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ENDURANCE CHALLENGES

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SWEET SPUDS

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SEPTEMBER 2021

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**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

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September 2021



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

*By Chris Burrows
Photos by Dave Shafer*

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*

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

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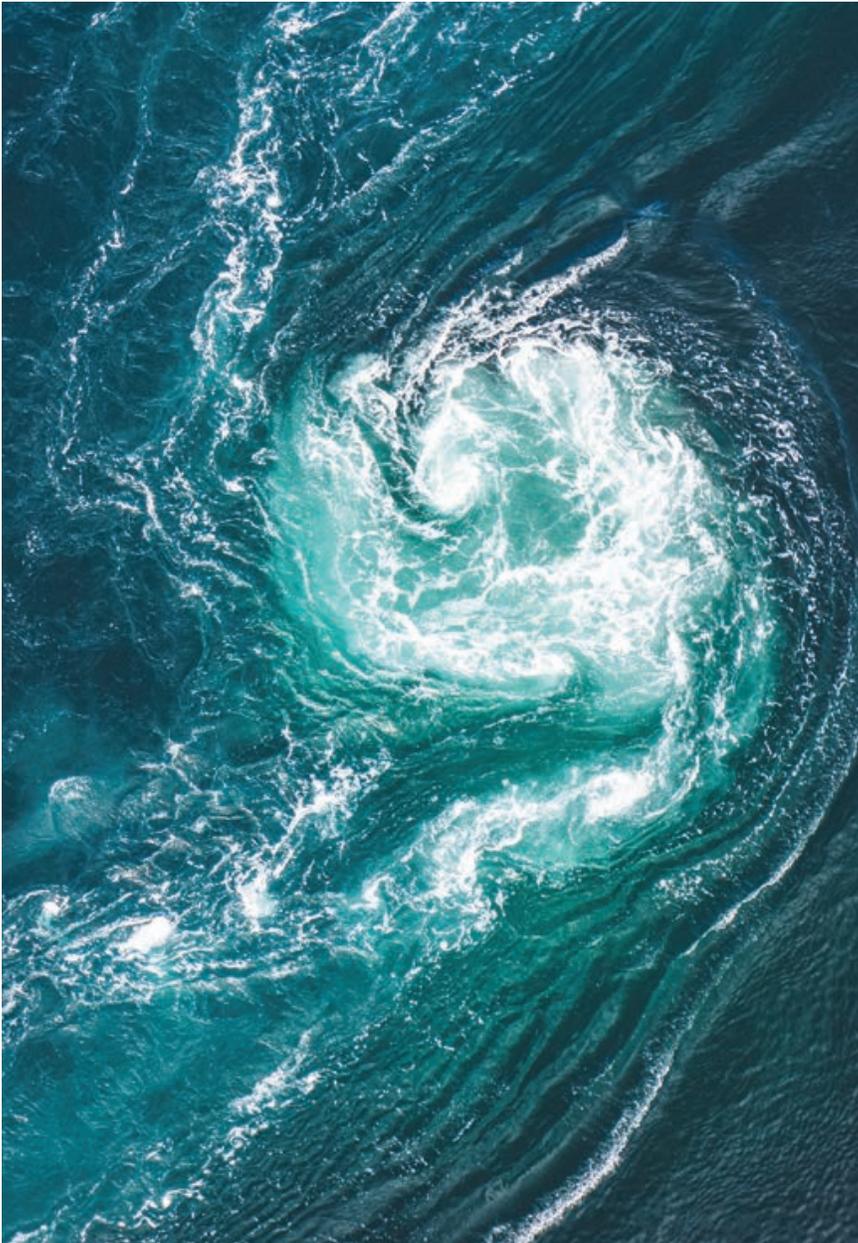
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Ocean Currents

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 FAHSHOLTZ
VIA FACEBOOK

To see more responses, read Currents online.

OCEAN: ALYOSHA | STOCK.ADOBE.COM. LADDER: RAWFS | STOCK.ADOBE.COM. FUNGUS: DOMNITSKY | STOCK.ADOBE.COM



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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.



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DANIEL SVETLIK
PEDERNALES EC
VICTORIA

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



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

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



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ATHLETICS

WRITE TO US

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

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 78, Number 3 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC). Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 75 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power’s* website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

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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

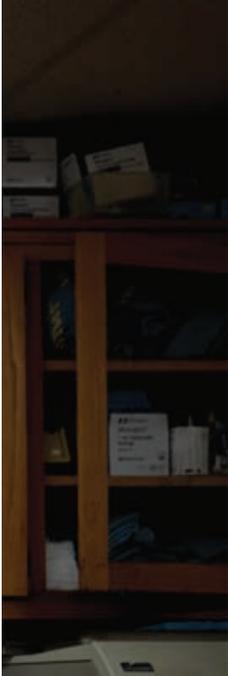
‘A slow day is kind of unusual. We pretty much have to take care of everybody who walks in the front door. If you don’t love it, you’re not going to do it.’

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.”

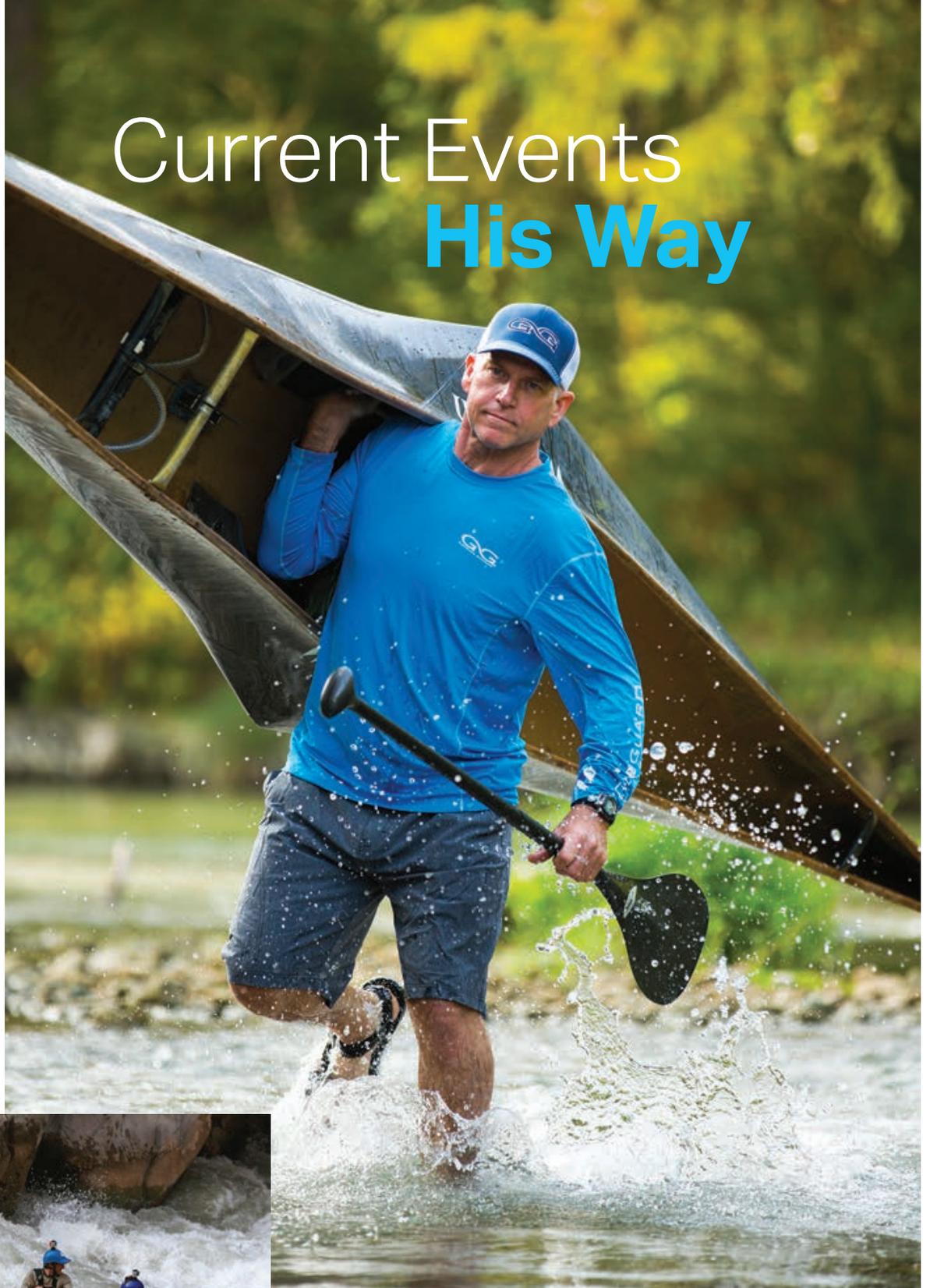
Two of Kraft’s veterinarian sons are on their way to one day taking over his practice, but most of Texas’ aging vets don’t have that kind of security—even while demand swells. Texas added 4 million people since 2010—more than any other state—according to census data, but 41% of vets in rural Texas are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

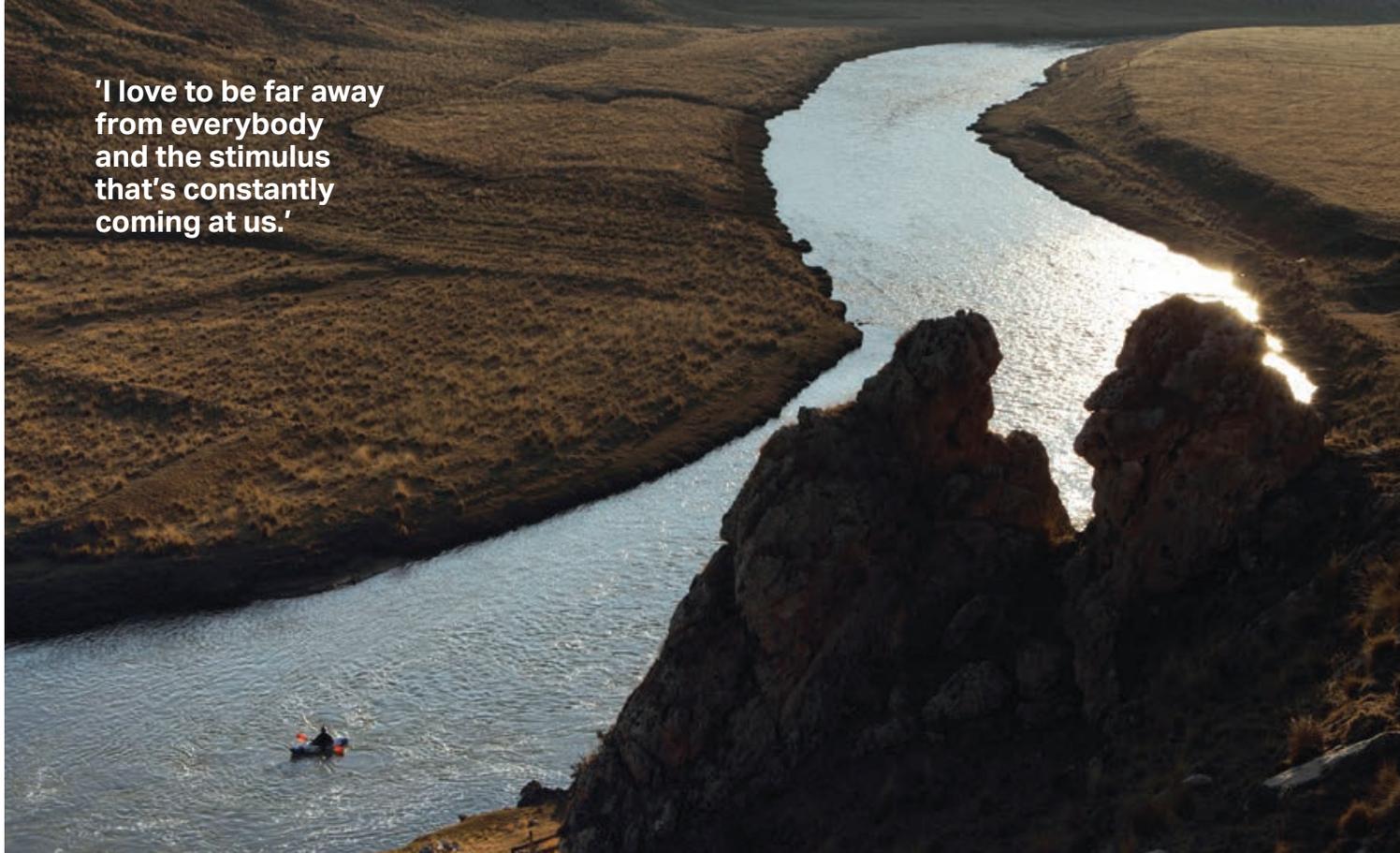
Hansen spent the next few years researching the river and lining up sponsors. He made a scouting trip to Peru in 2011. In 2012 he launched his expedition—the first to paddle the Amazon from a newly determined source high in the Andes Mountains to the sea. His wife and daughter, Isabella, who graduated 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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— The Jewellery Editor, 2021



C.

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Photos by Sarah Beal

The Elgin Courier has been around for more than 130 years. Above: From left are S. J. Isaacks, C. W. Webb and Basil Olds in the newspaper's building in 1898 in a photo from the book 'Elgin: A History of Elgin, Texas 1872-1972,' which was compiled by members of the Elgin Historical Committee. Isaacks and Webb were the owners at the time. Right: Printing supervisor Clifton Green, who has been at the paper for more than 30 years, checks the calibration of the printing press.



START SPREADING THE *News*

Small-town papers are still Central Texas page-turners and essential voices in their communities

By Ed Crowell

EACH ISSUE OF A LOCAL newspaper offers a time capsule of contemporary life, capturing the ups and downs of any town, big or small.

Community newspapers across the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area are by, for and about local residents. Their unique blend of hyper-local news, school sports stories, community events coverage and personality-driven columns by local residents keeps readers paying attention — and paying to read.

Many of them have been publishing for well over 100 years, too.

While big newspapers in Houston, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio and some other cities publish seven days a week, this region's small-town newspapers print once, twice or three times a week. Most now offer digital versions or news update emails.

In addition to their longevity and remaining the resource of record for many communities, they perform an important service: getting useful information to readers, said Jeff Wick, the enthusiastic managing editor of the Fayette County Record.

"Community newspapers like us are still vital because nobody besides us is doing in-depth coverage of local government and law enforcement," he said. "Nobody besides us is interviewing local athletes as they excel. Nobody besides us is reaching the ever-growing numbers of people who are turning away from social media as a reliable source of news."

Wick, who began working at the newspaper in 2009, says the twice-weekly Record's circulation is growing. "We have a very loyal subscriber base. While most newspapers have seen

Continued at bottom of page 20



Many community newspapers have a small staff requiring employees to wear a variety of hats. Heather Ott serves as general manager and publisher of the Elgin Courier but also shoots photos for the paper.



Editor Roy Sanders with the archives of the of the Burlson County Tribune, which began publishing in 1884. Yellowing print copies and a pair of old typewriters don't reflect the Caldwell-based paper of today: 243 of its 3,129 subscribers read the digital version.

AN UNUSUAL ownership arrangement is in place for two weeklies in Bastrop County. The Bastrop Advertiser and The Smithville Times are published by the daily Austin American-Statesman, which is owned by the national Gannett Co. newspaper chain.

The newspapers have deep community roots. The Bastrop Advertiser was first published in 1853 and today has 5,000 subscribers. The Smithville Times, with 2,500 subscribers, began publishing in 1894.

Andy Sevilla has been editor of the two community papers since 2015. He and one full-time reporter write for both the Advertiser, which has Thursday and Saturday editions, and for the Times' single Thursday edition. He writes two or three stories a week and the reporter writes at least five stories a week.

Their articles often appear on the Austin American-Statesman website, statesman.com, and occasionally in that paper's print edition.

Content overlaps in the two papers at times, such as news from the Bastrop County Commissioners Court meetings. The towns are only 13 miles apart, so major news events in one town are likely of interest in the other. Business coverage also often overlaps.

The front page of each edition is "hyper local" for each town, though, Sevilla said.

Both papers typically are 12 pages on Thursdays, and on Saturday the Bastrop edition is usually 8 pages.

Freelance columnist Debbie Moore writes about social, historical and entertainment events. Bill McCann, Joni Ashbrook and Don Loucks all write political opinion columns twice a month.

"We cover all the major high school sports as much as we can with freelancers," Sevilla said.

The pandemic kept Sevilla away from the newspaper's office in Bastrop, but he said remote coverage of government meetings was possible when public officials began meeting in an online format via Zoom.

Although the daily Austin American-Statesman is printed in Houston now, the Bastrop and Smithville papers are printed in Corpus Christi. That makes deadlines 24 hours in advance of publication. "We have to work harder to make sure the stories will



Photo by Laura Skelding

Andy Sevilla serves as editor of the Bastrop Advertiser and The Smithville Times. Behind him is Bastrop's iconic Old Iron Bridge across the Colorado River.

Bastrop Advertiser

FOUNDED: 1853

CIRCULATION: 4,667

EDITOR: Andy Sevilla

PUBLISHED ON: Thursdays & Saturdays

STAFF: 2 full-time

POPULAR CONTENT: City government stories

ONLINE: facebook.com/BastropAdvertiser

CONTACT: 512-321-2557; asevilla@statesman.com



FOUNDED: 1894

CIRCULATION: 1,011

EDITOR: Andy Sevilla

PUBLISHED ON: Thursdays

STAFF: 2 full-time

POPULAR CONTENT: Stories about development/growth

ONLINE: facebook.com/TheSmithvilleTimes

CONTACT: 512-321-2557; asevilla@statesman.com

still have a shelf life and are of value to the readers," Sevilla said.

During the pandemic, single-copy newspaper sales dropped dramatically at grocery and convenience stores and at Walmart, but those sales have been bouncing back recently.

"Growth is definitely making its way to the Lost Pines region, so a lot of our coverage involves the opening of new businesses," Sevilla said. Local government and school

news is a priority, too.

"The Bastrop Advertiser has a storied past as the oldest weekly newspaper still existing in Texas," Sevilla said. "With such a rich history, we put great effort into reflecting our community pride in the stories we tell."

"I love what I do, and I'd encourage anyone to pick up our papers and see how we cover our area."

Continued from page 18

their print circulation plummet over the past decade, we've really held our own."

The coronavirus pandemic caused business closures and public gathering restrictions over the past 18 months that negatively affected newspapers, he said. But "we still have a very robust classified section. Retail print advertising has been curtailed by the pandemic, but we are hopeful that will return as local events (come back)

post-pandemic."

Wick and the Fayette County Record publisher Regina Barton Keilers had a conversation as the COVID-19 crisis began to unfold in early 2020 and non-essential businesses were closing.

"She asked if we should (close), too," Wick said. "I thought it was important to the community that we keep the doors open, a symbol that we're still here for you. Immediate pay-off came a few days later when the county judge strolls in and —

because we are open and available — let us know about Fayette County's first confirmed case of COVID."

In a pandemic, small newspapers are more important than ever, said Mike Hodges, executive director of the Texas Press Association. "That's the only way people in some communities can get current local information. You need that news in emergencies like this."

Up and down Main Street in small towns, many businesses closed temporarily

IN WASHINGTON County, the Brenham Banner-Press publishes three days a week with a personal touch on the bottom of every front page: “Happy birthday wishes to . . .”

Friends and relatives of people celebrating birthdays contact the paper with names and dates for Page One display. “It’s a nice tradition that’s been around longer than I’ve been here,” said Derek Hall, the publisher and editor who started at the Banner-Press as a photographer 21 years ago.

The newspaper published six days a week until the coronavirus pandemic hit, when many businesses closed or stopped advertising. Hall doesn’t foresee more than three issues a week anytime soon, but the paper emails breaking stories to its 1,000 digital subscribers. It has 4,500 total subscribers.

Fourteen full-time employees produce the paper, which has its own press. Eight other Houston-area newspapers are printed there. Most Banner-Press editions are 12 to 16 pages, with two or three magazine-style sections printed each month to celebrate seasons, holidays and events such as the annual German heritage-themed Brenham Maifest.

“We pride ourselves on being local first,” Hall said. “We’re here for the community. That’s our main objective.”

Another fixture at the bottom of the front page of each issue is a “Water Usage” list. Brenham is dependent on nearby Lake Somerville for drinking water and the lake is a popular fishing and boating area, so the lake levels are reported regularly. Rainfall amounts and city water use also are listed.

Two longtime column writers provide interesting viewpoints: Bill Neinast, a retired Army colonel, writes about the military and other issues, and Cathy Ganske writes about a variety of topics, ranging from gardening to politics, in Cathy’s Corner.

or for good because of the pandemic. “That means they were not advertising in the local papers. It’s been a struggle,” Hodges said.

At the same time, many public agencies were not easily accessible because of coronavirus restrictions, so newspapers have been relying more on open-record requests for public documents. “Some agencies were taking a month to respond, citing skeleton crews in offices and employees working from home. That was too long,”



Photos by Sarah Beal

The Banner-Press in Brenham still has its own press, as seen behind editor and publisher Derek Hall. An in-house printing press is uncommon in the newspaper business these days, especially for small papers.

The Banner-Press

CITY: Brenham

FOUNDED: 1866

CIRCULATION: 4,500

PUBLISHER/EDITOR: Derek Hall

PUBLISHED ON: Tuesdays, Thursdays & Sundays

STAFF: 12

NOTABLE STORIES: Wesley gas explosion,

April 7, 1992; Jon Peters breaking national record for consecutive wins by a high school pitcher, April 13, 1988

POPULAR CONTENT: Local news, obituaries and local sports; columnist Cathy Ganske, who covers topics ranging from gardening to politics

ONLINE: brenhambanner.com

CONTACT: 979-836-7956; derek@brenhambanner.com



Dwayne Rogge pulls a stack of newspapers from the folding machine, the final step in the printing process. Rogge has worked at the paper for more than 42 years. The newspaper, published three days a week, was founded 155 years ago.

Hodges said.

Texas has 75 daily newspapers and 388 weeklies, according to the Texas Press Association. “We’re a resource to help them manage their businesses in terms of sharing information,” Hodges said. “If they have a question, for example, of how to handle paid versus free obituaries, we connect them via [a group email list] to the experiences of other newspapers. That interaction with other publishers is priceless.”

The Texas Center for Community Jour-

nalism, based at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, is another resource for small newspapers. It provides free training on a variety of subjects to help small newspapers survive in an ever-changing business environment.

Publishers and editors of nine newspapers in the Bluebonnet region spoke about their publications and the role they play in their communities.

More community papers, next page

Burleson County Tribune

FOUNDED: 1884

CIRCULATION: 3,129

PUBLISHER: Sam Preuss

EDITOR: Roy Sanders

PUBLISHED ON:
Wednesdays

STAFF: 7 (including part-time)

NOTABLE STORIES:
1999 Texas A&M bonfire

tragedy; 9/11 coverage of local connections

POPULAR CONTENT:

Denise Squier's photos: She has won first-place honors for her sports photography by the Texas Press Association among large weekly papers.

ONLINE: bctribune.com

CONTACT: 979-567-3286; news@bctribune.com

THE BURLESON COUNTY Tribune, founded in 1884, is a small weekly newspaper with a long history. Based in Caldwell, the newspaper also covers news from the towns of Snook and Somerville. It has a paid circulation of 3,129. The digital issue is delivered to 243 subscribers.

Editor Roy Sanders said all local high school sports are big news in the area because so many families are involved.



Denise Squier won a sports photography award for the trading cards the paper produced for high school seniors who played sports. Photo by Sarah Beal

In spring 2021, a 16-page issue featured five pages of coverage of high-school basketball games. Many large color photos captured the boys' and girls' teams in action.

The Burleson County Fair each September is another major source of news as students prepare, show and auction their animals. "It's our biggest event (to cover) by far," Sanders said.

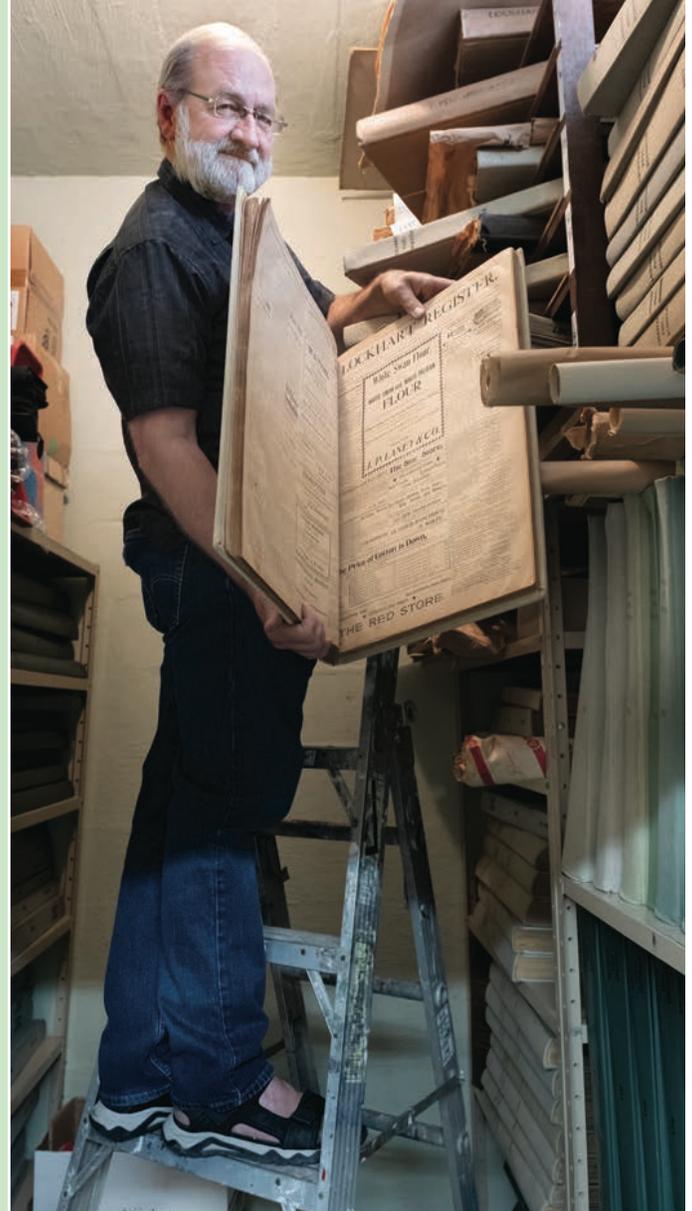
The Tribune also devotes major coverage to the annual Kolache Festival in Caldwell and the yearly Chilifest country music event near Snook. The two-day Chilifest Music Festival draws thousands of fans from Texas A&M University, but the April show was canceled in 2020 and this

year as well because of the coronavirus.

The paper has retained most of its advertisers during the pandemic. "It was more difficult, but we have a good footprint here in the area," Sanders said. "We take pride in the coverage we have that no one else can provide. There are many things in the Tribune not available elsewhere, except maybe on social media. But we think we're still rocking on."

Circulation is expected to rise, Sanders said. "We're seeing a lot of growth in Snook, with new homes being built for people who find they easily can commute to jobs at Texas A&M," he said.

Preuss Printing Co. owns the Burleson County Tribune and seven other Texas newspapers, including those in Luling (Caldwell County), Bellville (Austin County) and Giddings (Lee County).



FOUNDED: 1872

CIRCULATION: 2,000

PUBLISHER: Dana Garrett

PUBLISHED ON: Thursdays

STAFF: 5

MEMORABLE STORY: A county commissioner, defending himself in a meeting after an arrest for DWI, stated: 'I wasn't drunk, everyone knows you can't get drunk on draft beer.'

MOST POPULAR CONTENT: Lockhart's thrifty citizens enjoy Community Garage Sales; Editor Miles Smith's headlines

ONLINE: post-register.com

CONTACT: 512-398-4886; danagarrett@post-register.com



Photos by Laura Skelding

Left: Publisher Dana Garrett has preserved almost 150 years of bound volumes of newspapers inside a vault in the Lockhart Post-Register's building in downtown Lockhart. The newspaper was also recorded on microfilm. Digitizing 115,000 pages of the paper has to be 'my best accomplishment of the newspaper,' he said. He bought the paper when he was 24 and has owned it for 42 years. Above: The newspaper still has a very old Heidelberg letterpress. Garrett wants to eventually turn the building into a museum for the old newspaper and equipment.

IN CALDWELL COUNTY, the Lockhart Post-Register has been read by residents since 1872. Current publisher Dana Garrett bought the newspaper in 1979, at age 24.

He's seen many changes in the town and the newspaper in recent years, but nothing has affected his staff like the long-lasting pandemic.

"We went from eight staff members to just four when advertising drops hit us pretty bad," he said. "We acted like we just bought a new paper and started over again with zero-based budgeting."

Single-copy sales at H-E-B, Walmart and other locations dropped by half because many people used curbside pickup or self-service checkout for health safety. The paper's circulation is about 2,000 now, a decrease of 900 subscribers.

Still, Garrett is convinced the value of the Post-Register will win out. "When people look at our newspaper, they know what's in there is the truth. If they hear about rumors, they'll get the paper to see what's true. Facebook can't be trusted for that," he said.

Coverage of Lockhart's high school sports was tough when reporters and photographers were not allowed into games because of pandemic restrictions. "Coaches got us the information about games because they knew how important that was for the kids and parents," Garrett said.

Lockhart City Council and Caldwell County Commissioners Court coverage was also difficult when the meetings could only be viewed online. Discussions could not always be heard clearly and reporters were not there to ask questions following the meetings. "That was challenging and required a lot of calling after the meetings to clarify what was said," Garrett said. Fortunately, some of the meetings now are open for reporters to attend.

The Post-Register is usually 10 pages each week, with regular special sections for events such as the annual Chisholm Trail Roundup festival and the Diez y Seis celebration every September. The newspaper is printed in Bryan.

"I think community newspapers will come back just like movie theaters have done in recent years," Garrett said. "The theaters rebranded themselves with more comfortable seats and beer and such. Now, community newspapers are looking at how they can change for the better to keep up with the times."

ELGIN COURIER

FOUNDED: 1890

CIRCULATION: 2,300

PUBLISHER & GENERAL MANAGER: Heather Ott

MANAGING EDITOR: Julianne Hodges

PUBLISHED ON: Wednesdays

STAFF: 4

NOTABLE COVERAGE: Western Days, McDade Watermelon Festival, Elgin's Original Rodeo, county firework shows

POPULAR CONTENT: Sports, Police Log/Jail Blotter

ONLINE: elgincourier.com

CONTACT: 512-285-3333; publisher@elgincourier.com

AT THE 131-YEAR-OLD Elgin Courier in Bastrop County, Heather Ott has been slowly transitioning to the publisher's role after serving as general manager for 10 years. Her first job was as a receptionist in the front office before moving into advertising sales. She is a third-generation Courier employee.

Two full-time reporters and a "whole bunch" of freelance writers and photographers fill the paper each Wednesday, Ott said. Stories are updated online as needed. The newspaper has 2,300 subscribers.

An annual "Best of the Best Readers' Choice Awards" special section last spring showed how grateful Elgin residents were in difficult times. More than 17,000 votes were cast for favorite local businesses and owners, four times more than in previous years.

Once a month, special sections focus on town events and professions including medical services, high school graduation and the annual Western Days festival.

A long wrap-up article about life during a full year of the pandemic in Bastrop County ran on the front page in March. An updated list of county coronavirus case numbers and vaccine availability was printed weekly until recently.

In addition to paid subscriptions, the Courier sends 400 copies of the paper to local public schools for the Newspapers in Education program.

"People say newspapers are dead, but I say that's wrong," Ott said. "Our community is what keeps us alive and kicking. I'm happy to say a lot of people around town love us and look to us for events and news."



Heather Ott,
publisher of the
Elgin Courier

Other Bluebonnet-area community newspapers

- Bellville Times
- Columbus Banner Press
- Luling Newsboy & Signal
- Manor Journal/Community News
- New Ulm Enterprise
- Sealy News
- San Marcos Daily Record



Photos by Sarah Beal

The Giddings Times & News is a Preuss family business: From left, Sloan Preuss is managing editor, his mother Louise is the page designer and his father Buddy is the publisher.

THE GIDDINGS TIMES & News is a long-lived publication in Lee County, first published in 1888. It is part of a family-owned and operated group of seven weekly newspapers under the Preuss Printing Co. banner.

Sloan Preuss is managing editor in Giddings and one of the sons of company founder and Times & News publisher Buddy Preuss, who has been writing two columns for the Giddings paper for more than 50 years.

“One is the Viewpoint column about people and events of interest, and the other is a religious column called Solid Ground, about teachings in the Bible,” Sloan Preuss said.

In his Viewpoint of June 17, Buddy Preuss described a fast-moving thunderstorm that lifted a storage building off its foundation at Wilbert’s Tire Center in Giddings.

In the same column he wrote about mushrooms, which “I’ve grown to really like eating as part of a meal. . . . One thing I didn’t know is that mushrooms make good fertilizer for gardens. I recently learned that from a friend and loyal reader.”

That June issue of the Giddings Times & News, which has a circulation of 5,200, featured seven front-page stories, including one about a favorable Lee County government audit, another about the Lee County 4-H healthy lifestyles team winning a state competition and one about the new superintendent for the Dime Box Independent School District. The 12-page issue concluded with photos from the Dime Box High School graduation ceremony.

Sloan Preuss said Giddings has changed a lot since he started at the newspaper in 1995. “We’ve seen it go from a small, quiet town to one

with more chain stores and businesses” along two busy highways, U.S. 290 and U.S. 77. “Travelers stop and enjoy our town with more places to eat and shop now.”

There’s a shortage of houses for sale in town, he said, but new houses are being built and subdivisions are planned.

Subscriptions to the newspaper did not change much during the pandemic, Sloan Preuss said. Many stores in Giddings managed to stay open. The Lee County Fair was canceled in 2020 and again this year due to the pandemic, and that affected advertising sales. Good news: The annual event is expected to return in 2022.



Cindy Terrell is publisher and editor of the Lexington Leader, and Mike Organ has been covering sports for the paper since 1998. ‘He is so important to this paper because sports is still king in a lot of readers’ minds,’ she said. Organ retired from coaching and teaching for the Lexington school district in 2004 and ‘is still sought out by LISD to be the voice in the press box during home football and baseball games,’ Terrell said.

Giddings Times & News

FOUNDED: 1888

CIRCULATION: 5,200

PUBLISHER: Buddy Preuss

MANAGING EDITOR: Sloan Preuss

PUBLISHED ON: Wednesday

STAFF: 5

POPULAR CONTENT: Viewpoint, a humor/general interest column, and Solid Ground, a non-denominational religious column, both written by Buddy Preuss for more than 50 years; Sports Corner, written by Sloan Preuss for more than 30 years

ONLINE: giddingstimes.com

CONTACT: 979-542-2222;
buddy@giddingstimes.com

THE FAYETTE COUNTY Record was first published in 1922 and has been owned by publisher Regina Barton Keilers and her family since 1976.

In addition to the twice-weekly paper, “we also connect with readers via printed glossy monthly specialty magazines, our website, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter,” managing editor Jeff Wick said. The newspaper has 5,278 subscribers (693 of whom read the digital edition), Wick said, and a free copy of the newspaper is mailed monthly to every mailbox in Fayette County as an enticement for others to subscribe.

The Record aggressively covered the record-breaking winter storm that hit Texas in February, with four stories and two large photos on the front page of the usual 12-page edition. Inside that issue of March 2, 2021, the paper featured a full-page Black History Month story describing Fayette County’s first two freedom colonies. Also in the issue were columns from correspondents in the small Fayette County towns of Muldoon and Carmine, as well as school and sports news, and obituaries.

Advertising ranged from a full page of classified ads to display ads on the news pages for a photography studio, a wedding shop and a mattress store. Small ads for a wide variety of businesses filled about two pages. ■



Lexington Leader

SERVING LEE COUNTY, TEXAS

FOUNDED: 1997

CIRCULATION: 1,000

PUBLISHER & EDITOR: Cindy Terrell

PUBLISHED ON: Thursdays

STAFF: 1 full-time, 5 part-time

NOTABLE COVERAGE: Annual

Memorial Day issue

POPULAR CONTENT: Columns by Stanley Miller and Peggy Brown

ONLINE: lexingtonleader.com

CONTACT: 979-773-3022;
editor@lexingtonleader.com

WHILE SEVERAL newspapers in the Bluebonnet region were founded well over 100 years ago, the Lexington Leader is relatively new. The Leader started in 1997 under publisher Rita Owen. In 2015, Owen retired and Cindy Terrell bought the newspaper.

“I had been a community education teacher but was always interested in newspapers,” Terrell said. “I remember as a kid hearing the phrase ‘sensational news sells’ and being intrigued by that.”

Terrell, now publisher and editor, is the only full-time employee at the weekly. She has five part-timers who work in advertising sales and production. The paper counts 1,000 paid subscribers, 300 of whom read the electronic version.

Two Leader columnists who captivate readers, Terrell said, are

Stanley Miller, who writes about historic events and people, and Peggy Brown, who writes humorously about politics and other subjects.

Dozens of color photos, particularly of high school sports events, are common in the Leader. “You do what kids want and are used to. That’s color,” Terrell said.

The Leader went big and bold covering the crippling ice and snowstorm in February of this year. Under the headline ‘PICTURES=1,000 WORDS,’ a half-page photo showed a lone pickup driving through a whiteout in the middle of town. The caption said the image looked like a scene from a post-apocalyptic movie, as if the Earth had entered an ice age, adding that the photo was “the view from in front of Peterson’s grocery store.”



THE FAYETTE COUNTY RECORD

FOUNDED: 1922

CIRCULATION: 5,300

PUBLISHER & OWNER: Regina Barton Keilers

MANAGING EDITOR: Jeff Wick

PUBLISHED ON: Tuesdays & Fridays

STAFF: 8 full-time

NOTABLE COVERAGE: Hurricane Harvey’s devastating impact; car accident photo by Wick won first place, action photo, 2014 National Newspaper Association annual contest

POPULAR CONTENT: Sports; Community Correspondence section (pieces written by area residents); before her death at 85 in 2020, Gladys Giese’s Warda News column

ONLINE: fayettecountyrecord.com

CONTACT: 979-968-3155;
jeff@fayettecountyrecord.com

Jeff Wick has worked for The Fayette County Record for 12 years, eight in his current role as managing editor. Behind him is the Fayette County Courthouse in La Grange.



'CANCER PICKED THE WRONG

8-year-old Viviann Snow will not let this grueling fight rob the smile from her face

Princess'

By Melissa Segrest

IT STARTED WITH A stomach bug that most everyone in the family got, around Christmas last year. Everyone got better, but 7-year-old Viviann Snow's stomach pain kept getting worse.

The Rosanky second-grader ended up in an emergency room. A scan showed a mass in her abdomen. A quick biopsy followed at Dell Children's Medical Center in Austin. On Jan. 29 of this year, a doctor told Kelsey Snow that her

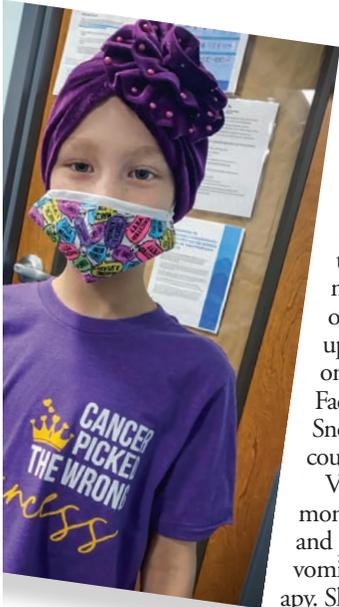
only child, her "sunshine in human form," had neuroblastoma, a rare form of childhood cancer. It was in the tumor and in her blood marrow.

A week later, oncologists at Dell Children's Blood & Cancer Center started chemotherapy. Vivi, as she's known by friends and family, was in the hospital for five days.

It was the start of a fight against a form of cancer that usually occurs in much younger children, often infants. As of late July, Viviann had received seven rounds of chemotherapy. Her treatment is led by Dr. Michael Mitchell at Dell. "He has been absolutely amazing throughout this whole thing," Kelsey Snow said.

By the second round of chemo, Viviann's long blonde hair had fallen out. She hated her "pork," her name for the port implanted near her rib cage where chemotherapy drugs

From far left: Viviani in an Easter dress in 2020; a touching portrait of Viviani with mother, Kelsey Snow, taken in April 2021, and Viviani in her purple princess T-shirt at a doctor's appointment in May. The statement T-shirts were sold as part of a fundraiser to cover costs of her treatment. (Portrait of mother and daughter by Brittany O'Brien of Wild Lovers Photography)



Bluebonnet is turning gold to spotlight Childhood Cancer Awareness Month

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's buildings, employees and even our trucks will be showing some gold in September to support Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

At night, our member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor will be bathed in gold light. If you see any Bluebonnet member service representatives, they'll be wearing gold ribbons and handing them out to members using any center's drive-through lanes. Look for gold ribbons on the doors of Bluebonnet service vehicles, too.

flow into her body. "She has had some challenging hospital stays, where the chemo hit her pretty badly," her mother said. "She had a bad reaction to one of the chemo drugs, and we ended up being in the hospital for 17 days one time. It just about broke her." Even FaceTime with her grandmother, Wanda Snow, and her beloved pug, Elvis Pugsley, couldn't boost her spirits at that time.

Viviani, it seems, is tough. In recent months, she's pushed through the nerve and joint pain as well as the nausea and vomiting that can come with chemotherapy. She has tolerated the daily shots that come after chemo, and the weekly check-

ups. Legos, Barbies and snuggles with mom to watch TikTok videos of pugs help.

Sometimes Viviani is reluctant to eat, leading to a self-prescribed, limited diet: Only spaghetti, then only Cinnamon Toast Crunch, then only McDonald's cheeseburgers. Or just homemade burgers or just chicken nuggets.

Cancer is hard for grown-ups to understand, much less a child. "This is a mistake. I don't feel like I have cancer. I feel like this medicine makes it worse," Viviani has cried to her mother. "When will my hair grow back?"

Kelsey Snow has gone from a well-organized working-mom life to a scrambled week-to-week existence. "It's been an adjustment," she said. A recent return to her job in Austin at the Seton Mind Institute behavioral sciences program helped restore some order.

Viviani gets support and transportation to medical appointments in Austin from her grandmother and her father, Matt Martin. Kelsey Snow's sister, Shannon Snow McGovern, has served as a sounding board, support system, meal provider and best friend.

Viviani recently had two days of specialized scans and other tests. "There is no more cancer in her bone marrow," her mother said happily in late July. The mass in Viviani's abdomen has shrunk, too, but it's not gone. Next up is an MRI and then complex surgery to remove the tumor, possibly at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston or Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York. That will likely be followed by more treatments, possibly radiation, and then lengthy rounds of in-hospital stem cell therapy.

Family, friends, neighbors and even strangers in and near Rosanky, 13 miles southwest of Smithville, are stepping up to support Viviani, who turned 8 in June. Aunt Shannon and much-loved 6-year-old cousin, Riyann, are next-door neighbors. Grandmother Wanda lives with Viviani and Kelsey Snow. All live on Bastrop County land that has been in the family for generations.

CHILDHOOD CANCER BY THE NUMBERS

- 483,000 survivors of childhood cancer in the U.S. between 1975-2018
- 15,700 cases of childhood cancer in the U.S. each year
- 1,800 youth younger than 20 are diagnosed with cancer in Texas each year
- 83.5% of families with a child with cancer experience financial hardship
- 4 out of 5 children survive cancer

Sources: cancer.gov, acco.org, dellchildrens.net (statistics vary slightly)

Kelsey Snow has good health insurance, but the cost of Viviani's treatments are astronomical, she said. Family and friends organized fundraisers and more are planned, including an October music event featuring local talent and perhaps a high-wattage country star.

"The amount of support has blown me away," Kelsey Snow said. "I'll see people I don't even know wearing purple 'Cancer Picked the Wrong Princess' T-shirts," which were sold as part of a fundraiser for Viviani. Cousins and family friends created Vivi's Villagers benefit fund because "it takes a village." Donations can be made at any First National Bank of Bastrop or via the Venmo money transfer app to @Vivis-Villagers. Keep up with fundraisers and activities at facebook.com/vivisvillage.

Kelsey Snow balances loving care with firm consistency. "I tell her: It's OK to be sad. We're going to have a few minutes to have some cry time, to feel our feelings, and then we're going to stand up and we're going to keep going," she said.

"Ever since she was little, anywhere we would go it would take twice as long as it should because Vivi would talk to everybody, always smiling, always happy, making jokes and meeting people," her mother said.

"She still has the smile. I don't know how she does it. Kids are resilient. And she is a fighter, for sure." ■

5 COMMON CHILDHOOD CANCERS

LEUKEMIAS, 28% — Cancers of bone marrow and blood

BRAIN, CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM TUMORS, 26% — About 1 in 4 cancers in children; 4,000+ diagnosed yearly

LYMPHOMAS, 3% HODGKIN AND 5% NON-HODGKIN — formed in lymph system, including lymph nodes, spleen, thymus, bone marrow or tonsils

NEUROBLASTOMA, 6% — Most common in children younger than 1 year; about 700 cases diagnosed yearly

WILMS' TUMOR, 5% — In kidneys, most common in young children; under 500 cases diagnosed annually in U.S.

Sources: cancer.gov, cancer.org

Get information about organizations that support kids with cancer and Ronald McDonald House charities online at bluebonnet.coop/TCP.

\$19,583 grant to aid Martindale Volunteer Fire and Rescue

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently awarded grants in Bluebonnet's service area. The grants are part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program to give back to the communities it serves. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and a partner in the grant program. More information is available at lcra.org/cdpp.

The Martindale Volunteer Fire and Rescue will purchase a utility terrain vehicle to assist with river rescues and patient transports, thanks to a \$19,583 grant. The grant, along with \$4,896 in matching funds, will provide the department with a reliable rescue vehicle to access areas along the San Marcos River.

Pictured, from left to right, are Drew Schulle, Martindale VFD fire lieutenant; Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Board member; Chris Germer, Martindale VFD fire chief; Bill Glaze, Martindale VFD fire board president; Joyce Buckner, Bluebonnet community representative; Rick Arnic, LCRA regional affairs representative; and Kyle Morris, Martindale VFD firefighter.



LCRA photo

Bluebonnet

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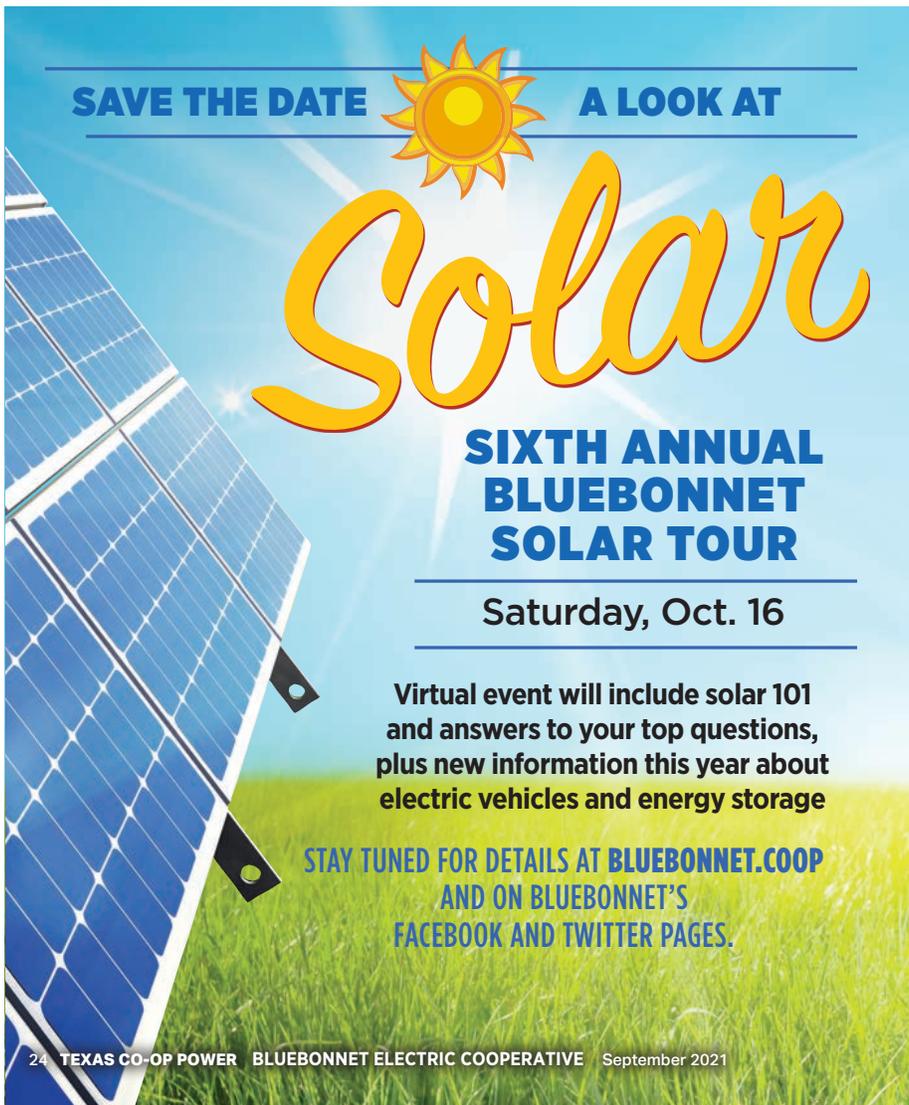
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Be safe on the farm



Overhead lines running across the rural regions of our service area can pose a hazard for harvesting crops and hay. To stay safe when farming around overhead power lines, we have five tips:

1. Keep all equipment at least 10 feet from lines.
2. Inspect the height of farm equipment to determine clearance.
3. Never try to raise or move a power line to clear a path.
4. Call Bluebonnet at 800-842-7708 immediately if a power line is sagging or low.
5. Always use a spotter when operating large machinery near lines.

For more tips during National Farm Safety Week, Sept. 19-25, visit our Facebook and Twitter pages.

Find out about careers at Bluebonnet

BLUEBONNET IS one of the largest electric cooperatives in Texas and has been serving its members since 1939. The cooperative provides power to more than 113,000 meters, and owns and maintains more than 12,000 miles of power lines across more than 3,800 square miles within 14 Central Texas counties.

Our workforce is diverse, and so are the jobs at the cooperative. If working close to home is a goal, then Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative may have the job for you. Our employees work with members and community groups, restore power, maintain our facilities, and introduce new technology. The list goes on and on.

In accordance with federal, state and local laws, Bluebonnet does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability unrelated to job requirements, genetic history, veteran status or any other legally protected status.

Bluebonnet accepts applications for its Department of Labor Certified Apprentice Program for line workers on the first Tuesday of every month, and for all other open positions as they become available.



Applications may be completed on the co-op's website, bluebonnet.coop. Click on Careers at the bottom of any page.

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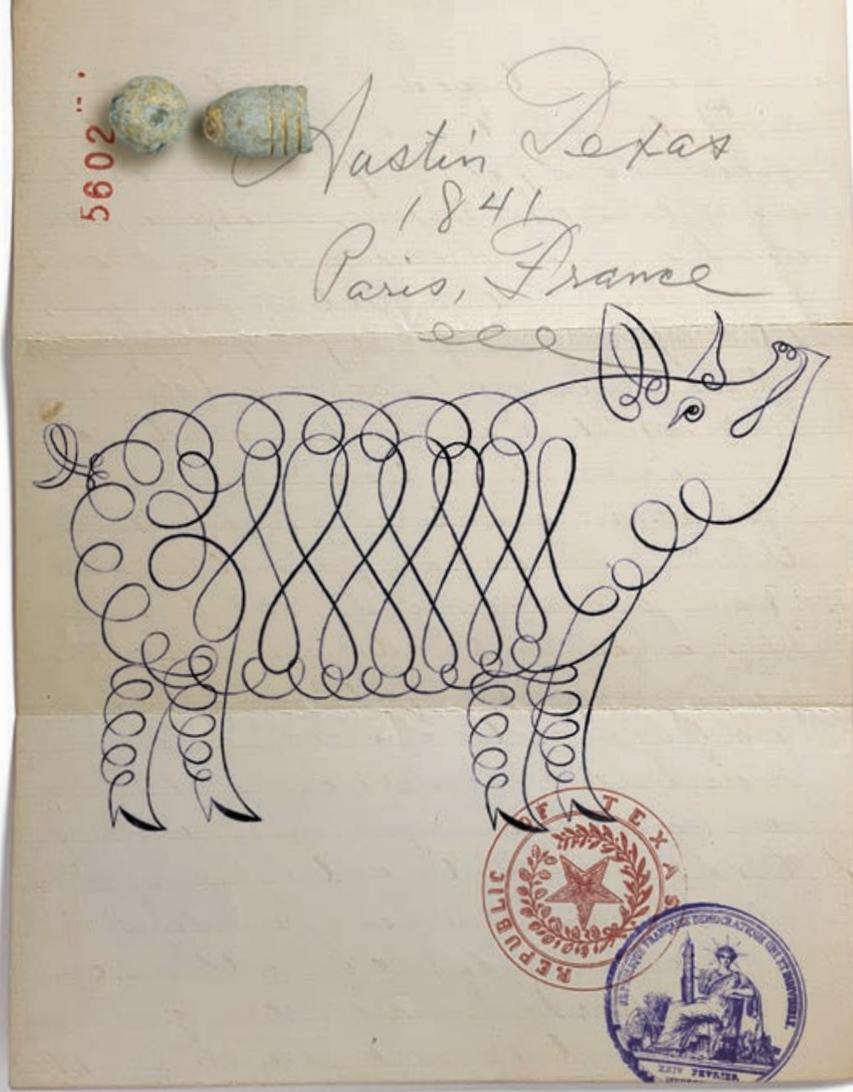
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France's Beef? Pigs

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, 1822, 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 unconsummated 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
- 2 ¾ 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 Texans 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, grapevineingruene.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, christchildssocietydfw.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

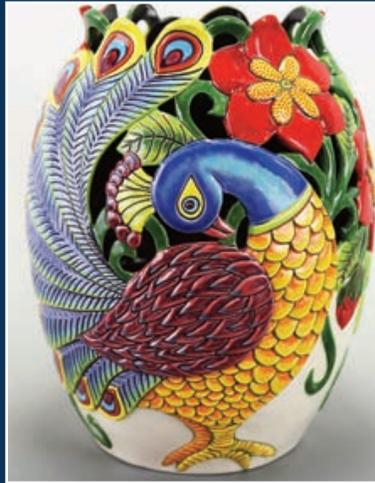
Austin [24-25] Capital of Texas Vintage Postcard & Paper Show and Sale, (512) 775-6796, ctxpc.org

MORE EVENTS >

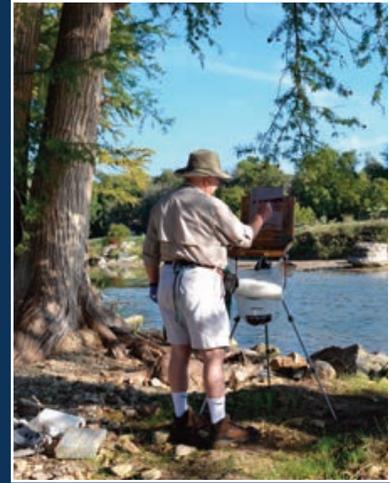
TCP *Submit Your Event*

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.

Retreat... Relax in Kerrville The Capital of the Texas Hill Country!



Texas State Arts & Crafts Fair
Sept 25-26
txartsandcraftsfair.com



Kerrville Outdoor Painters Event
Sept 22-26
kacckerrville.com

KERRVILLE
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

For Details Contact KerrvilleTexasCVB.com • 830-792-3535



Fredericksburg

Getaway Contest

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TexasCoopPower.com/contests

TCP E-news

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TexasCoopPower.com/events



PAVOL STREDANSKY | DREAMSTIME.COM

Pick of the Month

Leander Educational Excellence Foundation MUDstale & Family Fun Run

Cedar Park, September 18
 (512) 570-0027
leeftx.org/mudstale

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, eschewed 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 henbit. 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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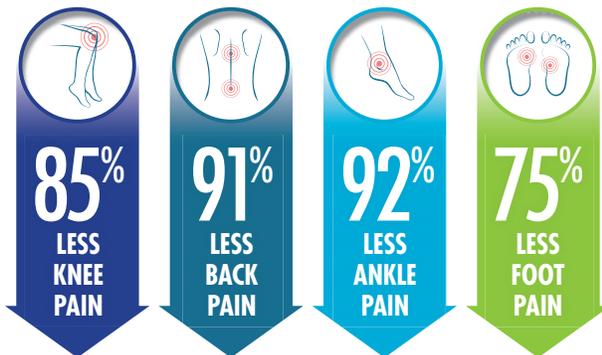


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