk sizes

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**\$13.97** **NOW \$6.99**

COMPARE TO DURACELL **\$13.97** **SAVE 49%**

MODEL: 004133303032

Item 64490 shown



13757462

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**AIRLESS PAINT SPRAYER KIT**

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**\$219.99** **NOW \$164.99**

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Customer Rating **★★★★★**

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COMPARE TO HONDA **\$2,069** **SAVE \$1,739**

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ITEM 63963/63962 shown



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**4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER**

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Customer Rating **★★★★★**

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COMPARE TO PERFORMAX **\$17.99** **SAVE 44%**

MODEL: 2411-1

ITEM 69645/60625 shown



13822208

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## SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

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**\$59.99** **NOW \$39.99**

COMPARE TO RANGEMAXX **\$99** **SAVE 65%**

MODEL: 1312-92

ITEM 63135/61451 shown



13823528

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 5/2/20

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**RAPID RUM® 3 TON STEEL HEAVY DUTY LOW PROFILE FLOOR JACK**

- Weighs 78 lbs.

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$189.99** **NOW \$99.99**

COMPARE TO TEQ CORRECT **\$189.99** **SAVE \$90**

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Item 56618/56619/56620/56617 shown



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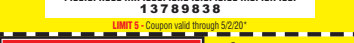
Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$8.99** **NOW \$5.99**

COMPARE TO BLUE HAWK **\$19.99** **SAVE 70%**

MODEL: 77280

ITEM 69505/62418/66537 shown



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## SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

**1 TON CAPACITY FOLDABLE SHOP CRANE**

- Boom extends from 34" to 45"
- Crane height adjusts from 69-5/8" to 82"

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$189.99** **NOW \$139.99**

COMPARE TO GOPLUS **\$229.99** **SAVE \$90**

MODEL: GP-101049150

ITEM 69512/61858 shown



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## SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

**4 PIECE, 1" x 15 FT. RATCHETING TIE DOWNS**

- 400 lb. working load

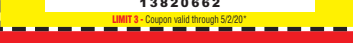
Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**\$12.99** **NOW \$6.99**

COMPARE TO KEEPER **\$22.80** **SAVE 69%**

MODEL: S505

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LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 5/2/20

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MODEL: S322A-1

ITEM 67514



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## Scrumptious and Healthy

I am tickled to death to welcome Megan Myers as the new food editor [*New Year's Resolution*, January 2020]. I have eaten healthy most of my life and am excited to be able to consult *Texas Co-op Power* for new recipes.

The January meals look scrumptious, so I am already a fan.

ELAINE FRIEDBERG | BRENHAM BLUEBONNET EC

When I was in college, I had to subsist on the meal plan since money was tight. A vegetable that was often served in the cafeteria was Brussels sprouts. I absolutely hated them.

As I have gotten older, I have learned how important it is to eat fresh vegetables.

I can't say enough good things about Megan Myers' recipe for Spicy Glazed Brussels Sprouts. It was easy, and even my husband enjoyed the tasty vegetables.

NANCY GLASSCOCK | SONORA SOUTHWEST TEXAS EC



## Brews and Pews

Back Pew Brewing in Porter is located on acreage that once belonged to a little country church [*Texas Feels a Draft*,

## Courthouses as Art

As an artist and student of Texas courthouse architecture, I loved Sheryl Smith-Rodgers' article about architect James Riely Gordon [*Gordon's Gold*, January 2020]. Gordon's iconic structures make some of the most interesting subjects for my Texas courthouse drawings [Wise County, right].

I suspect that there was a rivalry between counties for who could commission the grandest structure, and Gordon was certainly proactive promoting his vision of civic buildings.

NORMAN BEAN | MARTINDALE | BLUEBONNET EC



January 2020]. The church interior has been redesigned into a taproom for customers.

The owners invited the priest from St. Isidore Episcopal Church and the congregation to come and help bless their brewery.

MARY VAZQUEZ | MONTGOMERY MIDSOUTH EC

## Tamalada Tradition

We used to do *tamaladas* with my mom and all eight daughters [*The Call of the Tamalada*, December 2019]. Sadly, we lost Mom [a] few years ago, and this year we lost one of our sisters, but the tradition continues even as our circle gets smaller.

BETTY KEIPER | VIA FACEBOOK

At the risk of coming across too picky, I would like to point out that the singular of tamales is not *tamale*; it is *tamal*. In Spanish, when a word ends in "l," it

will be pluralized by adding "es."

MIKE MCEWEN | JACKSONVILLE CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

**Editor's Note:** Yes, in Spanish, the singular is *tamal*, originally *tamalli* in the Nahuatl language. However, the word has been adapted into English as *tamale*.

## Letters About Letters

Having grown up in a ranching family, I knew how to change a tire and drive stick shift early on [Letters, January 2020]. Having taught high school 37 years, I always told my students they needed to know those two things, even if they never needed to use them.

CHARLOTTE CASSIN | BATESVILLE MEDINA EC

A reader proposes a "dues requirement in Texas for VFDs." Emergency services districts may

be created where all property owners—not just those who feel like it—contribute, and many volunteer fire departments receive funding via the ESD mechanism. Voters must approve the proposed district and tax rate.

RON BOERGER | BRUSHY CREEK PEDERNALES EC

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

   **Texas Co-op Power**

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## HAPPENINGS

# The Box Tops Are Back

A theater from the 1940s brings a soul band from the 1960s to a 2020s Texas audience.

The **BOX TOPS** of Memphis, Tennessee, who released a string of hit singles in the late 1960s, are back on the scene and play a show **MARCH 13** at the Brauntex Theatre in downtown **NEW BRAUNFELS**.

The Box Tops' heyday was short-lived, but they became a sensation with hit singles *The Letter*, *Cry Like a Baby* and *Soul Deep*.

The Brauntex has a storied history, opening a month after the bombing of Pearl Harbor with a showing of *Birth of the Blues*, starring Bing Crosby and Mary Martin. Today, it is a regular stop for touring and Texas acts.

**INFO** ▶ (830) 627-0808, [brauntex.org/tickets.html](http://brauntex.org/tickets.html)

### WEB EXTRAS

▶ Find more happenings online.



**BOX TOPS, 1968**

## FLASHBACK

### 175 Years Ago

**Congress passed** a joint resolution annexing Texas on March 1, 1845, and on December 29 that year, Texas joined the union as the 28th state.



## SPORTS SECTION

### RANGERS ARE MADE IN THE SHADE

**Plenty of Texas Rangers** fans will tell you it was the best catch they've ever seen. During a game at then-Ameriquest Field in Arlington on July 1, 2006, Mike Lamb of the Houston Astros sent a shot barreling toward the wall in center field. The Rangers' Gary Matthews gave chase, leapt and snagged the ball with his back to home plate, twisting in the air to rob a home run.

**"People are always** bringing it up," Matthews told the *Los Angeles Times* a year later. "A few days ago, I was on deck in Cincinnati, and I heard a guy in the crowd say, 'That's the best catch I've ever seen.'"

**Over the course** of 26 seasons, sunny Globe Life Park in Arlington saw scores of big moments, including a perfect game pitched by Kenny Rogers on July 28, 1994.

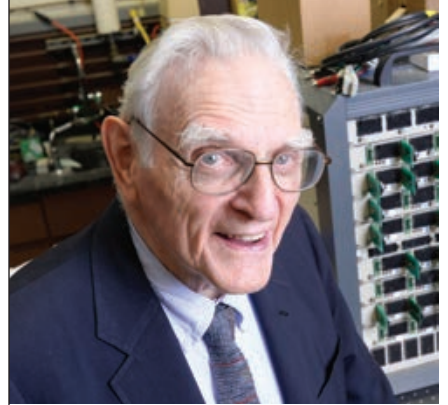
**But when the Rangers** take the field for the start of the season March 31, players—and fans—will no longer have to contend with the sun. The new \$1.1 billion Globe Life Field, just across the street, features 40,000 seats under a retractable roof.

BY THE NUMBERS

➔ *Did you know?*

The rubber band was patented 175 years ago. British inventor Stephen Perry received his patent March 17, 1845.

More than 30 million pounds of rubber bands are sold in the U.S. every year.



TECH KNOWLEDGE

## Powering the World

The average Texan retires when they're about 64 years old.

John Goodenough passed that mark back in 1986, the same year he joined the University of Texas, after decades spent developing lithium-ion batteries.

He hasn't stopped.

Now, Goodenough, who's 97, is the oldest person to win the Nobel Prize—for his battery breakthroughs that power the smartphones, laptops and cars we use every day. He shares the prize with two other scientists.

Of course, Goodenough is still going. He still works 8-10 hours a day, according to his assistant at UT, and just last year announced a breakthrough: non-flammable, glass powder-based lithium-ion batteries with twice the energy density of traditional lithium-ion cells.

Maybe he'll retire at 100. We hope not.



*The largest rubber band ball ever made used 700,000 rubber bands and stood 6 feet, 7 inches tall. It was made by a Florida man. Some things aren't always bigger in Texas.*

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

*Why do dogs always . . .*



► Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Your answers can be silly, serious, deep or superficial. Email your short responses to [letters@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:letters@TexasCoopPower.com) or post them on our Facebook page. Please include your city and co-op.

Below are some of the responses to our January prompt:  
**I knew I was grown up when ...**

I could kill my own spiders.  
SYLVIA WILLIAMS | NEW BOSTON | BOWIE-CASS EC

I sat at the dinner table and realized my feet touched the floor.  
GEORGE MCNEW | SPRING BRANCH | PEDERNALES EC

I realized I could eat ice cream for breakfast if I wanted.  
ROBIN HODGES | BANDERA | BANDERA EC

To see more responses, read Currents on our website.



SOUL MUSIC OF SOUTH



BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

# CONJUNTO, BUILT UPON A POLKA RHYTHM, TURNS ACCORDIONS AND 12-STRING GUITARS INTO A UNIQUE SOUND AND SUBCULTURE



**D**arren David Prieto played the accordion in Carnitas Uruapan, a meat market on the west side of San Antonio, one Sunday morning in 2016 while customers lined up for tamales and carnitas. Back then, the market hosted a weekly residency with accordionist Santiago Jiménez Jr., younger brother of accordion legend Flaco Jiménez. The gig was practice for Jiménez, but for Prieto, it was an apprenticeship and a steppingstone to a career performing the soul music of South Texas.

Jiménez introduced the shy teenager from New Braunfels, then 16, as “*mi protegido*”—his protégé—and, blushing, Prieto nodded toward Jiménez and added, “*Mi profesor.*” This unlikely venue and early start time was a very big deal for the slight, quiet young man because as part of a new generation of conjunto accordionists, it was his opportunity to learn from a master.

As Jiménez played his diatonic button accordion, accompanied by a sideman strumming chords on a 12-string guitar called a *bajo sexto*, pounding out a rhythm to propel the sounds from Jiménez’s accordion, the meat market’s owner occasionally walked out from behind the counter to harmonize with Jiménez in vocal duets. “Margarita, Margarita,” they crooned, faces inches from each other. Sit-ins from the neighborhood were part of the weekly routine. Grammy Award winner Max Baca of Los Texmaniacs walked into Carnitas wearing a football jersey and shorts rather than his western stage outfit and sat in with the band, playing bajo sexto.

**Opposite: Joel Guzmán at the Alamo.  
Above: Teenage conjunto performer  
Darren David Prieto in 2015.**

TEXAS

GUZMÁN: JOHN DYER. PRIETO: COURTESY TEXAS FOLK LIFE

AT A TIME WHEN MOST AMERICAN  
ROOTS MUSIC'S POPULARITY  
IS ON THE DOWNSWING,  
CONJUNTO'S ROOTS  
ARE SPREADING.



Conjunto's bouncy rhythm, typically a polka, is why it is also known as *música alegre*, happy music. Like blues and country, conjunto—pronounced coh-noon-toe—is indigenous, only regionally specific to South Texas, with mostly Spanish lyrics. In South Texas, and anywhere conjunto's influence extends, the term is applied to both sound and subculture.

Conjunto has two key instruments: the diatonic button accordion, which, like a harmonica, changes notes as air is pushed or pulled past vibrating reeds, and the bajo sexto, which provides the rhythm and backbeat. Most modern conjuntos also include drums, guitar and bass.

At a time when most American roots music's popularity is on the downswing, conjunto's roots are spreading. Public school programs in La Joya, Los Fresnos, Brownsville and other towns across the Rio Grande Valley have added conjunto to their curricula,

and bajo sexto classes are taught weekly at the Conjunto Heritage Taller and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. "We get them from 8 to 80," said Rodolfo Lopez, Conjunto Heritage Taller director. "Conjunto is us, *la gente*. This is a unique music form." Kids from the *taller* (workshop) have dominated the statewide Big Squeeze youth accordion competition sponsored by Texas Folklife since its inception in 2007.

#### WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to learn where to see and hear conjunto music. And check out our playlist.

Conjunto was born in the late 19th century when German immigrants introduced the button accordion to South Texas. In part because of its rural roots, it was known as cantina music. Conjunto made its commercial debut in the 1920s and '30s, when Columbia and Bluebird joined other labels in the fledgling recording business, setting up



**Clockwise from opposite page: Santiago Jiménez Jr., who gave accordion lessons to Prieto. Los Texmaniacs have taken conjunto as far as China. With her 12-string guitar, Lydia Mendoza became the first female star of Mexican American music. San Antonio's Eva Ybarra is known as the Queen of the Accordion. Narciso Martínez was one of the recording pioneers of conjunto.**

studios in rooms at San Antonio's Gunter and Bluebonnet hotels as well as at local WOAI radio to record musicians solicited by talent scouts. Conjunto accordionists were recruited to San Antonio alongside bluesman Robert Johnson, western swingsters Bill Boyd & His Cowboy Ramblers and the Tex-Czech sounds of Adolph Hofner as well as Texan Mexican singer Lydia Mendoza.

The instrumentals by those conjunto accordionists sounded Mexican with additional Bohemian, Czech and German elements, reflecting the influence of the immigrant communities of South Texas.

Texas conjunto recording pioneers Bruno Villarreal from Santa Rosa, Narciso Martínez of La Paloma and Santiago Jiménez of San Antonio all eavesdropped on Czech, German and Polish dances in South Texas and incorporated what they heard into their own music.

Conjunto follows neither mariachi nor ranchera traditions, nor is it *norteño*, the accordion style popular in northern Mexico. "It's a melding of European music and the Mexican bajo sexto," Rodolfo Lopez explained, noting that Czech *redowas*, Bohemian *schottisches*, waltzes and polkas all came from Europe. "We just added our jalapeño chiltepin flavor to it."

Flaco Jiménez, the older of conjunto pioneer Santiago Jiménez's two sons, expanded awareness of the genre in 1973, appearing on the album *Doug Sahm and Band*, featuring the rock musician from San Antonio and an all-star lineup that included Bob Dylan. Sahm sought out and played bajo sexto with Flaco Jiménez in his back-



yard on San Antonio's west side. "He could groove," Jiménez said.

Flaco Jiménez would ultimately take conjunto accordion around the world, recording with Ry Cooder, Peter Rowan, the Rolling Stones, Dwight Yoakum and Emmylou Harris before joining the Tex-Mex supergroup Texas Tornados.

Esteban "Steve" Jordan of Elsa, a dashing figure with an eyepatch known as the Jimi Hendrix of the accordion, also worked as a conjunto innovator. One record label described Jordan's style as *acordeón psicodélico*. If Jiménez was the standard-bearer, Jordan was the experimentalist—always pushing the envelope until his passing in 2010.

Another notable exporter of conjunto accordion is Joel Guzmán of Buda, who performs with his wife, Sarah Fox, as Aztex; plays and records with country rocker Joe Ely; and joined Paul Simon on his Homeward Bound tour. One of few professional female accordionists, Eva Ybarra earned a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2017.

Conjunto is no longer exclusively a Texas thing. Japan has several conjuntos who were inspired by Flaco Jiménez's appearance in their country with the Texas Tornados. Dwayne Verheyden from the Netherlands mastered Jiménez's playing style, then mastered Spanish to better communicate with Jiménez and conjunto audiences. After his performance at the Tejano Conjunto Fest in San Antonio in 2014, fans patiently lined up to have their picture taken with him, as if he was the Justin Bieber of conjunto.

Conjunto's crossover appeal comes to life in the music of Conjunto Los Pinkys, an Austin band led by octogenarian Isidro

Samilpa; a middle-aged Polish import from Saginaw, Michigan, named Bradley Jay Williams; and Mark Weber, an accordionist from San Antonio. Another crossover success is Stevie Ray Vavages of the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona, who learned the bajo sexto playing the native sound called chicken scratch.

Darren Prieto is part of the next wave.

Typical of most Texas kids, he grew up listening to rock, country, jazz and hip-hop. Not typical of most Texas kids, he chose to play accordion when he was 14. "I was always with my grandfather," he explained. "Around our house, conjunto music was always on. I listened to all types of conjunto, from Los Pavo Reales to Ruben Naranjo." The summer before he entered high school, Prieto picked up his grandfather's accordion, just as his own father once had. By that September, he'd learned some polkas. "I started falling in love," Prieto said.

Those Sunday morning performances on the small stage at Carnitas Uruapan, where he learned from Santiago Jiménez Jr., stoked Prieto's creative fire. "He helped me learn to get over stage fright, how to talk to the crowd and even how to be a humble musician," Prieto said.

The gigs at Carnitas Uruapan stopped in 2018 when the owner retired. But Prieto remains tight with Jiménez. "You can hear a little bit of Santiago Jiménez Jr.'s style in my own playing," Prieto said. "Playing conjunto music is so fun. It isn't like any other music. It has that beat that makes you want to dance. It makes you feel alive."

Writer **Joe Nick Patoski**, a confessed conjunto addict, lives outside Wimberley and is a member of Pedernales EC.

**Esteban "Steve" Jordan began playing accordion at the age of 7.**

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# TEXAS' MAIN SQUEEZE

Chris Rybak continues a tradition brought to Texas by European settlers in the 1800s. Inset: Rybak as an 11-year-old.



BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

# THE ACCORDION HAS BEEN A BELOVED MUSICAL INSTRUMENT SINCE IT GOT HERE

Of all the musical instruments brought to Texas by German, Czech, Polish and Moravian immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the accordion made the most unexpected inroads among Mexican, Cajun and Creole communities who embraced it as their instrument of choice. Generations later, squeezeboxes still move Texans.

Chris Rybak, known as the Accordion Cowboy, who hails from Hallettsville, explains that when he picked up the instrument 30 years ago, at age 11, accordion-playing bandleader Lawrence Welk was a big thing. “But that also made accordion not so cool,” he says, adding that now it’s heard in jazz, rock and a wide variety of other musical genres. “It doesn’t have to be just your grandpa’s ompah anymore.”

Packing the full-bodied sound of an entire band into one instrument, the accordion, invented in Europe in the 1820s, provided entertainment at dances of all kinds as Texas was settled. Without the need for electricity or amplification, its sound carried farther than stringed instruments.

The accordion was a key instrument for western swing bands in the 1930s and ’40s. It remains the most versatile musical instrument going in Texas, straddling regions and borders and injecting its sound into rock, country, blues, jazz and zydeco. It’s the defining instrument of conjunto, the folk music of South Texas, and the faster-paced *norteño*, a folk music of northern Mexico that is similar to conjunto.

Without the accordion, there would be no Mark Halata at Wursthfest, no Brave Combo playing WestFest, no Ennis Czech Boys working the National Polka Festival, no Fritz Hodde and the Fabulous Six performing at an SPJST hall.

The European-style accordion, the traditional large instrument with piano keys on the right-hand side that functions like a glorified organ, is favored by the Bohemians, Czechs, Poles and Germans of South and Central Texas; some Zydeco bands around Houston and southeast Texas; and Fort Worth’s Ginny Mac and Austin’s Debra Peters. It can weigh upward of 30 pounds.

Conjuntos and some zydeco bands favor the smaller, diatonic model of accordion with buttons on both sides that change notes as you push and pull and has considerably faster action. Texas Cajuns play an even smaller, simpler diatonic model with fewer buttons.



**Accordionist and band leader Emil Schuhmann of Fayette County in the 1890s.**

Rybak explains that Czech, German, German-Polish, Tejano and Cajun music each embody a distinct style. “On the other hand, when you go to a conjunto place,” he says, “the band will

throw in a few Czech songs. And vice versa. The accordion is distinctive, and it can cross boundaries and cultures.”

The universality of the accordion is celebrated at the Accordion Kings and Queens at the Miller Outdoor Theatre in Houston on the first Saturday in June, a production of Texas Folklife. All the bands onstage feature accordions as the lead instrument, but the performers sing in English, Spanish, French, German, Polish and Czech, reflecting each group’s ethnic background. Despite those differences, everyone dances the same on the dance floor, moving in a counterclockwise direction.

These days, Rybak says he mostly uses a digital accordion, which has changed his instrument much the way a digital keyboard changed piano playing. He can create blaring trumpets to open the Johnny Cash standard *Ring of Fire*.

“I would say for most shows, I play 70 or 80% with a digital accordion,” he says. “And that’s what the new generation really loves, too. They can do anything on it.”

Although Joe Nick Patoski gave up piano accordion for violin at age 7, he owns a button accordion autographed by Flaco Jiménez.

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# The Value of Electricity Continues To Shine



## MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

**HOW MANY OF US REMEMBER DROPPING INTO** Houston County Electric Cooperative's office with our parents and grandparents to pay the "light" bill? Whether you do that in person, by mail or online today, paying your monthly bill does a lot more than just keep the lights on.

Electricity keeps us connected to our modern world. Consider all the necessities and conveniences you enjoy in part because of power lines running to the electric meter outside your home.

Count up your TVs, computers, printers, gaming consoles, music and video players, and other devices. Whether they get

household wiring to your electric co-op.

You use electricity to run all these devices, heat the stove, run the AC and get hot water—and we still keep the lights on. The good news is, even as we rely more on electricity, it's still a bargain, especially compared to other things we pay for regularly.

Over the past 10 years, the cost of medical care, residential rental rates and education costs have increased at rates of 3% or more per year. Butter, meat and egg costs have gone up by more than 2% annually, and even bread costs have risen better than a half point on average per year.

Electricity costs have risen a bit too (about 1% a year), but co-ops across the country report a decline in average residential use per household since 2010. That means we're doing more things with less energy. Kilowatt-hour use per household has dropped by 8% over the past 10 years.

When it comes to value, electricity is a clear winner, and we're always looking for ways to work with you to make it even better. That's why Houston County EC encourages energy efficiency through such items as Energy Star-certified appliances and promotes technology designed to give members more control over their electricity use. These tools also give you opportunities to control or even trim your monthly utility bills.

That's good for family budgets. And it's going to become even



used every day or just occasionally, the electricity that keeps them working comes from Houston County EC.

Have you looked around your kitchen lately? In addition to the coffee maker, toaster, microwave and electric skillet, a lot of us have added several other modern small appliances.

If you've got a craft nook or workshop, the power tools and machines you use to cut and shape your projects are either plugged in or recharged from the outlets connecting your

more important as digital devices and internet-connected technologies become even more prevalent in our lives. The average American home has dozens of Wi-Fi-connected devices that depend on stable electricity. That's why your home depends on Houston County EC for more than the power that keeps the lights on.

We're always working to provide service that's reliable, affordable and even more valuable to our consumer-members.



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TEXAS CONSISTENTLY RANKS AMONG THE FIVE STATES THAT SEE THE MOST TORNADOES annually. Our state experiences an average of 132 twisters each year, although that total can vary considerably, and certain areas are struck more often than others.

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Spring is the most likely season for twisters to occur, but they can happen year-round. That's why it's wise to never underestimate their danger.

## Practice and Prepare

- ▶ Know where you'll meet your family during the tornado (and after). Practice a tornado drill annually. Keep a weather radio and safety supplies in your shelter.

## Know the Signs

- ▶ Look for swirling clouds. Watch for quick wind shifts or stark calm after heavy rain. Listen for a loud roar or rumble that doesn't fade.
- ▶ A tornado watch means a tornado is possible. A tornado warning means a tornado has been identified by weather radar. Go to your safe place immediately.

## Seek Shelter

- ▶ Go to a small interior room, under stairs on the lowest floor of the house or to your basement. Avoid windows and, for added protection, get under something sturdy, such as a heavy table. Cover your body with a sleeping bag, mattress or blanket.
- ▶ If you live in a mobile home, get out and look for a substantial building.
- ▶ If you are outside, find low ground—away from trees and cars—and lie face down with your arms protecting your head. Stay away from bridges and overpasses.

## After the Storm

- ▶ Stay away from downed power lines and avoid flooded areas—power lines could be submerged and still live with electricity.
- ▶ Don't enter seriously damaged buildings and avoid using matches and lighters in case of gas leaks.
- ▶ Let your friends and family know you are safe so they don't endanger themselves looking for you.

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# When People Speak, Congress Still Listens



NICOLAS RAYMOND | STOCKVAULT.NET

**WASHINGTON POLITICS HAVE BECOME SO POLARIZED THAT IT CAN** be tough for Democrats and Republicans to come together to tackle big challenges. But that's exactly what happened recently on Capitol Hill thanks to dedicated lawmakers that include Sen. Ted Cruz, Rep. John Ratcliffe, Rep. Bill Flores, Rep. Louie Gohmert and Rep. Lance Gooden.

Our faithful representatives listened to thousands of electric cooperative stakeholders as they fought tirelessly to add important legislation to the 2020 spending bill. The bill was signed into law in December and included a provision known as the RURAL Act, which solved a pressing issue for electric co-ops and America's rural communities.

Electric co-ops work to secure federal grants to help pay for numerous activities that benefit the communities they serve. These include storm recovery grants and assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

After storm damage Houston County Electric Cooperative and our neighboring cooperatives experienced from hurricanes and flooding, assistance from federal grants was desperately needed to help with the restoration process. Destructive storms can quickly amount to millions of dollars in damage to poles and equipment that isn't part of our normal, day-to-day

operations. Because our tax-exempt status is protected, electric rates will continue to stay low for 3 million Texans, including 15,000 HCEC members, who rely on cooperatives to power their homes, businesses and schools.

In order to maintain their tax-exempt status, electric co-ops can receive no more than 15% of their income from nonmember sources. Historically, grants to co-ops were counted as contributions to capital. But due to a glitch in the 2017 tax law, government grants were reclassified as income, pushing some co-ops beyond the 15% threshold and jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.

The tax problem left

co-ops with an unfair choice: Do they take the money they need to turn the lights back on for their members as quickly as possible after a disaster? Do they accept the broadband grants to help close the digital divide between rural and urban America? Or do they turn down those grants to avoid spending their members' money on taxes rather than improving service?

Thanks to Congress, electric co-ops across Texas don't have to make those tradeoffs. This is good news for co-ops and their members because some co-ops would have had to raise their electric rates to pay new taxes.

We at Houston County EC are extremely grateful to our lawmakers for their support of the RURAL Act. In standing up for Texas' rural communities, they proved that Congress still works for the people. Notably, the legislation drew the bipartisan support of more than 300 lawmakers in the House and more than half of the Senate as it was passed. That's a rarity in Washington these days.

In today's fast-paced society, pausing to give thanks is done with increasing rarity. That's unfortunate.

Thank you, again, to those lawmakers. Thank you for looking out for rural communities across Texas, and thank you for working with us to solve this problem.

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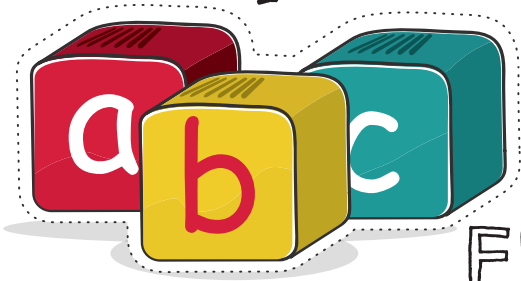
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## Board of Directors

HCEC is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors. Each director serves a three-year term and is elected by members in their respective districts. The HCEC Directors serve in the best interest of the members they represent and each share a common goal: to provide affordable, reliable electric power for your way of life.

HCEC is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors. Each director serves a three-year term

## Capital Credits

Capital credits represent each member's investment into the cooperative. Because cooperatives

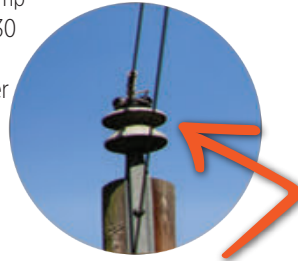
do not earn profits in the sense that other businesses do, any margins or revenues remaining after all expenses have been paid are returned to the members in the form of capital credits. Your share is determined by your electric usage

## ETREYS

The all-expenses paid leadership camp HCEC has sent students to for over 30 years. Students return with a better understanding on how to be a leader and an asset to their communities.

## Fish Fry

OR the HCEC Annual Meeting, held each Fall. This is an opportunity for members to meet their Board of Directors, the HCEC employees and hear updates from the Board President and General Manager.



## Guy Wire

a tension cable designed to add stability to a free-standing pole.

## Demand

The amount of electricity drawn from an electric system at a given time, measured in kilowatts.

## Hot Stick

line crews from electric shock when working on energized lines.

an insulated pole that protects



## Insulator

A device that supports the wires attached to the utility poles without allowing the current to flow to the ground.

A device that supports the wires

## Jarraff

The jarraff's arm can extend up to 75 feet!

A machine used to trim right-of-ways.



## Kilowatt

HCEC members are billed by the Kilowatt Hour (kWh). For example, if your ceiling fan is 50 watts and you use it for 20 hours in one month, you have consumed 1 kilowatt-hour (50 watts X 20 hours = 1,000 watts or 1 kWh)

A measure of 1,000 watts of electrical power.

## Lineman

The brave men who help HCEC members during good conditions and bad, whose main goal is to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity.

The brave men who help HCEC members during good conditions and bad, whose main goal is to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity.



## Member-owner

YOU! Being a part of HCEC means that you own a portion of your cooperative.

## NRECA

The national service organization that represents more than 900 consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

## Outage

HCEC does their best to try and minimize outages and outage durations. In most cases, power outages are out of our control. Animals come into contact with utility lines, cars crash into poles, and storms come through and damage our distribution system. One thing remains true, HCEC will never give up until all meters are restored.

# Pole-Top Rescue

A safety exercise done annually by HCEC lineworkers. They display their safety and climbing skills by

rescuing a dummy mimicking a rescue of one of their co-workers if they ever came into contact with electric lines.

# Quality of service

We pride ourselves in the quality of service we provide to our members. Since 1939, for over

80 years now, we have provided power for your way of life in rural East Texas when others weren't willing to extend their services to your ancestors.

# Right-Of-Way

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# Substation

Substations transform high voltage from transmission lines to lower voltage to distribute out into the HCEC System. They are

extremely dangerous to anyone other than a trained professional, so please remember to stay away and contact us if you see an issue!



# Tailboard checklist

As part of a safety measure, before each job is completed by a construction crew, the crew's foreman will start the job by going through

a tailboard checklist. He lists expectations from the job and each employee, and will give a brief overview of what the job will entail. This system provides a clear understanding of job details and potential hazards so everyone can go home safe.



# Underground Service

Members have the choice between overhead and underground service from HCEC.

Underground service means that wires are buried underground instead of being strung through the air. Underground Services can come in the form of Primary Service or Secondary Service.

# Voluntary & Open Membership

All cooperatives abide by the 7 Cooperative Principles. The first on the list is "Voluntary and Open

Membership", meaning membership in a cooperative is open to all persons who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic circumstances.

# Weatherhead

The point of connection where

HCEC's service meets the member's meter pole in an overhead secondary service.



# X FMR

An abbreviation for transformer, which is

a device used to raise or lower voltage along electric distribution or transmission lines. It's the cylinder shaped piece of equipment hanging at the top of a pole on overhead lines and the green box near the ground with warning labels attached for underground services.



# Youth Tour

The annual educational trip to Washington, D.C. hosted by HCEC. Delegates get to tour historical sites, including the Arlington National Cemetery, Capitol Hill, the Lincoln Memorial, and many more. Students get to meet local political representatives and learn more about our local and national governments. They also create lifelong friendships with students from all over Texas and the United States.

# Zero Contact

The Commitment to Zero Contacts initiative was designed to provide cooperative personnel with ideas and resources needed to help eliminate serious injuries and fatalities.





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# Lessons in Canning

Preserving figs brings to mind the Bible and rural life before electricity

BY JOE HOLLEY

WHEN A GOLIATH OF A BACKYARD FIG tree looms over the roof of your house, you feel a special obligation to prevent countless ripening figs from going to waste (or to the birds). That sense of obligation prompted wife Laura and me to spend a Sunday afternoon last summer harvesting figs, clipping off the stems, carefully tending them on the stove as they jiggled in pots of boiling water and then ladling the beautiful golden preserves through a funnel into glass jars. For an afternoon, at least, we were preserving the way our forebears used to.

My primary chore was to clamber barefoot among branches the size of an elephant's leg, ducking limbs, plucking the just-turning-purple fruit and trying to avoid the souring, gnat-attracting fig mash that carpeted the bare ground beneath the tree. At one point, I blundered into a spiderweb and when, seconds later, a dive-bombing wasp bounced off my eyelid, I thought of a lesson from the Bible.

As the Gospel of Matthew recounts, Jesus was headed back to the city one morning after preaching in Bethany, and he was hungry. Spying a leafy fig tree up the road, his spirit lifted, but when he got closer, he saw it was barren. A burst of righteous anger ensued.

"May you never bear fruit again!" he exclaimed. He had barely gotten the words out of his mouth when the fruitless tree withered, its green leaves instantly turning brittle and yellow. He used the incident to illustrate the efficacy of faith.

My dad grew up in the early decades of the 20th century on a Hill County cot-

ton farm. Even though he fled the drudgery as soon as he could, he jumped at the chance when my brothers and I were kids to buy a house on the edge of town with mature fruit trees, including figs, and an adjacent lot for a large garden. Mom was a city girl—Bigfoot, population 250—and had spent more time behind the counter of her folks' general store than she did learning to preserve nature's bounty. In the semirural house that appealed to her husband's farm-boy fantasies, she taught herself to preserve in Mason jars not only figs but also green beans, black-eyed peas, tomatoes, okra and blackberries, not to mention plums, peaches, pears and apricots (even as she tried to corral three rambunctious boys).

The best description of canning's tedium you'll ever read is in the first volume of Robert Caro's Lyndon B. Johnson biography, *The Path to Power*, in the chapter titled The Sad Irons. He's writing about farm life that lasted into the 1940s.

"Since—because there was no electricity—there were no refrigerators in the Hill Country, vegetables or fruit had to be canned the very day they came ripe," Caro writes. "And, from June through September, something was coming ripe almost every day, it seemed; on a single peach tree, the fruit on different branches would come ripe on different days. In a single orchard, the peaches might be reaching ripeness over a span as long as two weeks."

Elderly farm wives recalled for Caro that after the peaches, the strawberries would ripen, then the gooseberries and the blue-

FIGS: MANANA | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM. JARS: RANGSAN PAIDAEN | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



berries. The tomatoes would ripen before the okra, the okra before the zucchini and the zucchini before the corn. Canning went on all summer—along with hauling water

every morning, cooking meals on a wood stove for family and farmhands, mending and washing clothes, smoothing out wrinkles with a 6-pound wedge of hot iron

(a “sad iron”), and tending to the kids.

Caro interviewed Kitty Clyde Ross Leonard, LBJ’s first girlfriend who later became a teacher, principal and superintendent of Johnson City schools. “You’d have to cook for hours,” she recalled. “Oh, that was a terrible thing. ... I remember the perspiration pouring down my mother’s face, and when I grew up and had my own family, it poured down mine. That stove was so hot.” A Hill Country farmwoman named Gay Harris told Caro: “We had no choice, you see.”

These days, we do have choices, and from what I hear, more and more Texans are reverting to the old ways, even if they don’t have big gardens. Relying on roadside stands and farmers markets, they’re able to can fresh fruits and vegetables almost year-round. There’s joy in that experience—and pride in being heirs to a venerable tradition. (Fortunately, preserving is not as arduous as it once was.)

Fig preserves, anybody?

As I write on this hot afternoon, another batch just turned purple.

**Joe Holley**, a writer for the *Houston Chronicle*, is a former editor of *Texas Co-op Power*.

# Twist in the Wind

Dust devils, common in West Texas, turn up wherever atmospheric conditions are just right

BY E. DAN KLEPPER

AS I CROSSED THE SERENGETI IN A MUD-covered Land Rover, a dust devil suddenly appeared in the dirt road ahead, as if summoned by wizardry.

*“Kimbunga!”* my guide shouted in Swahili.

The rogue dervish spun up from the red volcanic soils that cover the grassland plain. It traced our route, leading the way down bumpy ruts, drawing us farther into a wild and mysterious place. There was something transformative about the way it spun the landscape into a scene from my West Texas home, a similar basin-and-range topography abundant with its own special wild things.

Whether it’s an East African kimbunga or a West Texas dust devil, whirlwinds occur wherever and whenever conditions are right. The formula calls for specific circumstances: a dramatic change in temperature caused by warm air that creates an updraft as it rises from the ground through cooler air above. Add a light wind that encourages horizontal rotation and forward momentum, and a whirlwind is born.

Studies suggest that these spinning columns of air occur all the time in the first several hundred feet of atmosphere above the Earth’s surface. We’re able to witness this phenomenon when the updraft is strong enough to lift sand, soil and ash from the ground to form a visible vortex—a dust devil—that can rise several hundred feet. The warmer air rising creates a void for more warm air to replace it, then cools in the upper layers before exiting the chimney. The cooled air sinks around the outer chimney walls, helping

to stabilize the dust devil. Altogether, these factors produce a self-sustaining engine that transports air forward, around, and up and down like a moving, spinning elevator. A tornado, on the other hand, forms from the updraft of a supercell thunderstorm.

Disruption, a common denominator of change, is usually responsible for the dust devil’s demise. Once a whirlwind’s careful balance of upward and circular movement is disrupted, by a slight decrease in surface temperature, a sudden rush of cold air sucked into the warm void or a topographic bump along the travel route, the dust devil quickly collapses like a magician in a puff of smoke. The magic is real but fleeting.

Magic is an apt descriptor for whirlwinds, particularly if you consider “magic” a romantic word for science. Whirlwinds do not discriminate, and they lift anything that isn’t heavy enough to remain on the ground. You’ll find sand devils among dunes, steam devils around power plants, coal devils in mining country and snow devils on ski slopes. With luck, you might also see a hay devil forming over fresh-cut fields of summer.

They also occur on Mars. Dust devils were first photographed on Mars by orbiters, part of NASA’s Viking program in the 1970s. Since then, Mars rovers Pathfinder and Spirit have documented dust devil activity. The red planet is a hotbed of atmospheric instability, spawning about two dust devils per square mile per day, on average. According to scientists, Martian dust devils play an integral



role in the planet's weather and climate, dispensing particles into the atmosphere, where they help retain heat, which can measure 68 degrees at the equator.

Martian dust devils have also assisted in their own research. Whirlwinds have lifted dust from solar panels and instrumentation on NASA probes, which can be hampered by particulate buildup. Any passing dust devil simply cleans up like a housekeeper, allowing the technology to function at full capacity.

That day on the African veld, the kimbunga was the first of many we would see as the afternoon heated up, as if someone had slowly let loose a box full of whirligigs

to race across the landscape. I felt the country's kinship to West Texas a few more times until a herd of giraffes appeared on the horizon, a clear sign that I was traveling across an unfamiliar continent.

In many ways, East Africa is as different from home as Earth is from Mars. But a life of travel often leads to enlightenment, suggesting that no matter how strange or alien a place may appear, you can always find something in common, whether it's a dust devil or otherwise on the opposite side of Earth or millions of miles away, on another planet.

Photographer, author and artist **E. Dan Klepper** lives in Marathon.



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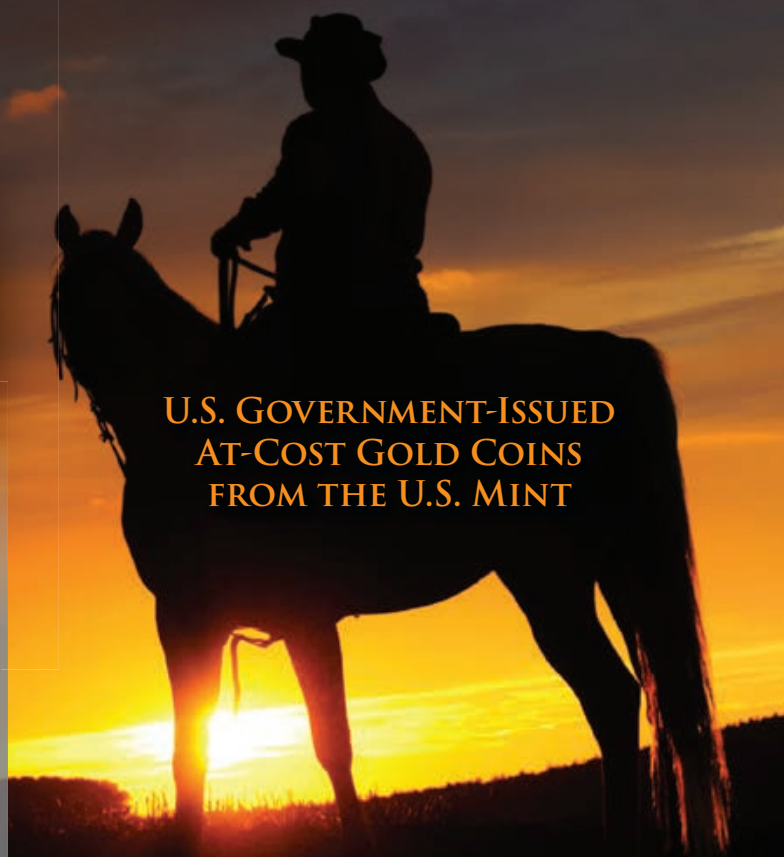
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# The Dirt on Soapy

Onetime Texan cleaned up as a nefarious con man and syndicate boss

BY CLAY COPPEDGE



THOUGH HIS LEGEND IS most associated with skulduggery in Colorado and Alaska, Soapy Smith spent his teenage years in Round Rock and began his career as a swindler in Fort Worth.

Before he was Soapy Smith, he was Jefferson Randolph Smith II, son of a wealthy Georgia family that lost everything after the Civil War and moved to Round Rock in 1876. Smith and a cousin reportedly witnessed the shootout there that killed outlaw Sam Bass in 1878. But the crime-doesn't-pay lesson inherent in the Bass incident was apparently lost on Smith: His two years in Round Rock were his last as a law-abiding citizen.

Jefferson Smith morphed into Soapy Smith following his most famous swindle, the "Prize Package Soap Sell." He'd set up a display featuring bars of soap on a street corner, establish a friendly patter with passersby and then wrap some of the soap with paper money. He then rewrapped the bars in plain paper, mixed them in with the others and sold them for 50 cents—about \$12 in today's money.

Someone—a ringer—always bought a bar of soap, unwrapped it and found money. The excitement spread to passersby who took the bait and bought up the whole pile of soap. Only Smith cohorts

ever bought a bar with money. He ran this swindle for decades.

Fort Worth was Smith's first operational base. He assembled a skilled gang, and they pooled their money, paid off cops and bribed politicians to overlook their nefarious activity. Jeff Smith V, Smith's great-grandson and biographer, wrote that Soapy's particular gift was organization.

"Alone, these men were forced to be drifters, moving from one town to the next, as Jefferson had done," Jeff Smith wrote. "Jefferson united the men, and together as an organization, they were almost unstoppable. ... In the late 1870s Jeff became so powerful and known for his crimes that laws were enacted at Fort Worth especially due to him. It was time for Jeff to move on."

Though the gang opted for Denver and points north, Smith maintained contact with Texans for the rest of his life. His younger brother, Bascom, was arrested in 1883, when he was 14, for trying to set fire to a Belton hotel, and two sisters lived in Bell County.

**Jefferson "Soapy" Smith stands at the bar in a Skagway, Alaska, saloon.**

Smith's reputation as King of the Frontier Con Men prompted him to seek dishonest work beyond Colorado. He traveled to Skagway, Alaska, gateway to the Klondike gold fields.

In Skagway, citizens formed a vigilance committee to run Smith and his confederates out of town. Smith responded by announcing his own committee to run the original committee out of town.

The tipping point came when a theft of \$2,000 was pinned on a Smith associate, and Smith wouldn't give up the robber or return the money. A group met at the Juneau Wharf on July 8, 1898, to discuss their next move. An armed and intoxicated Smith confronted the meeting. His enemies claimed his last words were, "My God, don't shoot!"

Twenty years to the month after Sam Bass was gunned down in Round Rock, Soapy Smith met the same fate in Alaska.

Clay Coppedge, a member of Bartlett EC, lives near Walburg.

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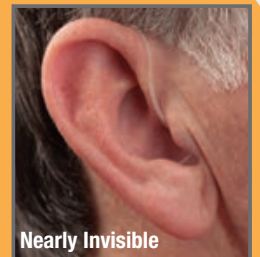
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## Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More

FROM A SIMPLE FISH FRY TO SHELLFISH harvested from the Gulf, Texas' bounty of seafood is one of the state's great pleasures and a wonderful blank slate for applying layers of flavor.

Chef Maggie Perkins, a food writer and former farmer, frequently uses Texas seafood in demos at farmers markets and in cooking classes. Perkins took inspiration from Texas' coastal ingredients and combines them with her Creole roots for this approachable dish.

It's easy enough to prepare on a weeknight but still impressive should guests pop by. The key is to be patient in making the roux—cook it fully to achieve a beautiful, deep color.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

### Shrimp Étouffée

- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 small green or red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 large ribs celery, chopped
- 3 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained and chopped
- 2 cups shrimp stock
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- 2 pounds medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- ¼ cup chopped green onions
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Cooked rice, for serving
- Hot pepper sauce, for serving

**1.** In a large heavy skillet or Dutch oven, melt butter over medium heat. Increase heat to medium-high and whisk in flour until incorporated fully. Whisk continuously until roux is the color of peanut butter, about 10 minutes.

**2.** Add onion, bell pepper, celery and garlic, mixing into roux. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until vegetables are softened and onion is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

# Recipes

## Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

DEANNA PAYNE | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

This easy yet flavorful recipe is perfect for entertaining, as it comes together quickly. Payne learned of it through a chef at a private club in Corpus Christi, where it was often served as an appetizer. Scoop the crab onto toast points or simply enjoy on its own; it's equally delicious chilled. When serving, squeeze the paprika-dipped lemon slices over the crab for a citrusy kick.

### Gulf Lump Crabmeat Sauté

- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 pound lump crabmeat, picked through for shells
- ½ cup slivered almonds, toasted
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Lemon slices
- Paprika
- Salad greens or toast points, for serving

1. Melt butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and sauté until golden, 2–3 minutes.
2. Add crabmeat and stir-fry until all meat is very hot, 3–5 minutes, stirring carefully to keep crab pieces intact.
3. Stir in almonds and parsley, adding salt and pepper to taste. Heat through 1 minute and ladle onto a preheated serving platter.
4. Garnish with lemon slices dipped in paprika. ▶ Serves 8 as an appetizer.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

transparent, about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes and stir to combine well.

3. Increase heat to medium-high and slowly stir in the stock. Continue to stir until sauce is smooth and bubbling and has thickened. Stir in seasoning.

4. Bring to a low boil, stirring, then reduce heat to medium. Cook, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes.

5. Fold shrimp, parsley and green onion into sauce and cook until shrimp is opaque, about 3 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings, adding more Creole seasoning, salt and pepper as needed. Serve over rice with hot pepper sauce on the side. ▶ Serves 8.

**COOK'S TIP** In lieu of shrimp stock, use seafood stock, chicken stock, clam juice, water or any combination thereof.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com).

### Crawfish Bread

GERI HUPP | DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

This unexpected side dish is a wonderful addition to a larger seafood spread. Look for the crawfish tail meat in the freezer section of your grocery store. Try experimenting with a variety of cheeses.

- 1 package (6 ounces) cornbread mix
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper, plus more to taste
- 12 ounces fully cooked crawfish tail meat, thawed
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 can (15.25 ounces) corn, drained
- 3 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup diced green onions
- ½ cup diced white onion
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together cornbread mix, baking soda, Creole seasoning and cayenne pepper.
3. In a large bowl, stir together crawfish, cheese, corn, eggs, onions and bell pepper. Fold in dry ingredients until well incorporated. Mixture will be thick.



New \$500 prize!

### \$500 Recipe Contest

August's recipe contest topic is **Cool Foods**. Ease this month's swelter with some no-stove-or-oven-needed dishes. Send us your best. The deadline is **March 10**. Readers whose recipes are featured will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

ENTER ONLINE at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests); MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

4. Spread batter into an ungreased 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Bake 30–40 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool slightly before cutting, then serve warm. ▶ Serves 12.

## Gulf Coast Corn Chowder With Shrimp and Pico de Gallo

SHERRY SCOTT | PEDERNALES EC

Chowder is always a winning way to enjoy seafood. This version uses potatoes, corn and plenty of toppings. “While visiting South Padre Island one fall, we were experimenting with seafood recipes and came up with this delicious option that has become a requested favorite,” Scott says.

- 1 poblano pepper
  - 4 slices bacon
  - ½ cup (⅓ stick) butter
  - 1 cup diced white onion
  - 6 cloves garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 pounds potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks

- 2 cups vegetable broth
  - 1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
  - 2 tablespoons seafood seasoning (such as Old Bay)
  - 2 cups 2% milk
  - 1 can (5 ounces) evaporated milk
  - 2 cups corn, thawed if frozen
  - 1½ teaspoons dried oregano
  - 1 avocado, diced, for garnish
- Pico de gallo, for garnish

1. Roast the poblano over an open flame until all skin is charred black. Place charred pepper in a plastic bag until it cools. Rinse the pepper under running water to remove charred skin.
2. Cook bacon until crisp. Drain and set aside.
3. Melt butter in a stockpot over medium heat. Add poblano, onion, garlic, and a pinch of salt and pepper and sauté until onion is translucent, about 3 minutes.
4. Add potatoes and broth and bring to a boil, then reduce heat and sim-

mer until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.

5. While potatoes are cooking, heat a pot of water to boiling. Add shrimp and seafood seasoning, reduce heat to a simmer and cook 2–3 minutes. Remove shrimp from water, set aside and keep warm.

6. When potatoes are done, slightly mash some of the potatoes in the pot, leaving some chunks. Whisk ¼ cup of broth from the pot into milk, then add milk and evaporated milk to stockpot.

7. Stir in corn and oregano, and add salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce heat and simmer until corn is heated through, about 15 minutes.

8. To serve, place 6 shrimp in each bowl. Add chowder, and garnish with crumbled bacon, avocado and pico de gallo. ▶ Serves 4-6.

**COOK'S TIP** You can substitute 1 can (4 ounces) roasted hatch peppers for the poblano.

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

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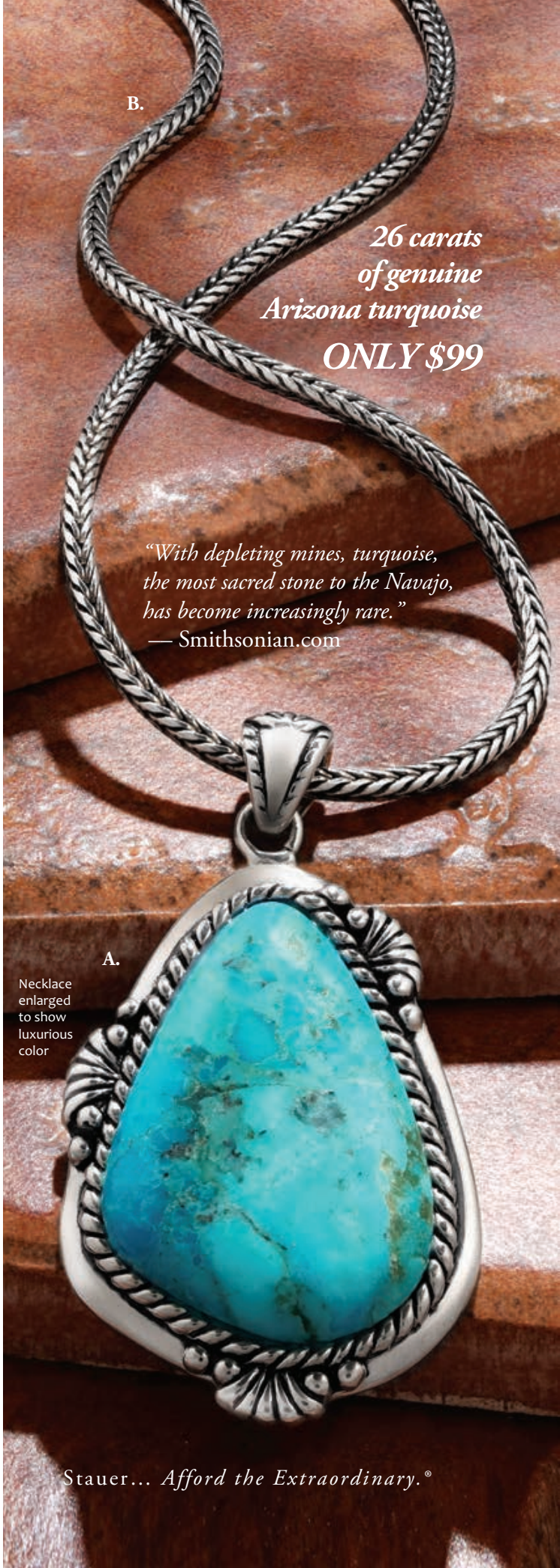
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**WEB EXTRAS** ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ **JENNIFER RIECK**, Medina EC: Billy Rieck Sr., Rieck's husband, in his soap box derby car in 1948.

▼ **JOSE GARZA**, Magic Valley EC: "Twenty-one-month-old Jordan takes his first pony ride and loves it."



▲ **LYNN LEISTER**, Guadalupe Valley EC: "Harper's first mutton bustin' ride at Yorktown Western Days."

▶ **PAUL GARCIA**, Medina EC: Garcia's granddaughter got to take control momentarily during a youth program flight at the Castroville airport.



▲ **JUDY TRUESDELL**, Farmers EC: Kids race old-time pedal cars down Wylie's Ballard Avenue.



### UPCOMING CONTESTS

JULY	EXPLORATION	DUE MARCH 10
AUGUST	ON THE WATER	DUE APRIL 10
SEPTEMBER	SHAPES	DUE MAY 10

Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/Contests](https://www.texascooppower.com/Contests).

**Pick of the Month**  
**RISE for Families**  
**Chili Cook-Off**

**Leander** March 28  
 (512) 736-8887, riseforfamilies.org

RISE for Families offers families of children with special needs free assistance in learning about the resources available to them. This event features a cook-off judged by Leander firefighters, children's activities, a silent auction, live music and vendors.



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## March

**7**  
**Lake Jackson** Youth Fishing Day at Sea Center Texas, (979) 292-0100, visitbrazosport.com

**Rosanky Rosanky Christian Academy** Annual BBQ Dinner Fundraiser, (512) 360-3109, rosankychristianacademy.com

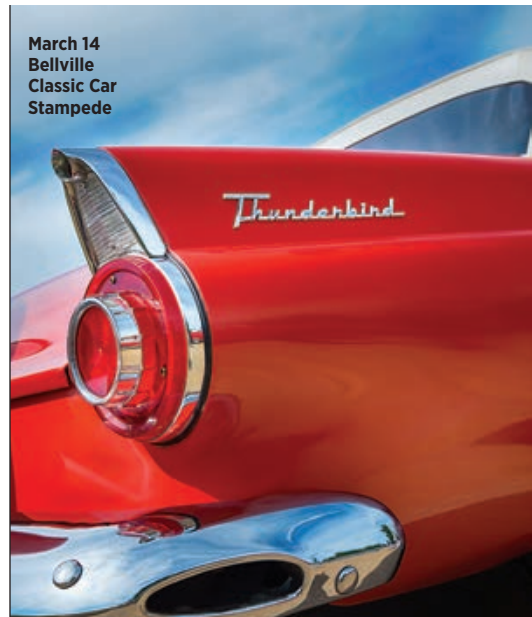
**Clarendon [7-8]** Whistle-Stop Trade Days, (806) 206-6815, facebook.com/whistop

**9**  
**Fredericksburg [9-14]** Spring Break at the Pioneer Museum, (830) 990-8441, pioneermuseum.net

**12**  
**New Braunfels** T.G. Sheppard & Kelly Lang, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

**13**  
**Dallas [13-15]** Dallas Quilt Show, (214) 766-2212, quiltersguildofdallas.org

March 14  
**Bellville**  
 Classic Car Stampede



**Ingram [13-29]** No Body Like Jimmy, (830) 367-5121, hcac.com

**14**  
**Bellville** Classic Car Stampede, (979) 865-3187, austincountycruisers.com

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**Seguin** Eastern Star Stew Dinner & Country Store, (720) 394-8514

**Fort Worth** [14-15] Funky Finds Spring Fling, (903) 665-7954, funkyfinds.com

20

**Round Top** [20-21] Herb Society of America: Pioneer Unit Herbal Forum Plant and Gift Sale, (979) 421-9980, herbsocietypioneer.org

**West** [20-21] West, Central Texas Ceramic Expo & Handcrafted Items, (254) 716-5227, westceramicshow.com

21

**George West** Patsy Torres as Patsy Cline, (361) 436-1098, dobie-westtheatre.com

**Kerrville** Camerata San Antonio: *Blueprint*, (210) 492-9519, cameratasa.org

**Lakehills** Lakehills UMC Annual Fish Fry and Auction, (830) 751-2404, lakehillsumc.org/fishfry

**Woodville** [21-22] Festival of the Arts and Dinner on the Grounds, (409) 283-2272, heritage-village.org

27

**Tyler** [27-28] Quilters' Guild of East Texas Annual Quilt Show, (903) 747-7072, qgetx.org/quilt-show.html

**Sabinal** [27-29] Wild Hog Festival and Craft Fair, (830) 486-8549, sabinalwildhogfestival.com

28

**Huntsville** Herb Festival at the Wynne Home, (936) 891-5024, texasthymeunit.org



April 2-4  
Edinburg  
UFO Festival

30

**Canton** [30-April 4] Van Zandt County Fair, (903) 292-6250, vzfair.org

April

2

**Brenham** Texas A&M Singing Cadets, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

**Edinburg** [2-4] UFO Festival, (956) 383-6246, edinburgarts.com

3

**Cuero** [3-4] Heirloom Stitchers Quilt Show, (361) 550-9388, cuero.org

4

**Port Arthur** [4] Cajun Heritage Fest, (409) 835-2787, cajunheritagefest.com

**Quintana** [4-May 6] Spring Fling, (979) 480-0999, gcbo.org/spring-fling

### Submit Your Event!

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

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# Sharpening My Knowledge

Poking around the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean

TEXAS IS KNOWN FOR WIDE-OPEN SPACES. On the 19th-century range, cowboys could ride from dawn to dusk without seeing a sign of civilization. Then came the invention of barbed wire, creating fences that made it near impossible to drive cattle. On a recent trip to the Panhandle, I found myself entangled in the history of the so-called devil's rope.

On Route 66, about 75 miles east of Amarillo, I discovered the perfect place to stop and stretch my legs while simultaneously pondering the weird and wonderful: the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean.

While cruising McLean's red brick streets and beyond, I noticed a beige building with two large orbs adorning its entrance. As I got closer, I realized these were actually rusted bundles of barbed wire, rolled up like yarn.

"How could any museum covering something as strange and specific as barbed wire be interesting?" I thought. I quickly realized how wrong I was. The museum was cavernous, with every inch of wall and countless educational panels filled with information, artifacts and stories. I decided to poke around and begin my education.

Barbed wire was invented after the Civil War, and hundreds of types received patents as inventors looked to outdo one another and create the next best thing. There's single twist, double twist, ribbon wire, diamond wire, sawtooth wire and one called the Dodge Star that can fetch upward of \$500 a foot from the right collector. Joseph Glidden of DeKalb, Illinois, came up with the design, which used two strands of wire twisted together to hold the barb spurs in place, that became the most popular in the country.

The museum in McLean displays 2,000



**Chet gets right to the point at the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean.**

to the sort of metal cockleburs that ripped through so many pairs of my childhood jeans.

In addition to barbed wire, the museum boasts other really cool exhibits. There's a full-size cowboy wagon set against a painted diorama of the Texas sky. There are countless tools used for tasks from digging fence posts to mending busted barbs. There's even a number of barbed wire sculptures that include a scorpion, armadillo and cowboy hat. I can only imagine how many pairs of gloves the artists must have gone through. Also set in a corner is a sobering exhibit about how humans have used barbed wire against one another in times of war.

When it was first introduced, almost everyone in Texas hated barbed wire. It sectioned off the prairie, cutting cowboys off from grazing and watering their cattle wherever they pleased. At night, renegade groups would go on fence-cutting sprees


types of wire. The number blew my mind because, in truth, I had never paid any attention

that resulted in bloodshed, and not just from pricking their fingers. It got so serious in the 1880s that Gov. John Ireland and the Texas Rangers had to step in and quash the violence.

Soon, Texans began to accept fencing as a way of life. Barbed wire was cheaper than wooden fencing. It helped ranchers control the breeding of their cattle, and it helped farmers grow crops without the threat of wandering herds mowing everything down.

As I learned, barbed wire truly changed the Texas frontier, and very few Texans understand its impact—something this small museum hopes to change, one visitor at a time. I also learned that sometimes the strangest roadside stops lead to the best road trip education.

**Chet Garner** shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

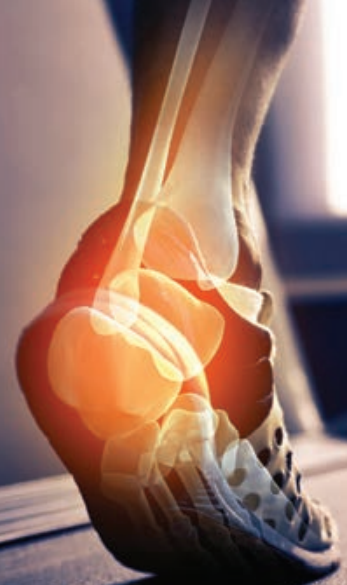
 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video from the Devil's Rope Museum. To learn more about the fence-cutting wars, read *Barbed Wire, Barbaric Backlash* in our January 2014 issue.

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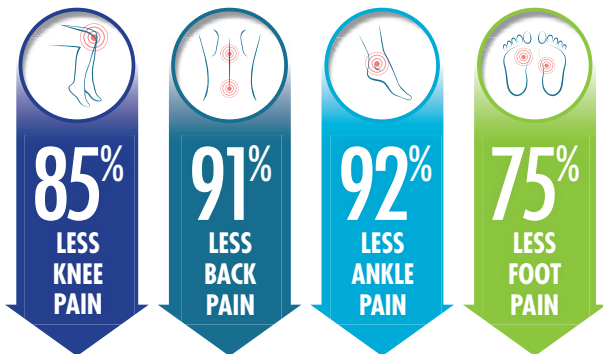
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