

GERMANS TRANSFORM  
HILL COUNTRY

GIVING TEXANS  
THE HEAVENS

HOLIDAY MEAL  
MAIN EVENT

# Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2020

## Sweet Life

Panaderías serve up  
pan dulce and traditions  
held dear in Mexican  
American culture

**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18







## LET YOUR DREAMS TAKE FLIGHT

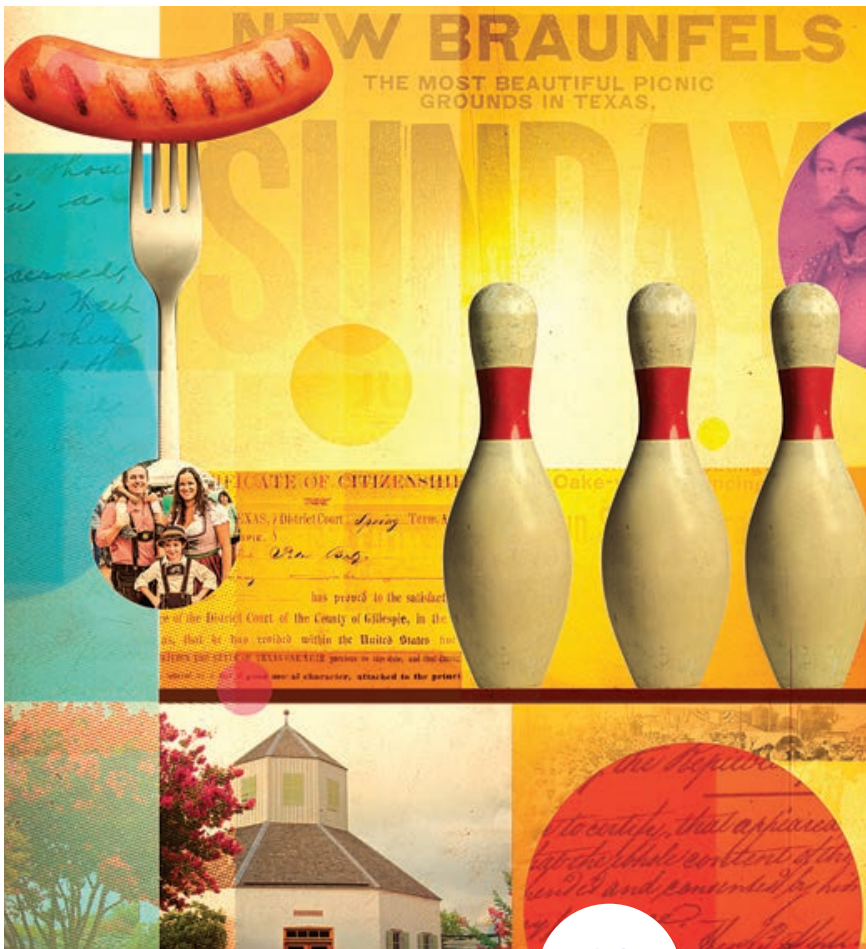
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# December 2020



12

## 08 Sweet Memories

Visits to panaderías for pan dulce create cherished family bonds for Mexican Americans.

By Vianney Rodriguez  
Photos by Eric W. Pohl  
Illustration by Tim Carroll

## Burgs in a New Land

A wave of German immigrants 175 years ago transformed the Texas Hill Country.

By Dan Oko  
Illustration by David Vogin

ON THE COVER

Vianney Rodriguez with her favorite pan dulce selections.  
Photo by Jason David Page

ABOVE

Traces of German culture in the Hill Country.  
Illustration by David Vogin

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By Tom Widlowski





“Christmas is doing a little something extra for someone.”

—CHARLES M. SCHULZ

## Park Pride

Texas has two of the best state parks in the country. Palo Duro Canyon State Park, in the Panhandle, and Brazos Bend State Park, about 45 miles southwest of downtown Houston, rank second and third according to a national rating by HomeToGo.

# Looking Brighter

**SURE, NIGHTS ARE GETTING LONGER** as the Northern Hemisphere approaches the winter solstice, December 21—but there’s a bright side.

Between Thanksgiving and New Year’s, holiday lighting makes American suburbs up to 50% brighter than usual, even after midnight, *The New York Times* reports. Those strings of lights and blinking reindeer, which use enough electricity to power 800,000 homes for a year, can be observed from space.

## Start Counting

You’d need 2,683 LED lights on your roof for them to be seen from space, say researchers at England’s University of Leicester.



PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK

The vacation rental website ranked parks based on solitude, activities, wildlife and nearby accommodations.

Letchworth State Park in New York took the top spot.



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I WISH  
I COULD ...

**TCP** Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to [letters@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:letters@TexasCoopPower.com) or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Here are some of the responses to our October prompt: **The best Christmas gift I ever got was ...**

A Majorette record player that my dad bought for me three days before he died.

BECKY HOLZHAUS  
MEDINA EC  
CASTROVILLE

When the neurologist removed a tumor from my son's pituitary gland in his brain and found no cancer.

FRAN BACA  
COSERV  
CROSS ROADS

My brothers coming home from World War II and the Korean War.

DON MASON  
HEART OF TEXAS EC  
GATESVILLE

My adopted son, born Dec. 22 and received in our arms Dec. 26.

DEE SUSAN MAGELLA AZEREDO  
VIA FACEBOOK

My brother, who was born on Christmas Eve 1957.

W. GRANT BRALY  
GUADALUPE VALLEY EC  
CUERO

A Texas-shaped waffle maker. I was so happy I cried.

SUSAN PROKOSCH  
VIA FACEBOOK

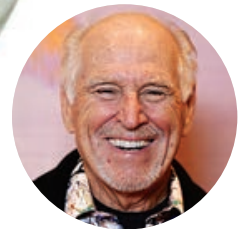
To see more responses, read Currents online.



# That Frozen Concoction

**DURING THE SUMMER OF 1977**, Jimmy Buffett's *Margaritaville* peaked at No. 8 on the music charts. The defining song of his career has a place in the Grammy Hall of Fame for its cultural and historic significance. It tells of the first huge wave of tourists to hit Key West, Florida, decades earlier and the laid-back lifestyle they discovered.

And it was written in Austin. Buffett enjoyed the titular refreshing beverage in 1976 at Lung's Cocina del Sur on Anderson Lane, which inspired him to wax lyrical at a friend's house about "that frozen concoction that helps me hang on."



### Did You Know?

Oh, and Buffett turns 74 on Christmas Day. Let's all send him shakers of salt.

### TCP Contests and More

[ON TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM](http://ONTEXASCOOPPOWER.COM)

#### \$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Potluck Dishes

#### FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Storms

#### WEB EXTRA

How UT's McDonald Observatory grants visitors access to the cosmos.





KRISTIN TYLER

Why Horses Wear Shoes

“I was reminded of my great-grandfather Smith. He was the town’s blacksmith and farrier back in Pennsylvania. His forge was fired with Pennsylvania coal.”

FRANK OTT  
CONCHO VALLEY EC  
EOLA

Co-ops Count

Who knew our electric employees “are so much more than power providers”? How can so few get so much done in all types of weather year after year, often under treacherous conditions [By the Numbers, October 2020]?

Jane Patterson  
Bowie-Cass EC  
Texarkana



They wear shoes so they don't hurt their feet when kicking their owners [Why Horses Wear Shoes, October 2020].

BOBBY BARRON  
VIA FACEBOOK

Encountering SRV

I was a limo driver in the 1970s, '80s and '90s. One of the approximately 100 celebrities I met was Stevie Ray Vaughan [Letters, October 2020]. I picked him and his mother up in Oak Cliff. This was the same month that he died in the helicopter crash.

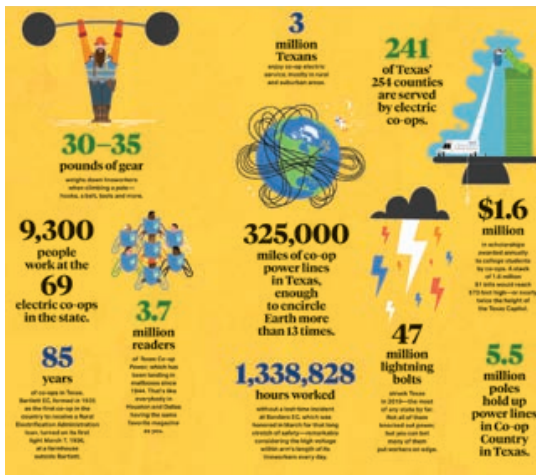
Vance K. Apple  
CoServ  
Frisco

Bittersweet Keepsake

The best Christmas gift I ever got was a cassette player with a cassette still in it, which my parents had used Christmas Eve while setting out presents [Finish This Sentence, October 2020]. On the cassette they were laughing, joking and talking about us three girls. I never told them about the cassette, nor did I tell my younger sisters. I am the oldest of three girls and was 10 then.

The reason this is so very special is that on March 30, 1975, just three months later, Daddy was murdered, and those were the only words I could hold and continue to have of him. My youngest sister was only 2, and for her these were the only words she would ever hear from her father.

Dedria Tanton  
Sam Houston EC  
Rye



SHAWN NIELSEN

TCP WRITE TO US  
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Austin, TX 78701

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

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\* Sweet \*  
Memories







BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ • PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL  
ILLUSTRATION BY TIM CARROLL

## Visits to panaderías for pan dulce create cherished family bonds in Mexican American culture

Growing up I spent summers with my *abuelitos* in Brownsville, and our Sunday morning visits to the *panadería* are a cherished memory. My sisters and I would quickly put on our shoes, tighten our ponytails and run to Abuelito Angel's car. At the end of the five-minute drive, my grandfather would park and walk us into the bakery. The aroma was intoxicating.

Like most panaderías, this one was self-serve, so my abuelo would grab a pair of tongs and a silver *charola* (tray) before he set us free. My sister would slowly pace the aisle, studying the colorful displays on each shelf. I, on the other hand, knew exactly what I wanted: two cereal-crust *galletas* with the jelly center. They were my favorite then, and they still are. I would point to the *galletas*, and my abuelito would smile because he knew they were my favorite. To this day visiting a panadería reminds me of my late grandfather.

Visiting a local panadería to buy *pan dulce* is a tradition we deeply love in our Mexican American culture. We enjoy pan dulce throughout the week with our morning *café* or for *merienda* (afternoon snack), and these special pastries are a major part of our holiday celebrations. Because panaderías are part of our daily lives, the folks at our local bakeries are part of our *familia*. We know them all, and when we stop in, we chat about our day, our children and life in general. Because we are a family, the pan dulce tastes that much sweeter.

Every panadería has its regulars who want to keep the tradition of enjoying pan dulce alive for their children and grandchildren. They have their favorite pan dulce selections and arrive early to fill their bags.

Pan dulce translates literally as sweet bread and includes a vast array of pastries that vary dramatically in size, shape, texture and flavor. My experience suggests there are several hundred varieties.

Canda LePage of Brownsville says pan dulce conjures up fond memories about family time and being a carefree kid for her, too. "It's also a very intergenerational thing," she says, describing her grandmother, who was born in Mexico

and does not speak English. “I have very few things in common with her,” LePage says, “but when I bring out the pan dulce and coffee, she’ll start sharing stories of her youth. It’s my favorite time with her.”

Pan dulce was originally heavily influenced by French baking techniques that Mexican bakers began to experiment with after May 1862, when the French were defeated at the Battle of Puebla. Bakers began incorporating indigenous ingredients such as *canela* (cinnamon), fresh-ground corn flour, Mexican vanilla, *piloncillo* (unrefined brown sugar), chocolate, nuts and native fruits. With shapes like *marranitos* (piggies), *bigotes* (mustaches) and *ojo de buey* (ox eyes), each baker gives a nod to his or her culture. These shapes became the beloved names of the pan dulce we love today.

And while that traditional character will always remain, the bakers of today are continuing to put their own mark on pan dulce culture.

Amanda Nolan, owner of Sweet Craft Vegan in Brownsville, scheduled the opening of her new storefront in early 2020. Though she, too, describes childhood visits to the panadería as an awesome experience and a special memory, her mother was very health-conscious, so she decided to learn how to make a healthier version of her favorite pastries. Vegan pan dulce was not readily available in South Texas, so she decided to teach herself.

Baking became an obsession for Nolan. She honed her baking skills at Linda’s Cakes & Desserts, a Brownsville bakery, and pitched owner Andrea Bernes on the idea of selling vegan pan dulce at the shop. The owner gave her the OK. So Nolan began sharing her creations on social media, and soon her vegan *conchas* (seashells) were scooped up by the dozen. Because they do not use any preservatives, her pastries must be sold each day, so calculating exact ingredients is essential to meeting demand.

Just as enjoying pan dulce is multigenerational, baking the special pastries also is often shared among family. I interviewed one Brownsville baker who worked in his family’s panadería for more than 25 years, learning the skill from his father and uncle.

Another Brownsville baker whose entire family works in the panadería tells me that one of his primary goals for this year has been not just to stay in business but to protect his family and employees during the COVID-19 pandemic—and to protect his customers, too. “We want them to bring their grandchildren into the panadería,” he says.

Throughout my travels in South Texas, I have visited many panaderías that have become near and dear to my heart and have helped me keep my abuelito’s memory alive. I encourage everyone to visit a neighborhood panadería and meet the talented bakers carrying on this beloved tradition. Visit, enjoy the aromas and fill up your tray with these irresistible special pastries. I promise you will not be disappointed.

*Les mando amor y pan dulce.* (I send them love and pan dulce.) ■



## Vianney’s Pan Dulce Favorites

**Bisquette** This savory and sweet treat is more dense than the typical biscuit—often enjoyed with butter or jam.

**Churros** Dough squeezed into star-shaped sticks and fried; crisp *churros* are rolled in sugar. Some are filled with *dulce de leche* or *cajeta* (caramelized sugar) and are best dipped in steaming mugs of Mexican hot chocolate.

**Concha** This sweet bread, named for seashells, is a sugar crust pastry that varies in color and flavor at each panadería.

**Cortadillo** Also known as *pastel de niños*, this popular yellow cake is topped with pink icing and sprinkles, then sliced into triangles.

**Cuernito** The flaky “little horn” is brushed with egg and dusted with sugar and sometimes filled with chocolate.

**Elote** Anise- or cinnamon-scented dough filled with orange cinnamon cream, baked, then rolled in sugar while warm from the oven.

**Empanada** Always quick to sell out, an *empanada* is a crescent-shaped turnover of flaky dough filled with pineapple, pumpkin, cajeta or apples.

**Mantecado** This is the muffin version of a pound cake and most often found in red wrappers.

**Maranito** A pig-shaped cookie made from a cakelike dough similar to gingerbread





Churros

Maranito

Polvorone

Cortadillo

Concha

Oreja

Empanada

Cuernito

but actually flavored with *piloncillo* (unrefined brown sugar).

**Niño Envuelto** This “wrapped child” is similar to a jelly roll made from cake topped with a layer of strawberry jelly, rolled and then topped with more jelly and shredded coconut.

**Oreja** An “ear” made from flaky dough that is brushed with butter and sprinkled with sugar to look like a French *palmier*. Most often enjoyed with afternoon *café*.

**Polvorone or Galleta**

This firm, crumbly cookie can be found in an assortment of

colors and flavors. Variations include *tricolores* (three colors), *sandía* (watermelon), *grageas* (with sprinkles), *rosas* (pink) and—my favorite—cereal-crusted *galleta* with jelly.



# PARK NEW BRAUNFELS

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Einwanderungs



BURGS IN

A NEW LAND

## 175 years ago, a wave of GERMAN IMMIGRANTS transformed the Texas Hill Country

Each fall Wurstfest in New Braunfels and Oktoberfest in Fredericksburg celebrate German culture with festive costumes, blaring polka music, and plenty of sausage and beer. With creative exploring, you can find a quieter, family-oriented expression of German culture that endures in out-of-the-way corners of the Hill Country.

The Blanco Bowling Club, just east of the town's courthouse square, is one of fewer than a dozen nine-pin bowling clubs in the German communities of Comal, Gillespie, Bexar and Guadalupe counties. Nine-pin bowling harks back to the game played by German immigrants in the mid-19th century and bears little resemblance to the 10-pin version played in most bowling alleys.

Nine-pin bowling is just one lasting cultural import that German immigrants brought with them when they settled in Central Texas towns and villages 175 years ago.

"Think of it as a team sport," says Julie West, who has lived in Blanco all her life and bowls at the Blanco Bowling Club with friends and family. Her roots in the community are deep. "My grandma managed the cafe," she says, "and my aunts all worked there." West, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative, was a pinsetter at the bowling club when she was a teenager.

The pinsetters are one reason this game is so distinctive. "As a pinsetter you're on your hands and knees, and you have to be athletic," West explains. That athleticism helps each pinsetter replace the pins bowlers knock down. "You have to pay attention," she says, "because the pins are flying around."

Nine-pin team bowling requires each bowler in a team of six to bowl in succession. "Knocking down nine pins means nine points," West says. "And the score is calculated cumulatively, not individually. A 12-ringer is when you leave the center pin."

Nine-pin bowling has remained popular over generations in Central Texas—for more than 150 years—because of the area's deep German roots. West explains that the emphasis

on family and the team makes the game uniquely German and attracts children to the game.

The locals know that youth involvement is essential to keeping cultural traditions alive. That's why New Braunfels traditions, such as the annual Kindermasken parade, a costume ball for children usually held in May, have survived since 1856. New Braunfels and Fredericksburg are this year and next marking 175 years of keeping alive the German culture brought here by immigrants, with various celebrations planned for the coming months.

New Braunfels was founded in 1845 by Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, who purchased land on the banks of the Comal River to establish a German colony. A year later a group of settlers from New Braunfels headed 60 miles northwest and established Fredericksburg. The earliest Texas settlement formed by Germans was Industry, founded in 1831, and a glance at a Texas atlas shows many other communities that can trace their origins to Germany: Weimar, Boerne, Schulenburg, Luckenbach and Muenster.

Ernie Loeffler was raised in New Braunfels and is now the president of the Fredericksburg Convention & Visitor Bureau. "The original Germans wanted to create a cultural enclave in Texas," says Loeffler. "They wrote many letters home describing it as a land of milk and honey."

Evelyn Weinheimer, an archivist at Fredericksburg's Pioneer Museum, which documents the German roots of Gillespie County, says that as early as 1842, the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, also known as *Adelsverein*, advertised to attract settlers to establish enclaves across the Hill Country and the south-central plains. New Braunfels and Fredericksburg were the first two settlements of the *Adelsverein*.

"Land was the biggest draw," says Weinheimer, whose ancestors arrived in that first wave. "Coming from those little German kingdoms, those settlers surely thought they would find a better way of life to raise their families."

“THE ORIGINAL GERMANS wanted to create a cultural enclave in Texas. They wrote many letters home describing it as a land of milk and honey.”



Those day-to-day concerns about family life determined the enduring aspects of culture. Among the visible reminders of German culture in Fredericksburg are the Sunday houses and their distinctive architecture.

“Coming to church on Sunday wasn’t going to happen in the days of wagons and old dirt roads,” Weinheimer says. Families loaded up the wagon on Saturday morning and made the trip into town, where they would barter at the general store and enjoy a social activity or family gathering on Saturday night. Sunday morning they went to one of the five churches in Fredericksburg.

Weinheimer says the typical weekend house was a one-bedroom frame building with a kitchen and living room and a sleeping loft. One of these “tiny houses,” the Fassel-Roeder House, awaits visitors on the grounds of the Pioneer Museum. William Roeder, a former Gillespie County commissioner, told Weinheimer stories of his family’s trips from the White Oak community, 22 miles west, to stay in the house.

Even though the 20 or so Sunday houses that remain in Fredericksburg are similar, Weinheimer says they do not follow an architectural style but reflect the pragmatism of German farmers and how they organized their lives.

Other enduring German influences, such as education, are more civic-minded. “You had this 3,000-year-old society that came and formed a community on the frontier,” says Judy Young of the New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce. “But they were not your average frontiersmen.” The settlers laid out the New Braunfels street grid their first month on the ground, she says, and the town created a tax in 1847 to fund the community’s first public schools.

The German culture in Texas that’s still thriving today is more clearly expressed in nine-pin bowling than in jubilant beer festivals.

New Braunfels is home to the oldest bakery in Texas, Naegelin’s Bakery, which opened its doors in 1868. The Naegelin family sold the business, but new owners kept the name and the Old World recipes. Manager Frankie Alvarado explains, “It’s these traditions that have allowed us to stay in business this long.” ■

#### TCP WEB EXTRA

Read about how John O. Meusebach, founder of Fredericksburg, signed what is believed to be the only unbroken peace treaty between Native Americans and U.S. settlers.



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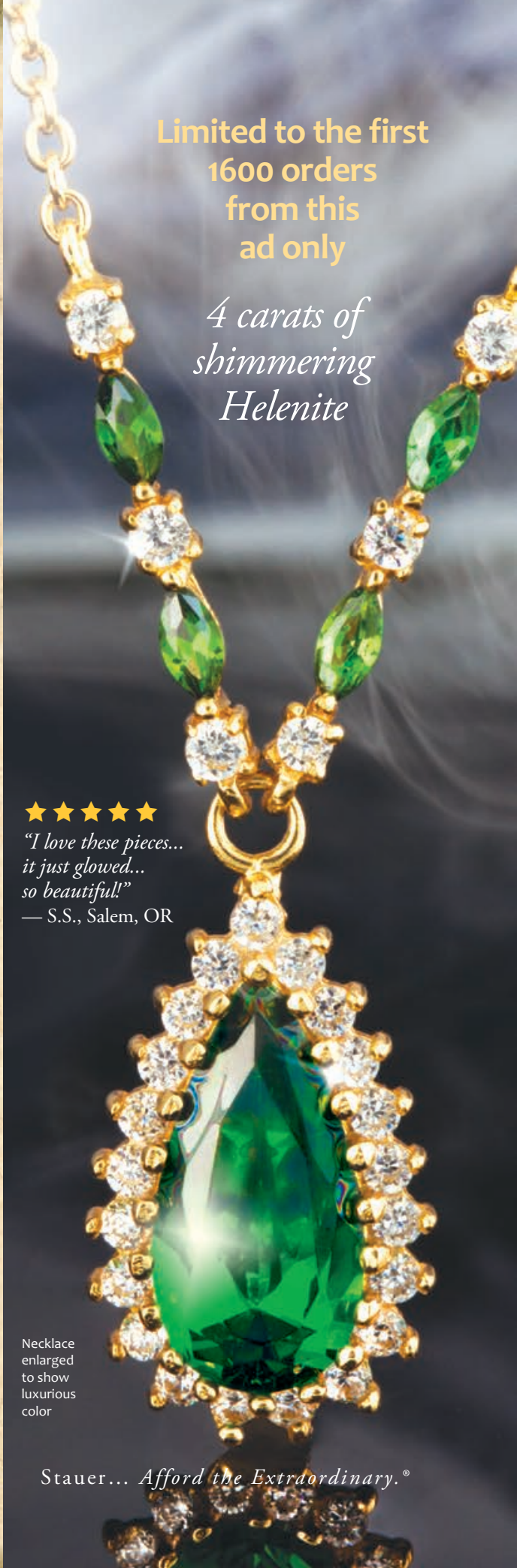


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After the pandemic changed the rules, outdoor living spaces became a prime option for entertaining.

Families in and around the Bluebonnet area have given new meaning to the great outdoors.

# OUT DOOR PLACES breathing spaces

By Sharon Jayson

Photos by Laura Skelding

**AMY FRITSCH** and her family in Fayette County never planned to be trendsetters.

But when they added a swimming pool, outdoor kitchen and other improvements to make the most of their backyard three years ago, they had no idea that thousands of other families soon would follow their lead, motivated by months of stuck-at-home time due to COVID-19.

We learned this year just how important spending time outdoors can be to both physical and mental health. Once we were locked down at home, being outside became the only safe way to entertain friends and family who aren't part of the household. Just stepping outside into nature boosts mood and mindset, especially when we've been cooped up inside working and being with family 24/7.

The Fritsch family — which includes husband Brad and sons Lane, 19; Logan, 16; and Lawson, 13 — had planned to spend much of the 2020 summer traveling around Texas for their younger sons' baseball and basketball games. The coronavirus outbreak

Continued on page 20







## THE FRITSCH FAMILY

Above, from left, Bluebonnet members Brad and Amy Fritsch prepare s'mores in their poolside cabana with sons Logan, 16, and Lawson, 13. The space at their home in Willow Springs, between Fayetteville and Industry, features an outdoor kitchen, at left, and overlooks the hot tub and pool, at far left. They made the upgrades three years ago. The work enables them to still host family and friends through the pandemic. Their outdoor living area offers a cozy space to view spectacular sunsets.



## RYAN PAPE

Landscape architect and Bluebonnet member Pape designed the outdoor features at a private retreat in Central Texas, including, from top, a small sandy beach with a shade canopy, a bridge over a dry creek, an outdoor swing over the water and a mini golf course. Pape, who owns Papescapes in Burton, says these features could be scaled down for residential sites.



## Continued from page 18

canceled those games and turned the family's outdoor living space into a haven in Willow Springs, an unincorporated community in Fayette County. They've used the amenities a lot – from frequent cookouts to twice weekly water aerobics for a group of friends.

"We're out there cooking at least three nights a week," Amy Fritsch said. "We used it more than in a typical summer."

When summer gave way to fall's chill, time in family outdoor spaces didn't have to end. Portable and installed heaters for patios and screened porches are just what people needed to extend the life of their outdoor areas, said Enrique Amaro, co-owner of Austin-based MCS Outdoor Living Specialists, which serves areas across Central Texas.

"Everybody wants to condition their houses to be able to stay out there," he said.

His company, which launched in 2003 with mosquito control systems, has expanded and rebranded to provide outdoor living amenities, including misting systems, outdoor heating and fire pits.

Summer 2020 was unlike any other for professionals who improve a home's outdoor areas, said Lucas Stroech, a landscape architect, contractor and licensed irrigator with Washington County Landscapes in Brenham.

"We're busier than we've ever been," he said in August. "We're doing double the amount of work we normally do. We expanded and added more crews. We could expand again, but we can't physically handle any more."

Stroech's company and others that provide residential outdoor living services agree that because a family's house has become a combination workplace, camp and school, homeowners are more inclined to spruce up their surroundings.

"They're not going on vacations, dining out or going to concerts," which has freed up money to spend on outdoor projects, said Kermit Baker, director of the Remodeling Futures Program at Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

"Outdoor living and outdoor projects — decking, porches, outdoor kitchens, pools — are all very strong," he said, noting that people also opt for outdoor upgrades in part because workers don't have to go inside.

Brian Fischer of Fischer Langham Custom Homes in Giddings says this year's customers have "gotten a bit more extravagant."

Whether it's a new home or additions to existing homes, his clients aren't just creating backyard barbecue areas. They're adding fireplaces, swimming pools, sitting areas and TV spaces. Also, more homeowners



## ANDREW MURRELL AND JO KEENA

The family added a basketball court, landscaping and a seating area to enhance the outdoor spaces at the Bellville home they share with Andrew's son Drew, 14. At right, Jo trims plants near the court; below, she relaxes by a fire pit that converts into a table.



want screened porches to make the most of outdoor evenings. Those porches often have automated screens and shutters, he said. Some homeowners even have air-conditioned porches.

Such amenities are pricey, though.

For those installing outdoor kitchens, the key is to “blend with the environment,” Fischer said.

“Most outdoor kitchens are covered to take advantage of the prevailing breezes as well as how the sun travels through the day. The roof will help shade the structure. In the afternoon, when the west sun is setting, you don’t want to have the grill on the west side,” Fischer said.

Ryan Pape, owner of PapesCAPes, based in Burton, said his customers ask for “open-air entertaining.”

“They’re wanting more of an outdoor entertaining area — not just fire pits and fire rings but outdoor kitchens and outdoor spaces,” he said. “There is an uptick for pools as well.”

Some customers install sliding glass walls on the house to bring the outdoors in. It’s part of a home improvement trend that began in recent years to integrate homes with their natural surroundings. Glass wall systems welcome in nature and can have automated controls. However, Pape says

such features are less efficient in Texas, where summer heat isn’t always a welcome indoor guest. To beat the heat, some buy misting systems to cool the air.

Amaro’s company added mist cooling systems in 2008 and has since added outdoor heating systems and outdoor and accent lighting. It also collaborates with other companies to build outdoor kitchens and pools.

“You spend all that money on a patio and pool and are ready to enjoy it and then you go outside and cannot be there — either the mosquitos are going to kill you or the heat will,” he said.

Experts say grilling outdoors offers a two-fer on energy savings. In warm weather you avoid heating up the house from the oven or stove, meaning less AC to keep the house cool. And cooking on fuel-efficient grills saves more power than using the oven. Creating an outdoor kitchen can be expensive, but outdoor professionals say it can save hundreds of dollars a year in electric and gas bills.

For an eco-friendly outdoor kitchen, infrared gas-powered grills are a good way to go. They use about 25 percent less gas than other grills, and save money and natural resources. Charcoal grills are more fuel ef-

## Choosing a heater to keep your space warm

Today’s heaters for backyard outdoor living aren’t limited to the mushroom-shaped styles that tower over restaurant patios. Newer options have different looks and warm up larger areas.

The type of outdoor heater that’s right for you depends on the age of your home and how you can power it.

Older homes may have limited power availability. A newer house typically comes with more electrical power and may have an outdoor gas connection.

If it’s available, gas heat is a good option, said Enrique Amaro, co-owner of MCS Outdoor Living Specialists.

Large electric heaters use 220 volts, versus the 110 volts from a home’s standard electric outlet. Using gas heaters outdoors can help prevent your electric bill from spiking. If you don’t have natural gas, or your backyard doesn’t have the proper power, a portable heater is the best option, Amaro said.

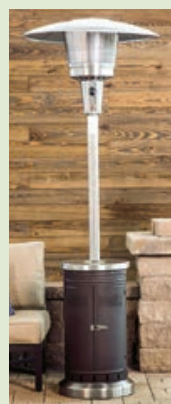
Prices of top-quality outdoor heaters vary by coverage area and power type. Higher-end

electric or gas heaters that are installed by professionals can cost \$1,500 to \$2,000 per heater, Amaro said. Each of those portable heaters can cover about 200 square-feet, he said.

If that is out of your price range, all sizes of gas- and propane-powered portable heaters are sold at large retailers like The Home Depot or Lowe’s. Name-brand outdoor heaters can also be purchased online. Larger heaters start at about \$100 but many are \$300 or higher.

There are many safety requirements and guidelines for gas and propane-powered outdoor heaters. Pay close attention to instructions and warnings, and make sure that the heater you select is intended for outdoor use.

— Sharon Jayson



**This Garden Treasures 47000-BTU mocha steel standing liquid propane patio heater sells for \$139 at Lowe’s.**

Continued on page 22



## DEDE AND BRIAN KAPLAN

The Kaplans' outdoor living areas include, at right, a poolside casita with a covered porch; below left, an earth wall just below the pool and alongside a walkway that leads to a vegetable garden and the main house; and, below right, an outdoor seating area with a fire pit, which they enjoy with their dog, Maggie Earleen.



### Continued from page 21

ficient, and rounded, ceramic “kamado” grills such as the Big Green Egg can use 100 percent natural lump charcoal made from unused log sections and recycled wood, experts say. Other types of charcoal can be used as well.

If you want a fridge in your outdoor kitchen, Dave Rebtoy, The Home Depot's regional vice president over the Southwest, has a key efficiency tip. “If you install a refrigerator in an outdoor kitchen, it needs to be an outdoor refrigerator,” he said. “They're different. People put mini-fridges outside and they won't stay cool. If you put it in an enclosed space, it needs to vent.”

The Home Depot offers all sorts of advice about outdoor living DIY projects, Rebtoy said.

When large outdoor projects require lighting, plumbing or other technical skills, many homeowners hire a professional. That's what Andrew Murrell did. After gutting and renovating a house in Bellville, he and his family moved there from Houston last fall.

When Murrell cut back his 124-mile round trip commute to his job in Houston to twice weekly because of the pandemic, the family started on a two-part outdoor project that initially included landscaping, a basketball court and sitting area.

That's when Murrell's family realized how lucky they were: the pandemic “heightened the need for the large gathering space to sit around and apart from each other,” Murrell said.

A swimming pool and cabana were completed this fall, Murrell

said. The total cost of the outdoor projects was \$350,000, including the \$100,000 pool cost.


Dede and Brian Kaplan drive every week from Houston to their weekend house in Burton that sits on just over 12 acres. But during the pandemic, they've spent more time in Burton, including the period when much of the country was shut down last spring.

“Being out here those three weeks was really wonderful and made us realize we could spend a lot of time here. We were happy we were improving the property so we could enjoy more of it,” Dede Kaplan said.

Although they've owned the Burton house for three years, they didn't start their outdoor project until earlier this year. They added a casita, swimming pool and landscaping.

Families who invest in outdoor living spaces may be helping their health, according to increasing numbers of studies showing that spending time outside is good both mentally and physically. Enjoy-





The pandemic  
'heightened the  
need for the large  
gathering space  
to sit around and  
apart from each  
other.'

— Andrew Murrell



ing nature appears to boost well-being amid the swirl of stress and anxiety produced by the pandemic.

“This paper adds value to the literature in showing that a dose of as little as 10–20 minutes of sitting or walking in an array of green spaces can have a meaningful impact in reducing stress, anger, anxiety, and in increasing vigor, comfort, positive affect and a sense of feeling refreshed,” said one study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* in January.

Research conducted by psychologist Marc Berman, director of the Environmental Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Chicago, finds similar benefits. Those working at home may experience “directed attention fatigue,” making it difficult to focus after hours spent online, he said, but spending time among natural elements such as trees, plants, water or animals is “going to help restore your attention. If you don’t have a lot of trees in the backyard, add some plants. We’re finding anything you have can help,” Berman said. ■

## DIY or go with a pro? Things to keep in mind

Everyone is spending more time at home, so home improvement projects may be on your to-do list. But your do-it-yourself skills may not be up to complex projects like creating outdoor living environments. Here are some key FYIs for DIYs, courtesy of The Home Depot.

**TIME:** First, do you actually have time to do a project yourself? Smaller tasks, such as building a table, can take a weekend or a few days. But an outdoor deck or larger projects may require several weeks of time.

**COST:** DIY almost always saves you money. But be sure to assess your budget in relation to the time and effort needed to tackle the project yourself. Consider asking a professional for a cost estimate before you start.

**SCOPE OF WORK:** How big is your project? It’s best to start small for your first attempt at DIY as you build your skills. It may be worth hiring a contractor for larger projects.

**EQUIPMENT:** Know which tools are needed to complete a project and whether you have them on hand. The Home Depot, Lowe’s and other stores offer rentals if your tool arsenal is limited. If you’re not familiar with which tools are best for a project or are unsure how to use the tools, it may be safer and more efficient to hire a pro.

**SKILL:** DIY is always an excellent way to learn, but if a project is complex or requires skilled labor — such as for electrical wiring — it’s important to know whether you have the ability to complete the project safely. It’s best to let a professional handle electrical wiring.

**PERMITS:** Be sure to check your local building permit laws to ensure you can legally make renovations or undertake a project without involving a professional.

**COMPLICATING FACTORS:** Consider every aspect necessary to complete a project. Will plumbing be involved? Do you need to supply electricity? If water and power sources will be affected, you most likely will need to hire a contractor to ensure everything is done by the book and that your project can be completed safely.

**COST ESTIMATES:** The cost of installing a basic outdoor kitchen or adding an outdoor covered area like a pergola varies widely based on size, design, material and location. General construction for an outdoor kitchen may range from \$3,000 to over \$10,000. Cost of a pergola may range from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

— Sharon Jayson



The Home Depot has numerous outdoor DIY guides at <https://thd.co/3kTLwQu>. See others at [lowes.com](https://lowes.com), click on Ideas.

# Take Bluebonnet's virtual Solar Tour online

By Kristin Finan

As is the case with most events this year, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's fifth annual Solar Tour went virtual for 2020.

The 1½-hour online event held Saturday, Oct. 24, showcased a presentation from Micah Jasuta of the Texas Solar Energy Society; testimonials from Bluebonnet members John Gardner and Jerry Douglas, who have installed solar panels on their homes; and a Q&A about the installation and upkeep of solar on a home.

"Solar is an opportunity to speak to the independent nature of us Texans," Jasuta said. "Texans are very independent people. We value that self-reliance. Solar is a way to do that. You own your own power source."

In general, with the help of federal tax credits, which could be phased out for residential installations as soon as 2022, those who install solar panels can expect to recoup the cost of their investment in 10-12 years, Jasuta said. He added that most panels have a 25-year lifespan.

"It's a long-term investment. It's not going to pay back tomorrow, but it's something as sure as the sun rises that will pay back," he said.

Bluebonnet member Gardner, who installed his first solar panels in 2004 and calls himself an "early adopter," agreed that solar panels have been a good



Texas Solar Energy Society's Micah Jasuta presented an overview of how solar works during Bluebonnet's virtual Solar Tour on Oct. 24. Watch a recording of the event at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop).

investment for his family.

"One of the interesting things people find out once they get it installed is they can monitor how much power they make on a daily basis or monthly basis. People become quite enthusiastic about that," Gardner said. "People feel good about having solar once they have it installed."

Several attendees wanted to know how to find reputable installers.

Ask friends and family who already have solar for recommendations, and search the business member page at [TXSES.org](http://TXSES.org),

Jasuta recommended, and review sites such as the Better Business Bureau, Yelp and [solarreviews.com](http://solarreviews.com). "Get at least three proposals," he said. "Don't succumb to high pressure sales. Ask questions. There aren't that many industries left where you can negotiate and haggle. This is one of them."

You can see the entire video presentation and find more solar FAQs at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop). Learn more about installing solar on your own home by going to [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop), clicking on Energy Solutions, then the Home Renewables & Green Rate link.

## Applications available for Board seats open in 2021

Bluebonnet members interested in serving on the co-op's Board of Directors can run for one of two seats up for election during the Annual Meeting on May 11, 2021.

Candidates, who would run in one of seven districts, can be nominated by presenting a completed Application for Nomination of Candidate form with either at least 50 signatures from co-op members in their respective districts or with payment of a \$250 filing fee in certified funds.

Bluebonnet's Board is made up of nine di-

rectors who serve staggered three-year terms.

There are two seats up for election in 2021: District 2, Travis County; and District 3, Bastrop County.

Candidates must be at least 21 years old, a co-op member in good standing, agree to a background check and meet other qualifications outlined in Bluebonnet's bylaws, which are available at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop). Hover your cursor over the About tab on the home page, click on Leadership in the drop down bar and then click on the Becoming a Director link.

Application for Nomination of Candidate forms are available at the co-op's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor and online at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop), under the About tab, then Reports & Forms.

All candidate applications by petition or filing fee must be delivered to any Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 10, 2021.

For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708.

### GOVERNMENT YOUTH TOUR, SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications are available for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, which offers two 11th or 12th graders the opportunity to explore our nation's capital from June 13-22, 2021, and receive a \$1,000 scholarship. Deadline is Jan. 22, 2021. Bluebonnet will also award 60 \$2,500 scholarships to graduating seniors who plan to pursue higher education. Deadline is March 5, 2021. Get applications at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop): click Community, then Scholarships.

### OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Dec. 24-25 in observance of Christmas and Jan. 1 for New Year's Day. Member service lobbies remain closed, but drive-through lanes will reopen the following business day. Report outages by texting OUT to 85700 (to register, text BBOUTAGE to that number) or via 800-949-4414, [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop) or our mobile app. Pay your bill any time online, on our mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708.



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## TRY IT TODAY!

The holidays are a great time of year for Paul Biles, executive director of Tejas Camp and Retreat, south of Giddings. The facility's brilliant Christmas light displays are among the most beloved in the Bluebonnet region. Paul loves using the MyBluebonnet online account portal to manage the Christian retreat center's energy costs. Due to COVID-19, Tejas is offering smaller retreat opportunities this year, letting families focus on safely spending quality time together. Check out upcoming events and availability at [mytejas.org](http://mytejas.org).

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# Why Are Dealers Hoarding These 100-Year-Old U.S. Silver Dollars?

When it comes to collecting, few coins are as coveted as the first and last of a series. And when big anniversaries for those “firsts” and “lasts” come around, these coins become even more coveted.

Take, for example, the 1921 Morgan Silver Dollars. These 90% pure silver coins were the last of their kind, a special one-year-only resurrection of the classic Wild West Silver Dollar. Three years prior, the Pittman Act authorized the melting of more than 270 million Morgan Silver Dollars so their silver could be sold to our allies in the United Kingdom. Facing our own Silver Dollar shortage, the world’s favorite vintage U.S. Silver Dollar was brought back for one year only while the U.S. Mint worked on its successor, the Peace Silver Dollar.

## Dealers Begin Stockpiling Last-Year Morgans

Knowing what we’ve told you about special anniversaries, dealers around the country are preparing for a surge in demand. 2021 will mark the 100th anniversary of the 1921 Morgan Silver Dollar—the last-year-of-issue for the most popular vintage U.S. Silver Dollar ever minted. But slow-moving collectors may be disappointed in what they find when they seek out these coins.

Since the days of the Pittman Act, millions more U.S. Silver Dollars have been melted or worn down in commerce. It’s been estimated that as few as 15% of all the Morgan Dollars ever minted have survived to the present day. That number grows smaller each year, with private hoards now accounting for virtually all the surviving Morgan Silver Dollars. And that was before silver values started to rise...

## Interest in Silver Is on the Rise

As you can see from the chart on the left, in 2020, we’ve seen daily silver prices close as low as \$12.01 per ounce and as high as \$28.33 per ounce. That rise in value has led to a sharp increase in buyers’ interest in silver. We’re already seeing a surge of interest from collectors wanting to add vintage Morgan Silver Dollars to their collections. But at what price?

## Don’t Wait—Secure Your 1921 Morgan Silver Dollars NOW!

With this special offer, you can secure a last-year 1921 Morgan Silver Dollar ahead of the rush in About Uncirculated (AU) condition for just \$39.95! Mint marks vary.

These vintage U.S. Silver Dollars allow you to hold 100 years of American history in the palm of your hand. But only if you secure yours before our limited supply of 1921 Morgan Silver Dollars lasts in our vault.

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Mint Mark:	varies

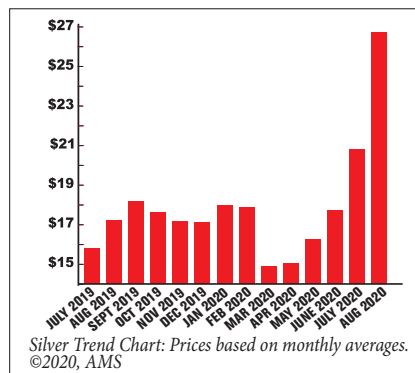
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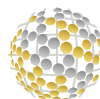
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 WEB EXTRA

Listen to W.F. Strong read this story, then watch our video about the McDonald Observatory.

had to go shopping for a mountain on which to build an observatory. That must have been fun. Mountain shopping has got to be something you get to do only once or twice in a lifetime. Luckily the university's representatives were able to shop in the Davis Mountains, which harbored some of the finest stargazing potential in North America.

After driving several thousand miles around the region, inspecting numerous sites for altitude, dark skies, cloudless nights and poor prospects for rain, they found what they were looking for. It had no official name, but the locals called it Flat Top Mountain. It was part of a ranch perfectly named for West Texas: The U Up and U Down Ranch.

University of Texas President Harry Benedict wrote a letter to Violet Locke McIvor, owner of that mountain. He told her of McDonald's gift and of the university's great need for a mountain to put an observatory on. Benedict informed McIvor that her mountain was ideally suited for such a facility and that "optical tests already made showed that the Davis Mountains region was the best in Texas, perhaps the best in the United States, for astronomical purposes." He asked her if she might consider giving her mountain to science.

McIvor might have surprised Benedict when she agreed. She wrote back almost immediately and gave UT 200 acres, the entire top of the mountain, which was renamed Mount Locke in honor of McIvor's grandfather, G.S. Locke, who founded the ranch. She also gave the university enough land to build a road to the summit. The resulting highway, Spur 78, is still the highest highway in Texas.

Today UT's McDonald Observatory sits majestically atop Mount Locke. It is one of the world's leading centers for astronomical research. As William McDonald predicted, his gift has given us the heavens themselves. ■

# He Gave Us the Stars

An eccentric banker funded the McDonald Observatory against family wishes

BY W.F. STRONG

IN 1926 A BACHELOR banker died in Paris, Texas—a rich bachelor banker, that is. His estate was worth \$1.2 million. Today that would be about \$17.6 million. In his will the banker left 90% of his money to the University of Texas to buy a telescope and build an observatory.

The banker's name was William Johnson McDonald (no connection to the famous hamburger chain).

McDonald's relatives didn't like him leaving all that money for a telescope. They believed that anyone who would do such a thing must not have all the pickets in his fence, so they sued to keep the money in the family.

Fortunately for UT, McDonald had shared his telescope dream with his barber, telling him that astronomy was a young science. He told the barber he hoped that "one day a telescope would be built that would allow astronomers to see the gold-plated streets of heaven."

McDonald was also known to be an amateur scientist. Consequently, a jury had little trouble believing that his bequest was the product of a sane mind. Upon appeal, his relatives received more than they were given originally, but UT still ended up with about \$800,000—\$11.8 million today.

Once the university had the money, it



# The Main Event

Special touches and flavors make for exceptional holiday meals

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Because my family lives so far away, we're not always able to get together at the holidays. Even though we might not be gathering around a table laden with turkey and plenty of potatoes, our smaller family holiday meal is no less festive. One dish I love to make that feels fancy but is mostly hands-off is short ribs. They only need a few minutes of browning time before braising in the oven. We like ours with mashed potatoes, but you can also serve them with cheesy polenta, risotto or even pasta.

## Red Wine-Braised Short Ribs

**3 pounds short ribs**  
**1½ teaspoons salt**  
**1½ teaspoons pepper**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**3 cloves garlic, minced or pressed**  
**1 cup chopped onion**  
**½ cup chopped carrot**  
**2 tablespoons tomato paste**  
**1 bottle (750 milliliters) cabernet sauvignon**  
**1 cup beef stock**  
**2 bay leaves**  
**4 3-inch sprigs fresh thyme or**  
**1 teaspoon dried thyme**

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Season short ribs with salt and pepper and heat oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in batches, sear short ribs on all sides and remove to a plate.
2. Reduce heat to medium and stir in garlic and onion, scraping the bottom of the pot. Cook 2 minutes, then add carrot and continue to cook 5 minutes, until carrot is softened. Stir in tomato paste until well mixed.
3. Add wine, beef stock, bay leaves and thyme and stir well. Arrange short ribs in the pot, making sure as much of the meat is submerged as possible. Cover, place in the oven and cook 3 hours.
4. Carefully remove short ribs from the pot (if you want to serve with the bone intact), place them on a platter and tent with foil.
5. Strain the liquid in the pot to remove solids and simmer until reduced by half, adding salt or pepper if needed. Serve short ribs over mashed potatoes with sauce spooned on top.

**SERVES 4**

**TCP WEB EXTRA** Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at [setted.com](http://setted.com), where she features a recipe for Easy Steak Roulade.





## Prime Rib Au Jus With Yorkshire Pudding

JACQUELINE BOYD  
NUECES EC

A meat thermometer is essential when roasting large cuts like this garlicky prime rib. "My family loves this prime rib for Christmas or New Year's," Boyd says. The accompanying Yorkshire pudding is perfect for soaking up the delicious au jus. If you can't find a bone-in cut, boneless will work just as well.

### PRIME RIB

- 5-pound bone-in beef rib roast**
- 5 large cloves garlic, minced**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon pepper**
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme**

### YORKSHIRE PUDDING (optional)

- 6 eggs**
- 2 cups milk**
- Pinch salt**
- 2 cups flour**
- ½ cup pan drippings from roast**

### AU JUS

- ½ cup white wine**
- 2 cups beef stock**

**1. PRIME RIB** The night before cooking, unwrap the roast and set it in a casserole dish to dry in a refrigerator. This helps to brown the roast.

**2.** An hour before cooking, set the roast on a rack, fat side up. In a small bowl, combine garlic, olive oil, salt, pepper and thyme, then apply rub to roast, making sure to cover all sides. Insert meat thermometer and pre-heat oven to 450 degrees.

CONTINUED >

\$500 WINNER

## Citrus-Brined Smoked Turkey With Brown Sugar Rub

JILEEN PLATT  
BOWIE-CASS EC



Is there anything more Texan than smoking a turkey during the holidays? Platt's recipe features a fruity brine that ensures the bird stays moist and tender during the smoking process. If you don't have a smoker, you can roast the turkey in the oven at 350 degrees for about 3 hours.

SERVES 8



### BRINE

- 1 gallon water**
- 1 cup salt**
- 1¾ cups orange juice**
- 1¾ cups cranberry juice**
- ½ cup brown sugar**
- 2 cinnamon sticks**
- 1 lemon, sliced**
- 1 orange, sliced**
- 2 tablespoons dried minced onion**
- 4 bay leaves**
- 1 tablespoon pepper**

### TURKEY

- 12- to 13-pound turkey, neck and giblets removed**
- Apple or pecan wood chips, for smoking**

### RUB

- ½ cup brown sugar**
- ¼ cup smoked paprika**
- 2 tablespoons onion powder**
- 1 tablespoon pepper**
- 1 tablespoon salt**
- 1 tablespoon chili powder**
- 1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper**

**1. BRINE AND TURKEY** In a pot large enough to fit the turkey, mix together the brine ingredients, stirring well. Place whole turkey into the brine, breast-side down. Cover and refrigerate overnight, 12–18 hours.

**2. RUB** Mix together all ingredients in a medium-sized bowl. Transfer the rub to an airtight container until ready to cook the turkey.

**3.** The next morning, set smoker to 250 degrees and soak apple or pecan wood chips.

**4.** Pour ¼ cup of rub into a small bowl. The rest can be stored in a cool, dry place to be used later. Remove turkey from brine, drain excess liquid from cavity, and set on a shallow pan or cookie sheet. Discard the remaining brine. Massage the rub all over the outside of the turkey.

**5.** When the smoker temperature has reached 250 degrees, place turkey directly on rack with breast side up. Add wood chips to smoker, replacing again after 1 hour. Let turkey cook until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees, maintaining a smoker temperature of 225–250. A 12-pound turkey will take approximately 6 hours. Remove turkey from smoker and let rest 30 minutes before carving.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

POTLUCK DISHES DUE DEC 10

Share your favorite dish to grace the buffet or pass around at family gatherings. Enter at [TexasCoopPower.com/Contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/Contests) by December 10.



*Happy Holidays*

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RECIPES CONTINUED

**3.** Roast 20 minutes at 450, then lower temperature to 325 and cook until roast is 120 degrees (130 degrees for medium doneness).

**4. YORKSHIRE PUDDING** Beat the eggs, milk and salt, then stir in the flour until smooth. Cover and place in the refrigerator while the roast cooks.

**5.** When the roast is done, remove from pan, cover with foil and let rest while you finish the Yorkshire pudding. Measure ½ cup of drippings from the roast and divide among a 12-cup muffin tin. Pour off the rest of the fat, but keep the roasting pan for the au jus.

**6.** Place the muffin tin in the oven and turn up the heat to 450 degrees. Let the muffin tin preheat for 10 minutes, then remove and quickly fill each cup ¾ full with the refrigerated batter. Bake 20–25 minutes until golden brown and very puffy.

**7. AU JUS** Place the roasting pan on the stove over medium-high heat. Stir in wine and bring to a simmer while scraping pan to dissolve drippings. Pour in beef stock, return to a simmer and cook 10 minutes. Carve prime rib and serve with au jus and Yorkshire pudding.

SERVES 6



**Grilled Pork Chops With  
Chai Spice Apple Compote**

MARIAN EVONIUK  
PEDERNALES EC

Pork and apples are a perfect pairing, and the spices in Evoniuk's compote make this a cozy, comforting dish that's ideal in winter, even while we fire up the grill. Any extra compote is delicious served warm with whipped cream.

CHAI SPICE APPLE COMPOTE

- 1** tablespoon butter
- 1** shallot, peeled and chopped
- ½** teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼** teaspoon ground allspice
- ⅛** teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ⅛** teaspoon ground cloves
- ⅛** teaspoon ground cardamom
- ⅛** teaspoon ground ginger
- ⅛** teaspoon salt
- 2** large Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and coarsely chopped
- 2** tablespoons light brown sugar
- Zest and juice of 1** large lemon

PORK CHOPS

- 1½** teaspoons salt
- ¼** teaspoon pepper
- ¼** teaspoon sugar
- ¼** teaspoon celery seed
- 1** teaspoon onion powder
- 1** teaspoon dried parsley
- 3** pounds (about 4) pork center rib chops, bone in, 1¼–1½ inches thick
- 2** teaspoons garlic powder, divided use

**1. COMPOTE** Combine butter and shallot in a 10-inch skillet and cook, covered, over medium-low heat until shallot is tender. Add the spices and salt and stir about 30 seconds. Add the apples, brown sugar, lemon zest and juice, and cover, cooking over medium heat until apples are crisp-tender, about 7–10 minutes. Remove skillet from heat, transfer compote to a medium glass serving bowl and set aside.

**2. PORK CHOPS** Prepare outdoor grill for indirect heat. In a small bowl, mix together the salt, pepper, sugar, celery seed, onion powder and parsley. Place pork chops onto a large platter. Sprinkle each side of the chops with ½ teaspoon of the seasoning and ¼ teaspoon of the garlic powder.

**3.** Place a 12-by-24-inch sheet of non-stick foil onto the grill grate, nonstick side up. Arrange pork chops on top. Grill pork chops 10 minutes on one side, then flip and grill 10 minutes on the other side. Flip pork chops again, grill 5 minutes, then flip and grill 5 minutes on the other side. Cook pork chops to 160 degrees, continuing to flip every 5 minutes as needed. Remove chops onto a clean platter, tent with foil and let rest 5 minutes. Serve with chai spice apple compote.

SERVES 4



# holiday GIFT GUIDE

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Ghost Town Hangout

Terlingua's Starlight Theatre draws a crowd

BY CHET GARNER

I'M SITTING IN the desert at the edge of Texas, enjoying grilled quail amid an assembly that includes artists, dropouts, backpackers and notable ranchers. Over my right shoulder I can see a stuffed goat that once served as the mayor of nearby Lajitas, and in front of me a troubadour sings a lament to the moon. It's Friday night at the Starlight Theatre in the Terlingua ghost town.

This rocky village sits about 10 miles from the Mexico border, but it seems more like another universe, one defined by incongruous elements such as a pirate ship and rough metal folk art. When it was founded more than a century ago, Terlingua was defined by a quicksilver mine, but the village faded after the mine went bust. By the 1960s artists and freethinkers found they could thrive there without society's constraints.

Like many of those gathered here, I'm fresh off the trails of Big Bend National Park. In pursuit of a good meal, I stop at the Starlight for dinner before heading home. The building served as the town's theater into the 1930s but was abandoned. After 30 years its four walls remained, but the roof was gone. The adobe shell became an open-air music venue. With the West Texas stars for a ceiling, the Starlight earned its new name.

After a few more decades, the owner decided to add a roof and create a proper restaurant. Now the Starlight is possibly the best place west of the Pecos for distinctive dining, boasting creative dishes like chicken-fried wild boar, axis burgers and bowls of classic Texas chili.

After dinner I grab a cold beer from the Terlingua Trading Company next door and join the characters on the expansive porch to enjoy the West Texas breeze and listen to yarns that stretch across the Rio Grande. ■

ABOVE Starlight signage on the facade above the front entry.

**TCP WEB EXTRA** See Chet's video from Terlingua's Starlight Theatre and check out his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

## Know Before You Go

Some events may have been affected by COVID-19. Call or check an event's website for scheduling details.

## DECEMBER

04

**Granbury [4-13] Away in a Manger Nativity Display**, (817) 360-6228, [visitgranbury.com/away-in-a-manger-nativity-display](http://visitgranbury.com/away-in-a-manger-nativity-display)

**La Grange [4-6, 10-13, 17-23] Trail of Lights at Kreishe Brewery and Monument Hill State Historic Site**, (979) 968-5658, [friendsofkreishebrewery.org/trailoflights](http://friendsofkreishebrewery.org/trailoflights)

08

**Nederland Lighted Christmas Parade**, (409) 985-7822, [visitportarthurtx.com](http://visitportarthurtx.com)

11

**Clute Christmas in the Park**, (979) 265-8392

**Fredericksburg [11-12] The Christmas Journey**, (830) 997-2069, [bethanyfredericksburg.com](http://bethanyfredericksburg.com)

**Levelland [11-12] South Plains Showdown Jackpot Pig Show**, (806) 894-4161, [malleteventcenter.com](http://malleteventcenter.com)

**Fredericksburg [11-20] Nuncrackers**, (830) 997-3588, [fredericksburgtheater.org](http://fredericksburgtheater.org)

12

**Hondo Tour of Vacant Buildings**, (830) 426-3037, [hondochamber.org/tour-of-vacant-buildings](http://hondochamber.org/tour-of-vacant-buildings)

**Jacksonville Cherokee Craft & Trade Fair**, (903) 268-1598, [jacksonvilletexas.com](http://jacksonvilletexas.com)

**Palestine Old Town Vintage Christmas Open House**, (903) 221-6233, [otvandmore.com](http://otvandmore.com)

**Palestine Wine Swirl**, (903) 723-3014, [visitpalestine.com](http://visitpalestine.com)

**Port Arthur Drive Thru Christmas**, (409) 983-8105, visitportarthurtx.com

**Reno Christmas in the Park**, (903) 785-6581, renotexas.us

17 **Palestine Christmas Carol Sing Along**, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com/christmas

18 **Fredericksburg [18-20] Trade Days**, (210) 846-4094, fbgtradedays.com

**Levelland [18-20] Christmas Cash Classic Show Pig Jackpot**, (806) 894-4161, malleteventcenter.com

19 **Fort McKavett Victorian Christmas Fair**, (325) 396-2358, facebook.com/visitfortmckavett



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## Pick of the Month

**Main Street Christmas**  
Darrouzett, December 12  
(806) 624-2441  
facebook.com/dzttt

This town of 300 mostly farmers and ranchers about as close as you can get to the North Pole and still be in Texas promises two blocks packed with a variety of activities. Children can decorate T-shirts and cookies. Adults can enjoy bingo. All can partake in chili and soup and a Christmas dance. A parade of hay-hauler trucks decorated with antlers is followed by a special guest who rides in a firetruck.

## TCP Submit Your Event

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

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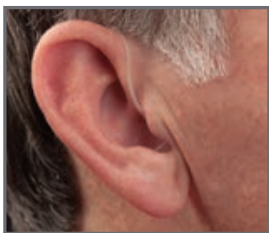


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"There are many spokes on the wheel of life. First, we're here to explore new possibilities." —Ray Charles

GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

**RICK KIEFFER**  
BLUEBONNET EC

"My friend Bill Stephens showing his skills at Palo Duro Canyon State Park."

**PHOEBE LAKE**  
BLUEBONNET EC

"We moved a 100-year-old farmhouse from Somerville to Brenham. This is half of it on its way."

**GARY CARPENTER**  
FAYETTE EC

"This bus was used by the Texas swing band that represented Lone Star Beer in the 1950s and 1960s."

**NANCY BURRER**  
SAN BERNARD EC

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## Upcoming Contests

- DUE DEC 10** Storms
- DUE JAN 10** Historic Texas
- DUE FEB 10** Manmade vs. Nature

Enter online and review submission rules at [TexasCoopPower.com/Contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/Contests).

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





## Hooked on Worms

Growing up with an unabated work ethic while stooping low in the rain

BY TOM WIDLOWSKI  
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KACHIK

I USED TO have worms.

Even at 13 I knew that wasn't very funny, but it seems to be a crack common to the night crawler business, and I used to be in the night crawler business.

It was 1974 in Joliet, Illinois, and I wanted cash.

We stuck a shingle on the utility pole—shame on us—at the end of our block, where it crossed a busier street. “Worms & Nite-Crawlers, 917.” Our address on Sheila Drive.

It worked. Folks heading out to fish stopped by and rapped on our door to buy their bait. Today it would probably be mistaken for drug deals. Strange cars pulling into the driveway, a dollar handed over in exchange for the goods.

It's not a job for the squeamish. First you must collect the worms. That means

going someplace with lots of grass—a park or a schoolyard. The worms come out of the ground after a good rain, especially at night.

My dad, God bless him, and I and sometimes my younger brother and sister would traipse through the grass in the dark, bent at the waist with a flashlight and old milk jug in one hand. We'd pluck the worms off the ground and drop them into our gallons, which had been cut open at the top to create a larger opening.

We'd be out there for an hour, maybe more—how does a kid measure time hunched over in the total darkness, sometimes in the rain? When we thought we had enough, either worms or of the experience, we'd head home.

There, we dumped them onto newspapers on our basement floor—a writhing mound of slimy, yucky... things. Earthworms produce mucus that keeps their bodies moist to help breathe in oxygen through their skin. In those milk jugs, they seemed to need a lot of mucus. On good nights there'd be more than a thousand of them squirming on the sports section. My bread and butter.

I counted them out by the dozen and put them, with a bit of peat moss, into old oleo, sour cream and similar containers that friends and relatives saved for me. Then into our basement fridge. Chilled, they went dormant but stayed alive.

And so the anglers came to our door, sometimes in the middle of the night, and bought my worms. Fifty cents a dozen. We'd open the container and stir the peat moss a bit with a finger to show the customer they were getting lively bait that couldn't fail. Then we'd wish them luck.

Barely more than a decade later, I was a newspaper designer and editor—still working at night, hovering over sports pages, but no longer knuckle-deep in slime. ■



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