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NOVEMBER 2020

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to creation of a bat cave

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18



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November 2020



08

Bat Lodging

A conservationist creates a unique oasis for roving insect hunters in Central Texas.

*By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Eric W. Pohl*

ON THE COVER AND ABOVE
Dusk sends bats rushing out of a cave at Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve to feast on insects.
Photos by Eric W. Pohl

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The International Space Station, controlled entirely in Houston and home to groundbreaking research, turns 20.

By Melissa Gaskill

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Fresh Perspective
By Dan Oko



Tuning Up a BMW

BY LAW, ELECTRIC CARS must emit artificial sounds to alert pedestrians, bicyclists and people with visual impairment. When BMW debuts its i4 sedan for 2021, its sonic signature will be the creation of film composer Hans Zimmer, who won an Oscar in 1995 for his score of *The Lion King* and has been nominated for 10 others.



Not Giving an Inch

The U.S. remains one of three countries that does not use the metric system.

The others are Myanmar, in Southeast Asia, and Liberia, on the West African coast.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I'M MOST THANKFUL FOR ...

TOP 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 city. Here are some of the responses to our September prompt: **I can't believe I bought ...**

A 2020 planner.
JANICE SCHWAB
VIA FACEBOOK

My daughter's story about the dent in the car.
JANET MOSLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Toilet paper for Christmas presents.
DONALIE BELTRAN
CECA
MAY

A Super Bowl XII Cowboys-Broncos ticket for \$32.
CRAIG MASSOUH
PEDERNALES EC
SATTLER

To see more responses, read Currents online.

“When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around.”

—WILLIE NELSON

Texas has 247 freshwater fish species.

SOUND FISHY? OR ALLURING?



PRIZED SCRIBES

November 1 is National Authors Day. *Texas Co-op Power* writers and editors tell of the authors who have been captivating them lately:

Chris Burrows: **Carlos Ruiz Zafón** crafted enchanting tales about enchanting tales.

Travis Hill: **Claudia Rankine** writes cross-genre poetry that lyrically weaves public engagement and private emotion around today's most relevant themes.

Charles Lohrmann: **John le Carré's** international intrigue has been replaced by **Attica Locke's** fast-moving crime fiction.

Jessica Ridge: **Toni Tipton-Martin** cracks open the culinary canon.

Tom Widlowski: **Elmer Kelton** takes me by horseback to pioneer Texas.



Howard Daniel Jr. and wife Clara with an award presented by Burke.

TCP WEB EXTRA

Read about other co-op members who are making a difference in their communities in TCP's Power of Our People program.

Real Passion, Real People

HOWARD DANIEL JR. of Livingston says everyone is important and that belief would be universal if people knew each other as individuals.

Daniel, a retired Army colonel and longtime member of Sam Houston Electric Cooperative, serves on the board for Burke, an organization that assists more than 10,000 people with mental health needs and developmental disabilities in 12 East Texas counties.

Daniel learned about Burke after his daughter, Marie, was born with a developmental disability. He joined the board in 1999 and has been its chair since 2011.

Under Daniel's leadership Burke has doubled its mental health services capacity, expanded developmental disability services, engaged law enforcement in mental health emergency management, and expanded Burke's reach to provide specialty services for children and veterans.

"I want the best for the people we serve," says Daniel, pastor of Chesswood Baptist Church, "because the people we serve, like my daughter and others, are real people, with real feelings—and they are special."

Daniel believes everybody should help people born with intellectual and developmental challenges. "We need to make them feel good," he says. "The best way to make them feel good is to put the best facilities out there that we can."

Learn more about Burke and Daniel at myburke.org.

To nominate a person who is making a difference in your community, email details to people@texascooppower.com.



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ANDREA COBB

Meadow Oasis

“Thank you, Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, for your Observations, which calmed my pandemic soul. It felt like I was there at the meadow with you.”

CATHERINE NELSON
PEDERNALES EC
SAN MARCOS

Freaks of Nature

I and many other native plant “freaks” have enjoyed our own little refuges of native habitat, experiencing the flora and fauna that used to be so common here—a true reflection of Texas—before the manicured lawn with its plants from Asia, Africa and Europe came to be the standard [Meadow Oasis, September 2020].

Regina Levoy
MidSouth EC
Shiro



Thank you for highlighting the story of [Jessie Daniel Ames](#), a compassionate, strong, confident woman who fought for our right to vote in addition to protesting against lynchings of people of color [Empowering Every Vote, August 2020].

MARTA LOPEZ
VIA FACEBOOK



WARNER BROTHERS | GETTY IMAGES

Giant Fan

The first time I saw *Giant*, I was very young [Reel Moments, September 2020]. It made such an impression on me. I am 63 and have seen it more times than I can count. Thank you for the wonderfully written story.

Daniella Spann
Medina EC
Medina

Movie Critics

It is amazing that so many good movies have been made in Texas. One that was left out, *Secondhand Lions*, was filmed around Austin in 2002 and was, hands down, one of the best movies ever made.

Norris and Pat Croom
Hamilton County EC
Copperas Cove

How can you do a story on films in Texas and not mention *Hud*?

Dan Golden
Houston County EC
Lovelady

TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

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

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest Texas Co-op Power

How could you not include *The Last Picture Show*, filmed in Archer City, written by Larry McMurtry and nominated for eight Academy Awards?

Mark Spurlock
Taylor EC
Abilene

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BAT LODGING



A CONSERVATIONIST creates a unique oasis for roving insect hunters in Central Texas

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL

AS DUSK FALLS ON A WARM SUMMER EVENING, I've joined J. David Bamberger and a few close friends at a table about 50 yards from a gaping hole on a hillside at his ranch near Johnson City.

As we nibble chips and salsa, a single bat emerges from the opening. In a flash a hawk swoops down, snatching the fluttering scout in midflight. A few minutes later, with sunlight quickly fading, a few more bats appear. Soon a narrow stream of flapping shapes forms, like a horizontal plume of campfire smoke.

Bamberger, a former door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman who co-founded the Church's Chicken chain, used his fortune to buy this once-overgrazed property in 1969, paying just \$124 an acre. He named it Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve and began nurturing it, removing nonnative species and planting indigenous grasses. The dry, eroded Central Texas landscape sputtered back to life. Today the 5,500-acre oasis features flowing creeks, fields of waving grass and towering trees and serves as a laboratory for land conservation.

It's also got a bat cave, or "chiroptorium," as Bamberger, 92 and still hiking or exploring his property nearly every day, calls it. (The word hasn't made it into dictionaries, but it's a standard at Selah, which itself is a biblical word whose definition is debated but to Bamberger means "to stop, pause, look around and reflect.")

While volunteering as a trustee with Bat Conservation International's Bracken Cave in the 1990s, Bamberger met BCI founder and bat expert Merlin Tuttle, who taught him the environmental benefits the furry, sometimes pecan-sized mammals provide. Bats gobble up tons of insects across the country each night, Bamberger learned, saving farmers more than \$3.7 billion a year in crop damage and pesticide use. Bamberger, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative, got the wild idea to lure a bat population to his own ranch by building a bat cave. Constructing a bat habitat, he figured, meshed with his mission to restore rangeland and protect wildlife.

Mexican free-tailed bats emerge from the chiroptorium—the bat cave constructed at Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE J. David Bamberger shows an indigenous grass that thrives at the preserve. Bamberger walks with author Pam LeBlanc. Sunset at the preserve.

TOP WEB EXTRA

Enter online to win Pam LeBlanc's recent book, *My Stories, All True: J. David Bamberger on Life as an Entrepreneur and Conservationist*.

"People laughed at the idea," Bamberger tells me. We met and became friends more than a decade ago, when I first wrote about his work. "When people laugh at you, sometimes you back away," he says. "Most successful people continue on."

After consulting with bat experts, architect Jim Smith designed a 30-by-100-foot, three-domed habitat with a special observation room where scientists and visitors could watch the bats through a plate glass window. They picked an easily accessible spot near water with a clear flight path. Then they went to work building the structure of concrete and gunite, backfilled it with dirt and covered it with native vegetation.

Newspaper reporters flocked to the ranch in 1998 to report the story. Now all he needed was a resident population.

Bamberger hauled in a load of bat guano to make the cave more appealing, but the bats turned up their noses. He brought in a small occupied bat box to lure a population, but the bats didn't stick around. Still, Bamberger persisted.

"If it doesn't work, it'll hold a hell of a lot of wine," he rationalized.

Every once in a while, a few bats would show up. "I'd be about to rapture," Bamberger says. But the stream of bats he dreamed about didn't move in until four years later, after biologists realized that the few bats that discovered the cave were smashing into the observation window. After they boarded up the window, the bats moved in.

"Unbelievable," Bamberger says, telling the story of driving up to the site and discovering the new residents. "Tears are running down my face. I can't believe what I'm seeing. The bats are pouring out."





“PEOPLE LAUGHED AT THE IDEA,”

Bamberger tells me. We met and became friends more than a decade ago, when I first wrote about his work. “When people laugh at you, sometimes you back away,” he says. “Most successful people continue on.”

He felt vindicated, especially since the *San Antonio Express-News* was printing a story that very week, dubbing the cave “Bamberger’s Folly” and noting that he’d spent more to build a house for bats than most people spend building a home for their family.

When he phoned biologist Tom Kunz, though, the bat expert warned that the emergence was likely a fluke and that a migrating group had probably just stopped over temporarily.

But the bats came back. And since they arrived in big numbers in 2002, they have never left. Today the ranch is

home to year-round populations of Mexican free-tailed bats and cave myotis, another type of bat. Thermal imaging scans show that as many as 400,000 individuals pack shoulder to shoulder along the chiropterium walls during the summer and fly out nightly to forage for insects. In the winter the population dwindles to 3,000–15,000.

“Our bats are very strange,” says Jared Holmes, staff biologist at Selah, equating the population to the bat version of a wild college fraternity house. While a large maternal population inhabits the space during summer months, it



changes when temperatures drop. “We don’t know if the winter colony is just a bunch of lazy males [from northern populations] that don’t want to fly all the way south or something else,” Holmes says.

The maternal population generally shows up in April or May and remains until the heat eases in September or October. Bamberger built the chiroptorium to hold a million individuals, but biologists today believe the cave’s current population represents full capacity. “If you go in there, it’s wall-to-wall bats, and as [evolutionary biologist] Gary McCracken put it, they are a possum’s crawl off the floor,” Holmes says.

Bamberger likes to say you could run around naked all day and never get bitten by a mosquito at his ranch. And while that’s not quite true, the bats do keep down the insect population at Selah.

“It’s David’s bat cave of dreams,” Holmes says. “We’re lucky David tried it.”

But testing also has shown the cave carries a high load of the fungus that causes white nose syndrome, the disease that has killed millions of bats across the country, mostly in the Northeast. When conditions are right, the fungus blooms, creating an itchy, white, mushroomlike growth on the bats’ faces that wakes them from hibernation. That’s less of a problem in warmer places like Central Texas, where they can still find water and insects year-round, but devastating in colder climates. So far the Selah bats have not shown signs of the disease, but as a precaution, Holmes hopes to pressure-wash the chiroptorium this winter, at

Bamberger overlooks a pond from one of his favorite spots on the preserve.

night while the population is out foraging.

“If we lose bats, we lose ecosystem services—all that free pest control and food for other animals,” Holmes says.

“Bats are in trouble, and we have a very unique opportunity to study how these man-made bat caves can function with fungus and virus and how we can disinfect their habitats. It’s an opportunity to see how we can help bats, and it’s great to have a proven design that we may be able to scale down for smaller colonies.”

Besides, bats don’t deserve their negative reputation, Holmes and Bamberger say. The mammals have long been maligned, equated with evil in old films and described as blood-sucking vermin.

“But everything in the natural world, even things we despise, plays a role in the conservation of planet Earth,” Bamberger says. “From the very beginning of my time here, I knew I wanted to make the ranch something special with Mother Nature. I realized the potential of bats—they would be another thing I could brag about, teach from and demonstrate.

“This is small potatoes, but I think my small potatoes are terribly important.” ■

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

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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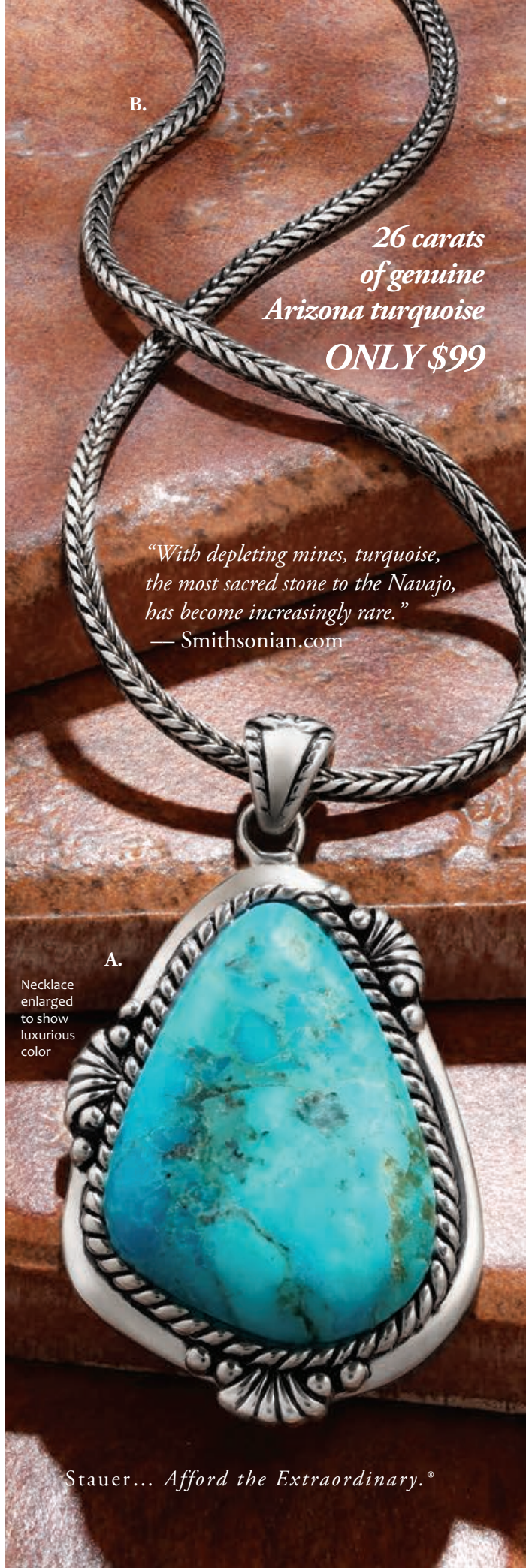
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A.

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BY MELISSA GASKILL

OUT OF THIS WORLD

The International Space Station, controlled entirely in Houston and responsible for groundbreaking research, turns 20

IF YOU OR SOMEONE you know recently underwent laser eye surgery, the surgeon likely used technology developed on the International Space Station to track eye movements of astronauts. Surgeons needed a way to follow eye position that doesn't interfere with the procedure, and the space technology proved ideal. The equipment is now used in corrective eye surgeries worldwide.

The space station, the only microgravity laboratory in our known universe, enables research that cannot be conducted anywhere else. As of November 2, scientists have used the orbiting lab continuously for 20 years, conducting more than 2,700 experiments.

All of this science—and in fact every aspect of the space station—is managed at Johnson Space Center, established in 1961 in southeast Houston. Flight control teams of engineers, medical officers and technicians remain on duty there 24/7/365 for the space station.

"I'm not sure people understand what goes on in Mission Control," says John-David Bartoe, who flew on the space shuttle for the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory in 1985 before spending 20 years, starting in 1993, as the space station's research manager. "No astronaut on the station is sitting at a console with a stick flying the space station. That all happens in Mission Control. They are



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE Astronaut Nick Hague shows materials that were part of an experiment for middle and high school students. James H. Newman works outside the space station. Christina H. Koch conducts a capillary structures experiment.

TCP WEB EXTRA

Learn more about the space station—and watch it pass over your town.



Scientists study colloids, which are mixtures of various particles in a liquid, to create more effective and longer-lasting products. Shampoo, laundry detergent and salad dressing are examples of colloids. On Earth, colloids are hard to study because gravity causes heavy particles to sink and lighter ones to float, but in microgravity, that problem goes away, leading to advances we see on store shelves.

Anheuser-Busch has tested germination and malting of barley on the space station to learn how the grain can be altered to improve its use in brewing, distilling and food production. Goodyear Tire has conducted studies to help produce more fuel-efficient tires, and Adidas uses the space station to research improvements in the process of making insoles.

Agriculture and land management benefit from space station research, too. Farmers can monitor water use with thermal infrared measurements taken of Earth's surface from the space station, and another instrument indicates how much carbon is stored in forest canopies.

Equipment on the space station also supports disaster monitoring and responses on Earth. Crew members on the space station can adjust sensors in real time in response to natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, flooding and tsunamis—something satellites cannot do—and relay valuable information to scientists on Earth. Night images taken from the space station help responders check the restoration of electric power after a disaster. Images also help monitor the spread of wildfires and the path of storms so earthbound experts can guide evacuations and rescue operations or the deployment of firefighters.

Researchers in Texas take advantage of the space station for their own work. Larry Kramer, an academic radiologist at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston, is working on a study with the Cardiovascular and Vision Laboratory at Johnson Space Center that looks into how space travel affects vision and the brain.

"Vision problems are a major problem for NASA to solve, something they have to worry about as flight duration becomes longer and they contemplate travel to Mars," Kramer says. "I had experience and was in the right place at the right time."

The team at Johnson Space Center continually plans experiments, and NASA is flooded with proposals from people wanting to conduct research on the space station, Bartoe says. "A long time ago, the executive director of a national science organization said that research in microgravity is of micro-importance. I think we have clearly proven him wrong." ■

actually controlling the mission.

"People in the space station program office make decisions every day on how to make this thing work," Bartoe says. "No one had ever done this before, and the brains behind making this thing happen are right there at JSC."

Bartoe says that when he arrived at Johnson Space Center, his goal was to interest the scientific community in using the space station, which was difficult because it did not yet exist. "We took the philosophy of 'build it and they will come,'" he says, "and turned out it worked."

Every single astronaut who has flown to the space station—more than 240 people so far—trained at the Houston facility.

Research on the space station has contributed to a variety of medical advances in addition to the eye-tracking technology. People soon may be able to receive treatments for some types of cancers via a simple injection rather than intravenous infusion, and studies in space contribute to development of medicines targeting specific cancers, muscular dystrophy, Alzheimer's and other diseases. Advances that help with osteoporosis, stiffening of the arteries and other symptoms of aging spring from research to help protect astronauts from bone loss and cardiovascular problems they can experience in space.

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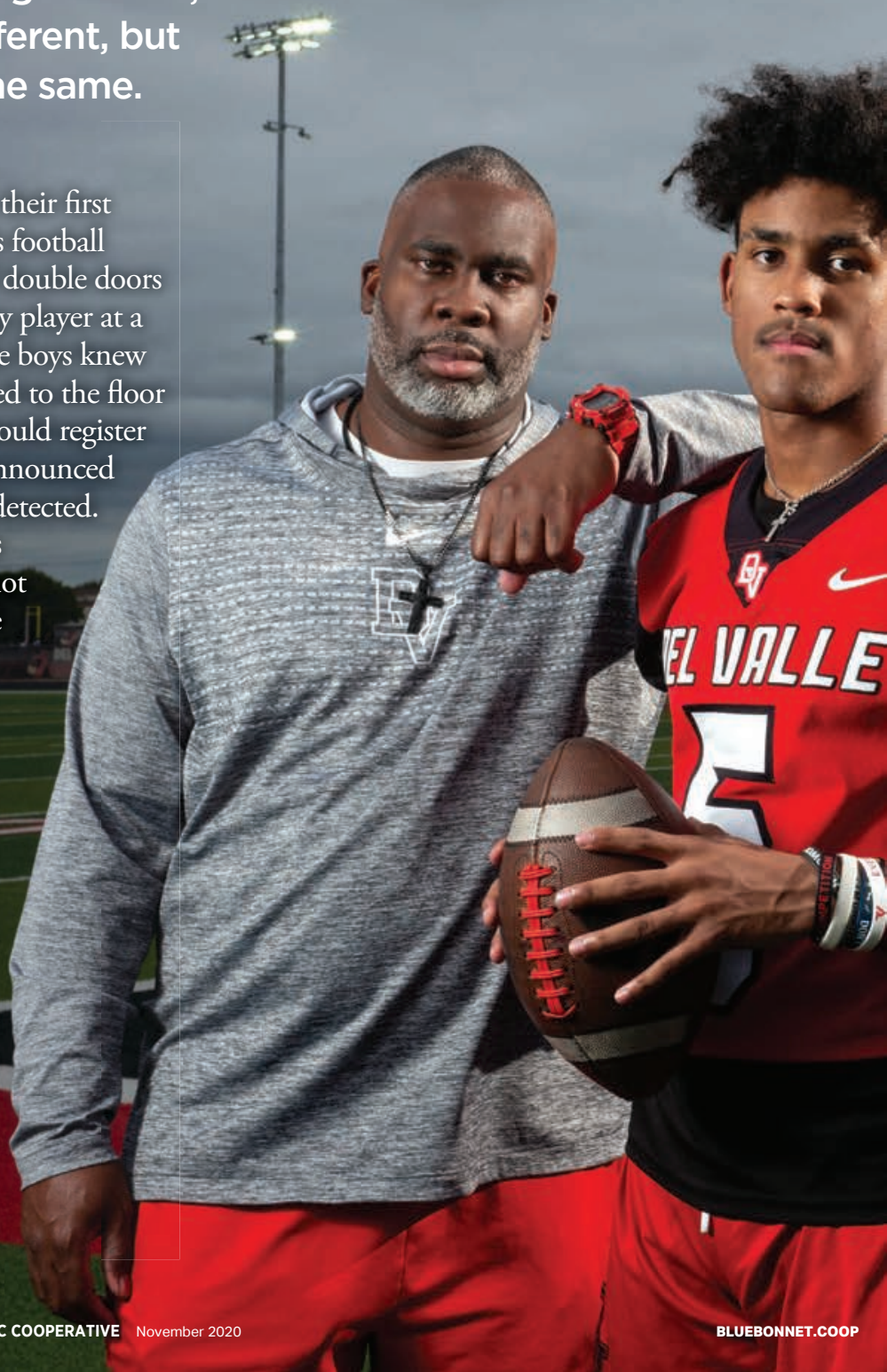
COVID-19 changed the rules for high school football across Texas. At Del Valle High School, everything looks different, but the game remains the same.

By Kevin Robbins

ON THE TUESDAY before their first game, Del Valle High School's football team stepped through a set of double doors for indoor practice, one groggy player at a time. It was not yet 6 a.m. The boys knew the protocol: step to an X taped to the floor so a scanner bolted to a wall could register their temperatures. A coach announced each reading. No fevers were detected.

Only then could the athletes proceed to their lockers, but not too many at once, because the district in southeastern Travis County allows only limited capacity in any small space, including the weight and training rooms inside a facility next to the stadium. The mere act of preparing for practice is cumbersome and complicated. Helmets off? Masks on. Hand sanitizer? Use it. Head coach Charles Burton persistently reminded players to keep a 6-foot distance from anyone else. Now it was habit, like snapping a chinstrap.

Continued on page 20



BALL GAME



Ralph Barrera photo

Members of the Caldwell High cheer squad await the start of the school's football game against the Giddings Buffaloes on Sept. 18. More about the two teams, page 22.

THE GAME GOES ON despite half-full stadiums, fewer games and myriad new rules

Across the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region, high schools of all sizes are keeping the football season going. **Page 20B**

How the season is shaping up for larger schools in the Bluebonnet region. **Page 20D**

Lockhart's special moment goes viral. **Page 21**

UIL's new COVID-19 protocols. **Page 22**

Find more photos with these stories and a list of all Bluebonnet-area high school football teams at **bluebonnet.coop**, or on Bluebonnet's Facebook page

Del Valle head coach Charles Burton and his son, Caleb Burton, a junior wide receiver, at the Cardinal's Veterans Stadium in southeast Travis County. Everyone associated with football — coaches, players, cheer and drill teams, band, faculty and fans — are adjusting to restrictions imposed because of COVID-19.

Rodolfo Gonzalez photo

Continued from page 18

“In football speak that’s two yards,” Burton says.

His players understand football speak. More than that, they understand the gift they have been given: a season many had accepted over the summer that they might not get. The coronavirus pandemic threatened to put a stop to many traditions. None mattered more to the Cardinals than the prospect of losing football. When the University Interscholastic League finally announced in July that big Division 6A schools like Del Valle could play 2020 football (but not until the first week of September) the Cardinals, and especially the senior Cardinals, cheered as if they’d been drafted by the Dallas Cowboys.

At that Tuesday practice in the cavernous indoor practice facility, Burton and his 11 assistant coaches covered their faces with gaiters and got to work. They watched Tavierre Dunlap, the graceful senior running back, slice through the defense, hurdling tackles. Even though the 6-foot, 210-pound Dunlap had already committed to the University of Michigan, he decided to stay and play with the Cardinals this year. Perhaps he could help them make a run for the playoffs. Then circumstances changed.

“I’m just glad I’m still playing, because there are a lot of people who aren’t playing,” Dunlap said, noting the number of U.S. athletes who lost their seasons, even their sports, as programs around the country were eliminated. “I’m just blessed that I get to play, honestly.”

The air conditioning hummed at full throttle. Rap beats poured from loudspeakers. In a typical season, a team like the Del Valle Cardinals would’ve endured hot, late-summer practices, lifted together in the 10,000-square-foot weight room and spent many hours studying their responsibilities with position coaches. But here they were, on Sept. 22, together for only the third week, and grateful.

They were still breaking in their new cleats.

Practice ended at 8 sharp. Burton called his boys to midfield and said: “Today was a winning practice.” He said he was proud of their improving grades. He instructed them to tell their sixth-period teachers they would miss class Friday. Their new game-day ritual would start at 2 that afternoon, when they would

Rodolfo Gonzalez photos



take three buses (not two) and sit one to a row (and no more) for the 30-mile trip to Round Rock to play the McNeil High School Mavericks.

Caleb Burton, a junior, listened on one knee, breathing hard through his mask. The stakes were more severe for the lithe wide receiver, son of the head coach.

Caleb Burton is one of the highest-ranked players in the nation and the top-ranked wide receiver in Texas, according to most recruiting services. He had 39 scholarship offers already, including from elite programs such as Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, LSU, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Notre Dame and Texas.

He admitted he’d been worried. He and his father wondered a lot about the future when they, like much of the coun-

try, had been asked to stay home in the early months of the pandemic last spring. Charles Burton tried to keep his 16-year-old son from dwelling too much and losing hope. The coach, who has led the football team at Del Valle for eight years, appreciated what was at risk. The elder Burton, who grew up in Houston, played college football at Syracuse. He wanted Caleb to have that same experience, the kind that can change a life.

“We’ve just stayed positive with them,” Charles Burton said. He was talking about his son. But he also was talking about his other sons: the 45 players on the varsity roster.

When he learned the UIL had approved the season, Charles Burton and the Del Valle administration began work





At left, the Del Valle drill team, down from 30 girls to 20, performs during the home opener against Liberty Hill on Oct. 2. Above, cheer captain Jayda Price leads the team in the school fight song cheer after a score. Below left, Del Valle's senior running back Tavierre Dunlap stands for the national anthem before the coin toss. Liberty Hill won, 44-27.

on a district-wide mitigation plan to manage everything from football to cheerleading to marching band while the virus remained a threat. His son simply thanked the heavens for the opportunity to catch footballs.

"I was super excited and blessed," Caleb Burton said.

So were many of his classmates. The UIL decision meant other fall sports at Del Valle also would proceed – the 49 volleyball players and four coaches, the 15 tennis players and two coaches, the 15 golfers and two coaches, the 66 cross-country runners and two coaches. Members of the marching band would march. Cheerleading teams would cheer.

Morganne Davies, fine arts coordinator for the district, built with her staff a new version of home game halftime and in-game entertainment. Band and drill team rehearsals began on Sept. 8. The band was smaller, with 80 musicians instead of the typical 120. The drill team, the Del Valle Belles, was down from 30 girls to 20. Band director Tom Guyton and head dance coach Catherine Zink collaborated with Davies to redesign choreographies to reduce close proximity. They replaced the flag corps with a junior-varsity drill team called the Cardettes. No one wanted anyone touching flags this fall.

"We're focusing on what we can do instead of what we can't," Davies said emphatically. Her goal is to make 2020 a year they won't forget, for all the right reasons and in all the right ways. "At the

end of the day, those are the memories they're going to take with them."

On the Thursday before the McNeil game, head cheer team coach Janet Ndomahina gathered her 16 cheerleaders for the annual "captain reveal." The cheerleaders already knew how their year would change: eight girls on the sideline at any one time, eight in the bleachers, switching out every quarter of the game. There would be no pep rallies. There would be no gift exchanges with cheerleaders from the opponents' schools.

But there would be a new captain.

Ndomahina had worked hard (and quite secretly) to make this particular reveal meaningful. She asked parents of cheerleaders to make video recordings, congratulating the new captain on her appointment. One of the mothers had made special T-shirts for the girls. The theme was Care Bears. Jayda Price, a senior, was wearing a Care Bears shirt at the reveal when she watched the video her mother — her mother! — made. It was for her. Price was the senior captain. "I'm so proud of the things that you've accomplished," Price heard her mother say.

"It was very, very heartwarming," Price said. "It made me cry."

It wasn't just the fact that she was captain. It was the weight of everything in the fall semester of her senior year. She once had dreams that no longer existed. She had goals that had to change. But, with the help of coaches and her cheer-

leading teammates, she also embraced new possibilities.

"We're going to make the best of it," Price said.

"We had so many plans for this year," said Ndomahina, her coach. "We wanted to go to camp in Dallas. We wanted to have auditions for a competition team."

They did not want a pandemic. They did not want a football season in which only eight cheerleaders could clap pom-poms on the sidelines at one time.

"Right now football season is the only thing we're looking forward to," Price said. Of her coach, she added: "When things get hard, she does not give up."

"I couldn't do it without having such great girls," Ndomahina said.

A day after the reveal, three buses idled outside Del Valle High School at 2 p.m. sharp. Players and coaches boarded, one to a row, masked, no exceptions.

When they arrived for the game, they were buoyed by the presence of spectators in the seats. Kelly Reeves Athletic Complex wasn't full. But it wasn't empty. It felt right.

The Cardinals scored early. Dunlap, the senior running back bound for Michigan, had an extraordinary game. He ran for 215 yards and scored two touchdowns. He caught three passes. Del Valle won, 28-13.

As any high school football player or coach in Texas will tell you, it's one week at a time.

After week one, the Cardinals were undefeated, and looking forward to their first home game the following Friday, when they could hear their band, watch their dancers and listen to their cheerleaders, eight at a time, with their parents up there in the bleachers, spread out. Whistles will blow. Lights will glow on the horizon there and all over Texas. One team will win and one will lose. But they'll be playing. They'll be thankful for playing.

The students at Del Valle didn't just get a football season. They got a year unlike any other year, a year they'll remember forever. ■

Editor's note: During the Del Valle Cardinals' first game of the season against McNeil High School on Sept. 25, star wide receiver Caleb Burton suffered a knee injury that ended his junior season. The Cardinals won the game, 28-13.

THE SEASON THAT AL

Despite the pandemic, new UIL guidelines are in place and high school football is back in the Bluebonnet region.

By Suzanne Halliburton

IT WAS EARLY October in Central Texas, and finally, high school football was back — from Brenham to Bastrop, Lockhart to Manor, Dime Box to Lexington.

Stadium seats could only be half full. Fewer games were scheduled. Some playoffs, the goal of every team in pre-season, were bumped to January.

The new reality under the Friday night lights of 2020 across the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area features players wearing school-branded neck gaiters or plastic shields inside their facemasks. There are fewer, if any, handshakes before or after games. Players bring their own water bottles to practice, and there are fewer big gatherings in the locker room.

But as long as players and coaches stay healthy and communities embrace the new pandemic reality, there are games and homecomings and still-loud crowds at high schools big and small across Central Texas.

This seemed unthinkable when high school sports shuttered in spring 2020 because of COVID-19.

“Football makes the world go round,” said Che Nwabuko, a standout tailback for the Manor High Mustangs. “I was a strong believer we could play. We kept working as if this football season was going to happen.”

The University Interscholastic League, which oversees athletics for Texas’ public schools, announced July 21 that high school football would happen, but with significant modifications. The an-



Stephen Spillman photo

For Manor’s Che Nwabuko, left, Carl Chester and Devin Lemear, COVID-19 masks are just another piece of protective gear worn prior to their scrimmage against McCallum High School at the Manor ISD Athletic Complex on Sept. 24.

nouncement came a day after California said it was pushing back the sport’s start until 2021. California, which has the second-largest high school football system in the country after Texas, was among 17 states that opted for the next-season delay.

The UIL said smaller schools, divisions 1A to 4A, would follow the same pre-season schedule as normal. Players reported the first week of August for training camps. Games started at the end of that month. The fall schedule had to be tweaked, sometimes because of a county’s COVID-19 restrictions or if an opposing team was in a larger division.

Bigger schools, divisions 5A and 6A, couldn’t kick off preseason practices until Sept. 7. The games for most of those high schools started at the end of September. Manor High, which made it to the final eight in the 2019 Class 5A Division I playoffs in 2019, had to wait until early October for its first game of 2020.

The UIL gave larger schools more time to deal with COVID-19 restrictions because most are in areas with higher-density populations where the

virus may be more likely to spread. Even before the UIL made its plans for the fall season known, Bastrop High School coach Todd Patmon had to halt his team’s summer workout program for two weeks after three athletes tested positive for COVID-19. He turned to Dr. Desmar Walkes, Bastrop County’s health authority for advice.

Texas’ high school football season wasn’t as chaotic as the start of college football across the country. Some major conferences decided not to play, then changed their minds. Players with COVID-19 or who had come into contact with someone with the virus had to quarantine. This temporarily wrecked rosters or impacted schedules at schools including Baylor, Houston, Texas Christian and Southern Methodist.

The high school season kicked off with a few hiccups, too.

After the first week of the smaller schools’ games, UIL officials received reports of teams and fans ignoring COVID-19 mitigation rules. The UIL reiterated the restrictions, including wearing masks and social distancing, and threatened penalties.

MOST WASN'T

Ralph Barrera photo



Rodolfo Gonzalez photo



Social distancing signs are common at fields and stadiums across the region now. The coin toss is different, too. At left, before the start of their Sept. 18 game, Giddings head coach Wade Griffin, left, and Caldwell head coach Matt Langley meet referee Alan Peacock in the end zone to call the flip.

Rodolfo Gonzalez photo



Dime Box wide receiver Jer'Perion Gilbert, a senior, shares a moment on the sideline with his dad, Kendrick Gilbert, during the game against Prairie Lea on Sept. 11.

"Any allegations of not following COVID-19 Risk Mitigation guidelines will be handled in the same manner as other UIL violations," the league announced on Sept. 2. Those penalties could range from a public reprimand of a school to shutting down a team.

The larger threat that can change everything very quickly is COVID-19 itself.

If a member of a team tests positive for the virus or too many players are directly exposed to someone with COVID-19, the program can be temporarily shut down. A player with a positive test has to be cleared by a doctor to return to the team. If a player lives in the same home with someone who has COVID-19, that player must quarantine for 10 days.

Coaches know the risks.

"We've got to understand that things are changing weekly, by the month," Lockhart coach Todd Moebes said.

Luling was forced to cancel its season opener after one of its players tested positive for COVID-19. Eleven players and two coaches were in close contact with the player, so they needed to quarantine. The one positive made more than half of Luling's 23-player roster unavailable.

In September, the powerhouse Lexington High Eagles team, which was fourth in Texas' 3A ranks early in the season, had its game against Cameron's C.H. Yoe High School canceled five days before kickoff. A Cameron player had tested positive for the virus, and the school had to shut down varsity football for a week.

It was one fewer game for Lexington's Jarred Kerr, a junior who plays multiple positions and is a top recruiting prospect in the area. By mid-September, he announced via Twitter that he'd picked

up his 17th major scholarship offer.

Jackie Edwards Jr., a three-sport star at Lockhart High, said it's easy to keep the Lions team from being tempted to stray away from social distancing and mask rules.

Edwards is the quarterback, so he's considered a team leader. He tells his teammates to appreciate what could be taken away through no fault of their own.

"I try to tell my teammates every time we're on field," Edwards said, "you never know when it could be our last time."

In tiny Dime Box, in the center of farm country not far from Texas 21 in Lee County, the team is focused on a football first despite the pandemic.

Their Longhorns are making a UIL football debut, becoming one of 218 schools in Texas playing 6-man football in division 1A, for schools with fewer than 105 students.

Dime Box fielded its first football team in 2019, rolling to a 4-1 season playing an independent schedule. The team plays home games on a reconfigured baseball field.

The team played one game in September, defeating the Prairie Lea Indians. If COVID-19 doesn't dash the Dime Box Longhorns' plans, they will play six games in the regular 2020 season.

Maybe a small team of UIL rookies, despite the distractions, can make its field of playoff dreams come true. ■

SNAPSHOTS

Some area high schools' 2020 football hopes

By Suzanne Halliburton

High schools in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region range from the smallest Division 1A to two big Division 6A schools, each with more than 2,200 students. Here's a quick season roundup for the area's Division 3A-6A schools.

San Marcos: DIVISION 6A (2,200 students and higher) — One of the two largest high schools in the Bluebonnet area with 2,309 students, San Marcos has high hopes for a huge hire made in May. John Walsh is the new coach of the Division 6A Rattlers, and he brings with him one of the highest profiles in Texas high school football, having led Denton's Guyer High School to two state titles in four championship game appearances. He'll be challenged at San Marcos to turn a 1-9 team into a winner.

Del Valle: (6A) — The largest Division 6A high school in the Bluebonnet region, Del Valle has 3,337 students. **See story, Page 18.**

Cedar Creek: DIVISION 5A (1,230 to 2,219 students) — The Eagles were 5-5 in 2019, the first time in the school's short history it had a non-losing year. But there's reason to believe the 2020 team could do better than break even, returning its quarterback and top running back along with an experienced offensive line.

Elgin: (5A) — The Wildcats want to end a five-year playoff drought. Elgin returns 12 starters from last year's 3-7 team, including quarterback/running back Peter McFarlin and linebacker Willie Simmons III, a senior who is committed to play at North Texas. Coach Jens Anderson hopes for a winning season, as the Wildcats have celebrated only 10 victories in the last three years.

Bellville: DIVISION 4A (515 to 1,229 students) — The Brahmas sported a 9-4



Sarah Beal/photo

Bastrop High School's Coach Todd Patmon, left, and five of his players, from left to right, linebacker Joseph Gonzalez, quarterback Romeo Flores Giles, lineman Cayden Scott, center Chance Wilson and defensive back/receiver Conrad Pace.

Bastrop: (5A) — The Bears returned 10 starters from the 2019 squad that rallied for three straight victories to finish 6-4 last year. Coach Todd Patmon selected Seth Mouser as his starting quarterback at the end of training camp, hoping the sophomore can help push Bastrop back into the playoffs.



The Brenham Banner-Press

season in 2019 to reach the regional semifinals. This year, 15 starters have returned and are poised to contend with the Sealy Tigers for the district title. Tailback Richard Reese broke a school record with 323 rushing yards in early September against the Cameron High School Yoemen, earning him state player of the week honors.

La Grange: (4A) — Leopards quarterback Caden Cooper, a senior, started the season with early success, throwing for a career high 339 yards against the La Vernia High Bears in September. A solid running attack led by senior D.J. Taylor also should help the Leopards improve last year's 8-4 season.

Smithville: (4A) — Smithville's Tigers finished 7-5 in 2019, reaching the area finals. This year, 13 starters returned. If coach Cyril Adkins needs to plug in players used to winning, he can tap someone from last year's junior varsity team, which was 10-0. Senior Christian Adkins returned as the team's leading rusher.

Lexington: DIVISION 3A (230 to 514 students) — The Eagles feature 17 starters from a year ago when they made the regional semifinals. Lexington's top player is running back Jarred Kerr, a junior, who is attracting a ton of recruiting attention from major college programs. He had consecutive 200-yard-plus games in September.

More team reports on next page

Brenham: (5A) — The Cubs had a good transition in 2018 from former coach Glen West, who won 185 games in two decades at Brenham, to Eliot Allen. The Cubs were 10-3 in 2019 and made it to the regional semifinals for the second straight season. They were preseason picks to win district again in 2020.

Brenham High coach Eliot Allen gives the team a pep talk during a scrimmage against Cypress Park on Sept. 18 at Cub Stadium in Brenham.



Ralph Barrera photo

Lockhart quarterback Jackie Edwards, left, and outside linebacker Josh Ramos warm up during a recent practice. Edwards said he has been patient and safe during this unusual season.

Lockhart: (5A) — This is Todd Moebes' second season with the Lions as head coach. Lockhart made the playoffs in 2019 and finished 5-6 for the year. The Lions should be more comfortable in their coach's spread offense, but the team returned only eight starters.

A special night for Lockhart's Desmond Pulliam

Lockhart High's football team savored a play that went viral on social media this season. In the final moments of the Lions scrimmage against the Bastrop Bears, Sept. 17, defensive lineman Desmond Pulliam, a favorite of his Lions teammates, recovered a fumbled snap and returned it for a touchdown.

Coach Todd Moebes had been working with Pulliam, a senior with a developmental disability, for two weeks on the art of the defensive scoop and score. Courtesy of a willing Bastrop team, Pulliam got his chance for scrimmage stardom to the cheers of teammates and fans.

An Austin sportscaster tweeted the video clip, which had more than a million views. Even ESPN gave it a retweet bump.

"Hopefully it was six seconds that everybody in attendance was able to take a little bit of a deep breath and say, 'You know what? Everything is going to be all right,'" Moebes told reporters at the scrimmage.

"Desmond is certainly to thank for that."

At the end of September, the NFL's Washington Football Team sent along a video congratulations and a signed jersey to Pulliam. Washington kicker Dustin Hopkins, who lives in Austin in the off-season, saw Pulliam's touchdown. Hopkins' son has a developmental disability similar to Pulliam's.



See the viral video at <https://tinyurl.com/y5nm5k4p>



Stephen Spillman photo

Manor head coach James Keller watches as his players warm up before a scrimmage against McCallum on Sept. 24.

Manor: (5A) — It's James Keller's first season as head coach, but nothing much will change. He's been coaching at Manor for 16 years. The Mustangs, with 13 returning starters, reached the regional finals in division playoffs in 2019 despite team injuries. Hopes are higher this year. On a team known for speed, Che Nwabuko, whose dad played for Manor, could be the fastest player on offense.

Luling: (3A) — After canceling the 2020 season opener due to COVID-19, the team was also forced to cancel its first game in October against Austin's Travis High Rebels. Coach Stacey Martin said the decision was not forced by the virus, but too many injuries meant there weren't enough players to safely field a team.

GAME GUIDELINES FROM THE UIL

The University Interscholastic League, which oversees athletics for all of Texas' public schools, issued guidelines that schools must adhere to if they play football games. The restrictions follow guidance in an executive order issued by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on July 2.

Everyone attending a game — school employees, parents, visitors and children 10 years and older — must wear a face covering to enter an area where a game is being played.

Attendance at a game cannot exceed 50 percent of capacity during the season. To help fans who cannot attend games because of these rules, the UIL allows schools to live stream the games. All game attendees must maintain standard 6-foot social distancing.

An exception will be made if the home team's county has had 20 or fewer new COVID-19 cases in the previous two weeks, according to the governor's mandate. ■



Ralph Barrera photo

Giddings players Evan Young, left, and Jakota Moore wear masks and practice social distancing on the sidelines of their game against Caldwell on Sept. 18. Giddings defeated Caldwell 50-14.

Giddings: (4A) — The Buffaloes, a regional semifinalist in 2019, returned a dozen starters from a playoff team that was 7-6. Giddings has a strong offensive line and a dynamic player in senior Gage Jaehne, who runs the ball, catches passes and is also the ace return man. He opened this season by returning the first kickoff 88 yards for a touchdown.

Caldwell: (3A) — The Hornets are playing on new stadium turf this fall. Matt Langley, in his second year as coach, hopes a talented sophomore class can help him improve on 2019's 3-7 record. Standout player senior Larry Davis, a receiver and defensive back, was named all district on both sides of the ball last year.



Rodolfo Gonzalez photo

A temperature check is a standard part of entering a stadium or field of play these days, including at 6-man football games like the one between Prairie Lea and Dime Box on Sept. 11. Dime Box won the season opener 45-0.

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Sarah Beal photos



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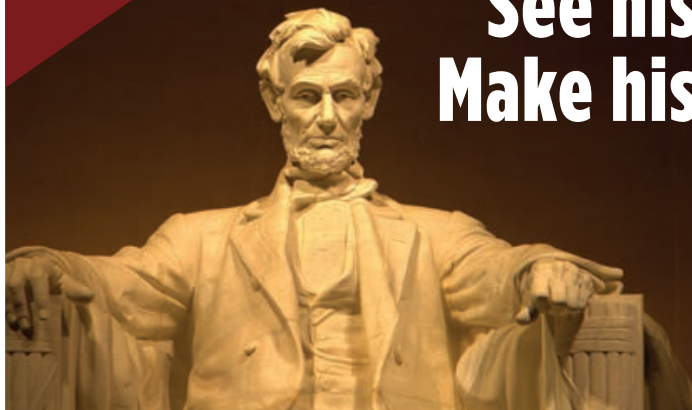
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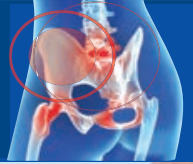
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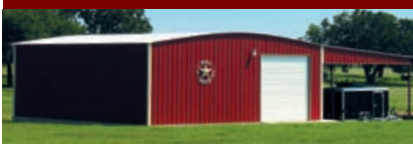


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Toeing the Line

How a Washington connection helped Texas keep a 900-square-mile slice of New Mexico

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TRACI DABERKO

YOU CAN NEVER underestimate the value of a good friendship forged early in life. If not for one such friendship, Texas would be more than 900 square miles smaller.

Before I get to the friendship, come with me up to the northwest corner of the Panhandle, where Texas meets Oklahoma and New Mexico. If you look closely at a map, you see that the border between Oklahoma and New Mexico doesn't meet up exactly with the border between Texas and New Mexico. The northern Texas border continues 2.3 miles west before heading straight south, essentially notching into New

Mexico. That jog is the result of a mistake some have called the worst survey error in U.S. history.

In truth, that land should have gone to New Mexico. The border between Texas and the New Mexico Territory was to be exactly along the 103rd meridian, same as the border between Oklahoma and New Mexico.

John H. Clark was hired to do the Texas survey in 1859. He started from the south and surveyed northward until he ran out of access to water. He figured: No problem, I'll just go up to the north end of Texas and work my way down and connect to this spot.

Clark started again northwest of present-day Dalhart, at a spot that was a couple of miles to the west of where he should have been. He headed south, marking his way, until Native Americans ran him off. He was just 70 miles from connecting the line to where he left off in the south, so he connected the dots on the map and turned in his work. Sadly, he never would have connected with his earlier starting point. He would have missed it by more than a mile to the west. His northern starting point was 2.3 miles west of where it should have been, and his southern corner was nearly 3.8 miles west of the correct point. The error amounted to an extra 603,348 acres, or 942 square miles, for Texas.

By the time New Mexico was set to achieve statehood, state leaders knew about the error and slipped a clause into the statehood legislation that said that the eastern boundary would be the true 103rd meridian. Thus, New Mexico would get its land back. Nobody seemed to be paying attention to the state's intentions except John Farwell, an original investor in the XIT Ranch in Texas. He realized that the XIT would lose hundreds of thousands of acres—and mineral rights—if the New Mexico plan went through.

Farwell had been good friends with President William Howard Taft during college at Yale University. He went to see his old buddy and explained the predicament. Taft summoned powerful men to his office and told them the Clark border would be the legal border when New Mexico became a state, or it would remain a territory.

And that is how a survey error, along with an old friendship, made Texas almost a thousand square miles bigger than it was supposed to be. Once again, it's about who you know. ■

Cookie Swap

Get to know people and recipes with a sweet exchange

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Cookie swaps are a wonderful way to get your sugary holiday fix while learning a bit about the other swappers. I feel like you can tell a lot about people from what kinds of cookies end up on the table, whether there are classic thumbprints or delicate macarons. Because bourbon balls don't require baking, they are a perfect treat to make while your other holiday cookies have their stint in the oven. While I use graham crackers here, vanilla wafers or gingersnaps are also options. Go with your favorite—or whatever you already have on hand.

Bourbon Balls

2 cups crushed graham crackers
1¼ cups powdered sugar, divided use
1 cup finely chopped pecans
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ cup bourbon
2 tablespoons pure maple syrup

COOK'S TIP To make these nonalcoholic, use apple juice in place of the bourbon.

1. In a large bowl, mix together graham cracker crumbs, 1 cup powdered sugar, pecans, cocoa and cinnamon.
2. Whisk together bourbon and maple syrup, then add to dry ingredients. Stir together until everything is evenly moistened. If the mixture looks too dry, add more bourbon and syrup, a small amount at a time. The mixture should clump easily when squeezed.
3. Form mixture into small balls by hand. On a flat surface, roll balls in remaining ¼ cup of powdered sugar and then place them on a waxed paper-lined plate or tray. Chill to let the flavors meld before serving.

MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Raspberry Jam Cookies.





Chocolate Chip Ginger Wheels

NANCY FILER
COSERV

These big cookies are a great option for mailing to friends and family thanks to molasses, which keeps the treats soft and tender. For the ones you keep for yourself, Filer recommends wrapping each baked cookie individually in plastic wrap to freeze and enjoy as desired.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- 3 teaspoons baking soda**
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger**
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon**
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard**
- 1 teaspoon instant coffee**
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1¼ cups sugar, divided use**
- 1 cup molasses**
- 1 egg**
- 4¾ cups flour**
- ¾ cup milk**
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips**
- 1 cup chopped nuts**

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees and line two cookie sheets with parchment.
2. In a large bowl, cream butter, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, mustard, coffee, cloves and salt. Blend in 1 cup sugar, then molasses and egg.
3. Mix in the flour, alternating with the milk. Stir in chocolate chips and chopped nuts. The dough will be somewhat sticky.
4. Measure a scant ¼ cup of dough and place on parchment-lined baking sheet, spacing cookies 2 inches apart.

CONTINUED >

\$500 WINNER

Mocha Wedge Cookies

MELISSA SEXSON
PANOLA-HARRISON EC



This recipe was inspired by Sexson's grandmother, who baked butter cookies with a light raspberry glaze. "I love the combination of chocolate and coffee flavors, so I came up with these cookies, which my family and friends all love," Sexson says. If you can't find espresso powder, use ground espresso.

MAKES 16 COOKIES



COOKIES

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- ½ cup packed dark brown sugar**
- ⅛ teaspoon salt**
- 2½ cups flour**
- ⅓ cup mini semisweet chocolate chips**

TOPPING

- ½ teaspoon espresso powder**
- ⅛ teaspoon cinnamon**
- 1½ tablespoons hot water**
- 3 tablespoons light corn syrup**
- Sparkling or sanding sugar**

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat two 8-inch round cake pans with nonstick spray and set aside
2. **COOKIES** In a large mixing bowl, cream butter, sugar, brown sugar and salt. Incorporate flour in thirds, using a sturdy spoon to mix. The dough will be crumbly.
3. Once the flour is mixed in, use your hands to continue mixing dough together and forming clumps with your hands. Mix in chocolate chips by hand.
4. Remove dough to a clean surface and knead for a few minutes until dough is evenly moistened and holds together well. If needed, sprinkle on 1 teaspoon of water to moisten.
5. Divide dough into halves and press each into a prepared cake pan, making sure to create an even layer all the way to the edges. Use a fork to prick holes over the surface of the dough.
6. Bake 25–30 minutes, until golden brown on top, rotating pans halfway through. Remove pans and immediately invert onto a clean cutting board. As soon as rounds are turned out, cut each into 8 wedges.
7. **TOPPING** In a small bowl, combine espresso powder and cinnamon. Whisk in hot water, then corn syrup. Using a pastry brush, brush each cookie wedge lightly with syrup mixture. Sprinkle each with sparkling or sanding sugar, then cool completely.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

HERBS DUE NOV 10

Fresh herbs can elevate almost any dish. From basil to rosemary and dill to mint, we're looking for your best recipes using herbs. Enter at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests by November 10.

RECIPES CONTINUED

5. Pour remaining 1/4 cup sugar into a shallow bowl or onto a rimmed plate. Wet the bottom of a glass with water, then dip glass into sugar. Press the glass onto each cookie to flatten slightly, leaving sugar on the cookies. Bake 12–15 minutes.

MAKES 2 DOZEN LARGE COOKIES



Lemon Bonbons

LONNA RANADA
COSERV

These tender cookies, first made by Ranada's mother, have a burst of lemon flavor thanks to the easy frosting. Be sure to sift the powdered sugar before measuring to remove any large lumps, which can make the cookies and frosting thicker than desired.

COOKIES

1 1/4 cups flour
3/4 cup cornstarch

1/2 cup powdered sugar
1 cup (2 sticks) butter
1 teaspoon almond extract

FROSTING

1 tablespoon butter, softened
2 cups powdered sugar, divided use
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1–2 teaspoons heavy cream

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. COOKIES In a large bowl, mix together flour, cornstarch and powdered sugar. Cut in butter using a pastry blender or two butter knives, much like mixing a pie crust. Once mixture resembles coarse

sand, sprinkle in almond extract, then continue mixing until dough forms large clumps.

3. Scoop dough into small balls and place on cookie sheets. Bake 10–12 minutes, until edges just begin to brown. Let cookies cool on cookie sheets for 5 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. FROSTING Mix softened butter with 1/4 cup powdered sugar, then blend in lemon juice. Add remaining sugar a little bit at a time, then blend in cream. For a thinner glaze, add more cream until frosting reaches desired consistency. Frost cooled cookies, then let frosting set before serving.

MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES

TCP WEB EXTRA Don't stop swapping. We have nearly 900 recipes in our archive, including dozens for cookies. Help yourselves.

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The U-Drop Inn still entices travelers to pull off Route 66 in Shamrock

BY CHET GARNER

TEXANS LOVE a good road trip.

With the advent of the automobile in the early 20th century, road-tripping became a pastime as important as baseball and barbecue. With the completion of Route 66, the Mother Road of America, road trippers needed rest stops to refuel gas tanks and stomachs. The U-Drop Inn Café in Shamrock stood ready to serve.

The first time I saw the U-Drop Inn, I was traveling the Texas stretch of Route 66 that slices across the Panhandle. Fifteen miles west of Oklahoma, I found the High Plains town of Shamrock, known for the tallest water tower in Texas. But another tower, a cream-colored column with glowing green neon atop an art deco gas station, caught my attention. It was the U-Drop Inn and Tower Station, one of the iconic stops along historic Route 66. The distinctive architecture even inspired a building in *Cars*, the Pixar animated feature about a forgotten highway town.

Built in 1936, the Tower Station was open 24 hours a day and connected with U-Drop Inn Café, which also kept long hours to serve weary travelers. The U-Drop became famous as the best stop between Oklahoma City and Amarillo. Even Elvis Presley dropped in on occasion. The diner no longer offers food but now serves visitors a glimpse into the past. I roamed through, wishing I could park at a booth and order a blue-plate special.

The rest of the building is now a visitors center catering to folks from all over the world who travel the Mother Road. The world map was cluttered with pushpins noting visitors from more than 100 countries. To them, Route 66 and classic stops like the U-Drop Inn signify freedom—the sort of freedom that can only be found on the open road. ■

ABOVE The Tower Station and U-Drop Inn as it looks today.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Chet's video from the U-Drop Inn Café in Shamrock and check out his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

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NOVEMBER

07

Corpus Christi Harbor Half Marathon, (361) 884-6561, harborhalf.com

Kerrville Kerr County Market Days and Hill Country Swap Meet, (830) 459-6198, kerrmarketdays.org

New Braunfels Fall Walk, (830) 660-4935, my.ava.org/find-an-event.php

Tyler [7-8] Texas Rose Fall Horse Trials, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

Georgetown [7-15] Field of Honor, (951) 834-3301, georgetowntxfieldofhonor.org

10

Bryan Messina Hof U.S. Marine Corps Ball, (979) 778-9463, messinahof.com/events

11

Grapevine Paint Your Pet, (817) 442-8463, messinahof.com/events

Ozona Veterans Day Appreciation Banquet, (325) 392-2827, ozona.com/eventscalendar

12

New Braunfels [12-14] Shop, Crop & Craft, (830) 221-4011, heirloompro.com

13

Palestine [13-Dec. 27] The Polar Express, (855) 632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

14

Denison Holiday at the Market, (469) 712-9122, downtowndenisonfarmersmarket.com

20

Kingsbury Pioneer Flight Museum Wings and Wheels Fly-In, (830) 639-4162, pioneerflightmuseum.org

Santa Fe Heritage Festival, (409) 925-8558, santafetexaschamber.com

Tyler [14-15] North Texas Hunter Jumper Club Year-End Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

Corsicana Christmas Tree Lighting and Fireworks Display, (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

Alpine [20-21] Artwalk, (432) 294-1071, artwalkalpine.com

Giddings [20-21] Texas Word Wrangler Book Festival, (979) 542-2716, texaswordwrangler.com

Fredericksburg [20-22] Fredericksburg Trade Days, (210) 846-4094, fbgtradedays.com

Ingram [20-21, 27-28, Dec. 4-5, 11-12] Inspecting Carol, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

21

Jacksonville Cherokee Craft & Trade Fair, (903) 268-1598, jacksonvilletexas.com

Seguin Texas Hold 'em Poker Tournament, (830) 379-0933, texagedu.org/texasholdem tournament

Tyler [21-22] Dallas Hunter Jumper Scholarship Circuit Year-End Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

26

Lake Jackson [26-27] Turkey Trot 5K, (979) 285-2501, lakejacksonturkeytrot.com

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b. Total Paid Print Copies	1,694,365	1,721,961
c. Total Print Distribution	1,705,163	1,732,613
d. Percent Paid	99.37%	99.39%

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership
 Publication required. Will be printed in the November 2020 issue of this publication.
Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner Date
Karen Nejttek, Managing Editor October 1, 2020



Pick of the Month
American Legion Anvil Shoot
Hamilton, November 11
(254) 386-3992
facebook.com/cunningham222
American Legion Cunningham Post 222 has held this event every November 11 since 1918, when World War I ended. It involves exploding gunpowder that has been placed between two stacked heavy anvils, which sends the anvil on top flying. Anvil shoots were once a common way for pioneers to commemorate holidays, elections and other special occasions.

NOVEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

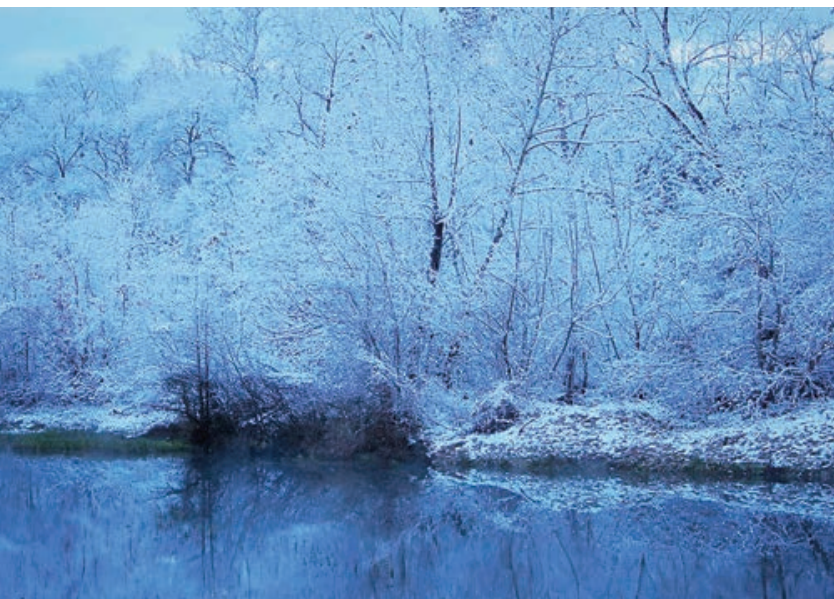
- 27 **Granbury Night of Lights Christmas Parade**, (817) 573-5548, visitgranbury.com
- Abilene [27-28] Thanksgiving Throwdown**, (325) 673-4233, abilenevisitors.com/calendar
- Fredericksburg [27-29] Peddler Show**, (512) 358-1000, peddlershow.com
- Fredericksburg [27-29] Trade Days Thanksgiving Show**, (210) 846-4094, fbgradedays.com
- Jefferson [27-28, Dec. 5, 12, 19, 26] Christmas Express**, 1-866-398-2038, jeffersonrailway.com
- Llano [27-Dec. 31] Starry Starry Nights Lighted Christmas Park**, (325) 247-5354, llanostarrystarrynights.com
- 28 **Comfort Christmas in Comfort**, (830) 995-3131, comfortchamber.com

- DECEMBER
- 01 **Amarillo [1-3] Farm and Ranch Show**, 1-800-827-8007, ideagroup.com/amarillo
- 02 **Alpine Christmas in Alpine**, (432) 837-2326, vitalpinetx.com/christmas
- 03 **Cameron Christmas Drive-Thru Parade**, (254) 697-4979, cameron-tx.com
- Columbus Ladies Night Out**, (979) 732-8385, columbus-texas.org
- Jacksonville Christmas Parade**, (903) 586-2217, jacksonvilletexas.com
- La Grange Schmeckenfest**, (979) 968-3017, visitlagrangetx.com
- New Braunfels Wassailfest**, (830) 221-4000, since1845.com
- 04 **Fredericksburg First Friday Art Walk Fredericksburg**, (830) 997-6523, visitfredericksburgtx.com
- La Grange [4-6, 10-13, 17-23] Trail of Lights**, (979) 968-5658, friends-of-kreischewbrewery.org
- 05 **Fredericksburg Holiday Home Tour**, (830) 990-8441, pioneer-museum.net
- Fredericksburg Kinderfest**, (830) 990-8441, pioneer-museum.net
- Grand Saline Salt City Christmas**, (903) 962-5631, grandsalinemainstreet.com
- Kerrville Kerr County Market Days and Hill Country Swap Meet**, (830) 459-6198, kerrmarket.days.org

Extremes

Extreme environments, animal behaviors and weather are to be expected, and Texans rise to meet any challenge.

GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

TOMMIE CALFEE
PEDERNALES EC

A winter scene on Onion Creek.

AMBER LADYMON
FARMERS EC

"Our neighbor was burning his field. This is one of my favorites that I got."

JENNIFER CARMACK
HEART OF TEXAS EC

Carmack's son Cyress took this photo of a large thunderhead on the horizon.

JESSICA RAMOS
SOUTH PLAINS EC

"A sunny, warm day takes an extreme turn filled with hail and rain."



Upcoming Contests

DUE NOV 10 **Diners**

DUE DEC 10 **Storms**

DUE JAN 10 **Historic Texas**

Enter online and review submission rules at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests.

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



Fresh Perspective

An ardent conservationist resurfaces as a 'meat angler'

BY DAN OKO
ILLUSTRATION BY NIC JONES

ALONG THE BRACKISH shallow lakes off Matagorda Island in the Gulf of Mexico, I'm scanning for redfish fins. Restless mullet keep distracting me, their schools pulsing in the shallows, when all I want is a keeper red.

I'm armed with light spinning tackle, and my friends are spread across the flats. It is an undeniably beautiful day. I spotted herons, egrets, flamingo-pink spoonbills and surfacing dolphins as we crossed the salt. Adding a stout redfish for dinner would make the day even better.

I have not always been what's sometimes referred to as a "meat fisherman," but 20 years in Texas have taught me that redfish on the half shell, prepared over coals and sprinkled with Cajun spice mix and drizzled with oil and lemon, is a treat every angler should enjoy. Before I moved south,

I could be found stalking trout in the riffle lines of Rocky Mountain streams, fly rod in hand, either standing astern in a drift boat or moving like a slow-motion hunter along the bank.

As an ardent conservationist, I don't know what to say about my trajectory from catch and release to deadly hunter except that I believe in abiding the law of the land, and ultimately, fishing purely for sport lacks a certain zest. Rather than debating whether fish feel pain, let's just say my thinking has evolved.

I know plenty of saltwater anglers who prefer fishing with flies, and I have watched redfish hit crab patterns, clouser minnows and popping foam shrimp. But in the name of efficiency and simple camaraderie, I fish conventional tackle when I'm on the Gulf Coast. Whether I am pursuing assorted stream fish or ocean species, the joy I experience remains rooted in the same nitty-gritty details: the attention paid to subtle signs and structure where fish might lurk, the anticipation when a well-placed cast brings the bite, the pulse-pounding joy of the hookup and the epic relief of bringing a fish to hand.

Which returns us to this patch of Matagorda Bay, where I attempt to wade with the stealth of a prowling cat. Through polarized lenses, I glimpse the prize—a bronze bruiser suspended in a few inches of water. I've got a speckled soft-plastic bait, which lands a few feet from my target. I reel slowly, then rest a beat. The movement puts the red on high alert.

He chases down the lure, and I raise my rod to set the hook. A fight ensues that lasts minutes but feels like hours. With a 20-inch red in my net, I look around and spot my friends on the boat. The sun is setting. Dinner will be fresh fish after all. ■



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