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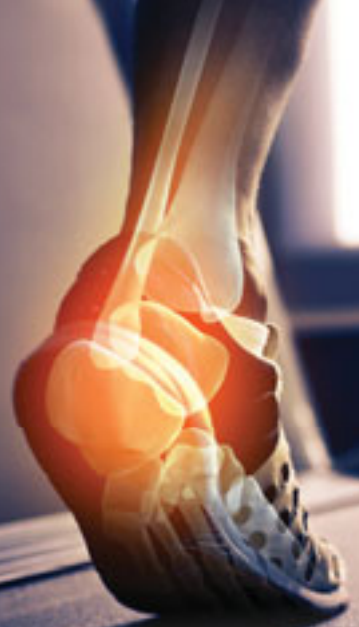


**BLUEBONNET NEWS**  
SEE PAGE 18

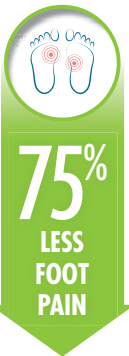


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Sue, left, and Jerry Machetta sponsor children in Nuevo Progreso.

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FAMILY: LAURA JENKINS. CAR: BILLPHILPOT | DREAMSTIME.COM



**ON THE COVER** *Winter Texan neighbors from South Dakota and Minnesota greet each other.* Photo by Laura Jenkins

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## Chain of Command?

If, as you write, Navy Adm. Chester Nimitz of Fredericksburg “commanded all land and sea forces in the Pacific” during World War II, then what was Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur doing? [*Painting the Heavens Blue*, Currents, April 2018]

LOUIS LEE JURIKA | BUDA  
PEDERNALES EC

## Another Evil Plant

I don’t know why bull nettle isn’t named after the devil because it comes straight from hell! [*What the Devil?*, March 2018]

LES MEADS | STOCKDALE  
GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

## Long Time Coming

At Pedernales EC, we currently have two female lineworkers who are an important part of our team [*Women at Work*, Currents, March 2018]. It has been a long time coming since people like Rosa Vasquez, my mother, helped pave the way for women in the industry. In April 2017, my mother became the first female lineworker inducted into the International Lineman’s Hall of Fame. As a lineman and her son, I am very proud of her accomplishments.

The lineworkers, men and women, are the backbone of America.

JAMES VASQUEZ, TECHNICAL TRAINING MANAGER  
JOHNSON CITY  
PEDERNALES EC

## Finding Books

Following your feature on out-of-the-way bookstores [*Blue Highway Literature*, June 2017],

## Beach Beauty

I always enjoy reading *Texas Co-op Power*, especially the Texas History section and recipes. We spend time at Padre Island National Seashore twice a year.



I took this photo on Malaquite Beach last fall, and your April cover [*Back to the Beach*] reminded me of it. It is always a beautiful place!

MONIKA SANDOVAL | LAGO VISTA  
PEDERNALES EC

I arrived at Booked Up in Archer City on a Monday. The front door was decorated with a sign: “By appointment Mon.–Wed., from 1 to 5 Thur.–Sat.” At Recycled Books, Records & CDs in Denton, my luck was in.

I found some nice copies of Andre Norton I was missing. Gladewater Books added a Giles and a Costain.

GERALD STEPHENS | SHELBYVILLE  
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC



## Appreciating Prairie Dogs

Read *High Plains Sentinel* [December 2017] and have known prairie dogs are a

threatened Texas treasure. In New Mexico, they have prairie dog towns along their busy city streets. Amazing to see them scurrying around and popping their heads out of their tunnels. They can survive in Texas if we work with them in their habitats.

CINDY BARNETT VIA FACEBOOK | FLOWER MOUND  
COSERV

## Malakoff Man

I have an anthropology degree. I knew that there were three of these heads but had no idea that they were finally all together in one display a short drive away [*Saving Face in Malakoff*, November 2017].

I look at the Pearce Museum as an underappreciated asset and a well-kept secret considering the quality of the exhibits.

After viewing the faces, it is obvious to me that they are not naturally occurring, nor were they carved in historic times as some have postulated. These

heads are oddities not unlike some other past finds that don’t fit so neatly into the archaeological record as we understand it but are, nevertheless, there to make us think about it.

ED DOLZEL | MARLIN  
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

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   Texas Co-op Power

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## HAPPENINGS

# The Final Frontier

The southern High Plains' Cochran County in the 1930s bragged that it was "where the pavement ends and the West begins." Indeed, Cochran was one of the last counties formed by the Legislature and the last to be settled, leading to its nickname, Texas' Last Frontier.

Today, the area celebrates that legacy with the annual **TEXAS' LAST FRONTIER HERITAGE CELEBRATION** in **MORTON, JUNE 22-24** this year. The festival started in 2004 as part of a commemoration for a historical marker that heralds the end of a misadventure that has become known as the Buffalo Soldier Tragedy of 1877. Four African-American cavalry troops on patrol during a drought in West Texas succumbed during an 86-hour search for water. Dozens survived the ordeal.

Among the highlights of the Last Frontier Heritage Celebration, which attracts many members of Bailey County Electric Cooperative, are a brisket cook-off and car show.

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## YOUTH TOUR

# A Special D'Hanis Travel Agent

**After graduating** from D'Hanis High School in the 1990s and attending college in San Antonio, Cody Santos landed a job as an accountant with United Airlines in Houston.

**His heart, though,** remains in Medina County, in part because he bought his grandparents' place in Yancey in Medina Electric Cooperative's service territory. Santos also believes his education in D'Hanis set him on his way to a successful career. So when he read the feature story *The State With the Most* [October 2017] about the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, he was inspired by the program and Medina EC's involvement in sending students to Washington, D.C., each summer.

**He contacted** the co-op and offered to pay for Medina EC to send an additional student on the trip this summer. And so Medina is sending four students instead of three on Youth Tour, June 6-15 this year.

**"I believe in** giving back," Santos says. "I'm a very big proponent of people traveling."

45

states observe Juneteenth, which commemorates June 19, 1865, when Texans learned about the Emancipation Proclamation—more than two years after President Abraham Lincoln issued it. The five states that do not observe Juneteenth are Hawaii, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota and South Dakota.



CO-OP PEOPLE

## A Toad's Abode

**THE DISTINCTIVE, HIGH-PITCHED** and trill-sounding chirps of the Houston toad were once common sounds across the central coastal region of Texas. But today, the toad's chorus is harder to come by, as habitat loss and other factors have pushed the species toward extinction in the wild.

**TWO MEMBERS** of the cooperative family are working to reverse that trend.

**LAST FALL, ROXANNE AND ELVIS HERNANDEZ**, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members and owners of Rancho Zunzun in Bastrop County, became the first private landowners to enroll in a conservation program through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to aid in the recovery of the endangered Houston toad.

**THROUGH BRUSH MANAGEMENT**, invasive species control, prescribed burning and other conservation practices, the Hernandezes hope to revitalize their property with the native loblolly pines and sandy soils that the toad depends on—and in the process, help restore the Lost Pines ecosystem, which was ravaged by wildfires in 2011.

**“WHAT’S GOOD** for the toad is good for other wildlife,” says Roxanne, whose 53-acre ranch is part of the Alum Creek Wildlife Management Association. Though Rancho Zunzun is so far the only official participant in the Houston toad conservation program, Hernandez says every bit of the association’s acreage is being managed to some extent for the benefit of the toad. And other property owners have expressed interest in joining the program—a prospect Hernandez welcomes: “It’s the collective that’s going to make the difference.”

## REINVENTING THE WHEEL

Note these milestone anniversaries this month, commemorating people and events that left quite a mark in American society:

**175 years ago:** Susan Elizabeth Blow, who opened the first successful public kindergarten in the United States—in St. Louis—was born June 7, 1843.

**150 years ago:** The patent for the typewriter, developed by Wisconsin inventor Christopher Latham Sholes, was granted June 23, 1868. It featured the QWERTY keyboard that’s still in use today.

**125 years ago:** Two creations debuted at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 that continue to provide enjoyment: a new popcorn sensation that became known as Cracker Jack and the Ferris wheel.



### Did you know?



**AN ANONYMOUS** developer filed a request with the Federal Aviation Administration last fall to perform a study to build the world’s largest Ferris wheel in San Antonio. The wheel would tower 900 feet high, making it the tallest structure in San Antonio.

A man and a woman are riding bicycles away from the camera on a paved road. The man is on the left, wearing a dark jacket and a white cap. The woman is on the right, wearing a pink shirt and grey pants. The road is lined with tall palm trees on the left and a white building with a red truck parked in front on the right. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting sunset or sunrise.

# ❄️ the winters of their LIVES

**They come from colder  
climes, and while they're here,  
Winter Texans volunteer  
and spread warmth**





*Story and photos  
by Laura Jenkins*

**F**or a woman who was once on the run from a drug cartel, Sue Machetta seems surprisingly relaxed in Mexico. I don't mean the chaise-longue, umbrella-drink kind of relaxed. I'm talking about the composure that appears when you're certain you've found your calling. Even though they live in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, Sue and her husband, Jerry, work with the Mexican Children's Refuge, a nonprofit that provides scholarships for children across the border, in Nuevo Progreso, Mexico.

After spending one day with the couple in Mexico, I had a hard time keeping up with all the ways they've found to improve the lives of the impoverished.

Each year, this couple and thousands of Winter Texans like them spend an enormous amount of their time and resources to give back to the community that's taken them in.

Winter Texans spend a few weeks to a few months in the Lone Star State each year, usually to escape harsh winters in the northern U.S. About half own or rent a mobile home in the Rio Grande Valley; another third own a recreational vehicle; and some own a second home or condo.

According to a 2016 study conducted by the Business and Tourism Research Center at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, approximately 96,000 Winter Texans visited the area in 2016. That seems like a lot, but that number is down from 144,000 in 2010. Kristi Collier of Welcome Home RGV, an organization that provides resources and support for Winter Texans, says the decline isn't surprising.

**Ron and Celeste Rogers ride through Snow to Sun RV resort in Weslaco.**

"The No. 1 reason people come down here is word of mouth," Collier says. "They heard about it from a friend who was coming here. There were times when you couldn't find an



**Top: A coveted waterside slip in Isla Blanca Park on South Padre Island. Above: Jardin de Los Niños, a kindergarten endowed by the Mabel Foundation.**

RV spot because they were all full. But every year, due to attrition, we lose people. Some are in poor health. Some pass away. We're kind of in that transitional phase where [we] haven't been replacing them as fast as we've been losing them."

When pressed for a ballpark figure, Collier estimates that today the mobile home parks are about 75 percent full. She says back in the 1980s, the region did quite a bit of marketing in the Midwest, which is where the great majority of Winter Texans hail from. But once the parks got full, marketing efforts dwindled.

Despite their waning numbers, Winter Texans' economic impact is staggering. According to the aforementioned study, Winter Texans funneled an estimated \$760 million into the Rio Grande Valley economy in the 2015-2016 season and injected another \$30.6 million into Mexican border towns. But the value of volunteerism that Winter Texans bring might be an even greater benefit than the money they spend.



**Above: Medical supply room at Mabel's Free Clinic in Nuevo Progreso. Right: Winter Texans fish at Isla Blanca Park.**



Clearly, these people aren't skimping on the fun of being retired.

But somehow they still manage to find plenty of time to give back to their seasonal community.

The Machettas, who heard about the Rio Grande Valley from friends, unwittingly sold their beekeeping business and home in South Dakota to a person involved in drug trafficking. While the authorities sorted out the details of the case, the Machettas drove their RV to Texas to keep a low profile as the case was resolved. They visited Nuevo Progreso and met a shoeshine boy who ignited their passion to serve that community. That was eight years ago.

Eventually they joined forces with Dr. Eva Lilia Garcia de González, a physician in Nuevo Progreso who is the Mexican director of the Mabel Foundation, a nonprofit that provides medical care, food and scholarships to the community. (Mabel Clare Proudley was a Weslaco-based humanitarian and philanthropist who devoted most of her life to serving the people in and around Nuevo Progreso.) The Machettas live in the RGV for four months each winter, but their work on behalf of the poor in Nuevo Progreso is year-round.

“When we were young, our grandparents often just sat in rockers watching the world go by,” Sue Machetta says. “People were there to help us when we were struggling and trying to raise our families and pay tuition fees, and now it’s our turn to pay it forward!”

They make furniture and intricate woodcarvings, sew quilts, and paint on canvas and glass, and they sell the items to fund their work with the refuge. Sue Machetta recently had the idea to found

a trade school for those who don't have access to traditional education. Plans are in the works for sewing, woodworking and welding courses, with other trades and music classes forthcoming. The Machettas are just two Winter Texans who devote themselves to charitable causes in and around the Rio Grande Valley.

It's a cold, drizzly January day in South Texas when I pull into Trophy Gardens RV Resort in Alamo. I selected this community, a member of Magic Valley Electric Cooperative, out of *The Park Book*, a guide that lists 330 RV and mobile home parks in the Rio Grande Valley.

I'm here to see if I can gain a better perspective on how Winter Texans spend their time. As I walk through the main entrance, I notice a group of people playing shuffleboard. The weekly calendar of events on the wall makes me tired just to read it. I note several art and sewing classes, including a crocheting and knitting



**Above: A conga line at the Trophy Gardens RV Resort in Alamo. Right: Karen Price, left, and Kristi Collier at a welcome event in Mercedes.**



group that calls itself “The Happy Hookers.” The calendar includes a profusion of card games, sports and exercise opportunities. Every Saturday night, the park hosts a dance with a live band. Clearly, these people aren’t skimping on the fun of being retired. But somehow they still manage to find plenty of time to give back to their seasonal community.

“We go to police stations and schools to ask what areas, what children need help,” says Janet Yeley, who serves on the board of the park’s nonprofit organization, Caring for Others. “There’s a new shelter going in for women and children, so we’re going to try and see what their needs are. Every Tuesday morning, we meet to consider where to concentrate our efforts.” Trophy Gardens residents founded CFO more than three decades ago. Their aim is to design creative ways to help needy children and families.

Their efforts are eclectic and inspiring.

Some residents help care for premature babies at an area hospital. Others play Santa or take food and presents to the poor on Christmas Eve. One man collects old bicycles, refurbishes them and gives them to people who need transportation. Another man collects used carpet, cleans it and makes beds for children in Mexico. A women’s group collaborates with the Rio Grande Valley Quilt Guild to make quilts for individuals in the U.S. military.

“We have residents that drive the van to the Shriners hospital in Houston,” says Lynn Murray, who with her husband, J.D., manages Trophy Gardens. “They pick the kids and a parent up at the border, drive them to Houston and then spend the night with them at a hotel.”

Everything the Trophy Gardens RV Park donates is either made by residents or purchased with funds raised by park residents. They have bake sales and make things like hats and blankets. They organize food drives. One of the most popular fundraising efforts is the park’s donation station, where residents

contribute clothing and household items.

“Every Wednesday they bring us their donations,” says Yeley. “I get it all ready, fix it up, make sure any appliances work. Then they all come back on Tuesday and give money for what their neighbors have donated. All proceeds are used to fund our work in the Alamo community.”

Most Winter Texans I met convince me that they’re a resourceful bunch. Many referenced Collier’s organization as a heartwarming presence and a phenomenal resource. But her company exists to serve the needs of Winter Texans, not to spearhead their volunteer efforts. I never encountered anyone who was organizing volunteers on a large scale. Winter Texans effect positive change in a multitude of singular ways.

“I think volunteerism is part of the Midwest values,” says Murray. “A lot of our residents come from Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, even Canada. I think they’re taught from a young age to give back to the community. So that continues no matter where they are.”

Murray and her husband live in the Valley full time, and she says one thing she really appreciates about her adopted state is the inclusion implied by the name part-time residents are widely known by.

“The great thing about coming to Texas is the term ‘Winter Texan,’” Murray says. “You’re not just a snowbird here. You’re considered a Texan.”

Laura Jenkins is a writer and photojournalist based in Austin.

# CONNECTING YOUR HOME



# High-tech devices allow you to control lights, appliances and air conditioning wirelessly

Story by Jeff Siegel | Illustrations by Carl Wiens

When CoServ offered its members a discount on smart thermostats in April 2016, the North Texas cooperative's goal was to enroll 3,000 devices in its demand-response program. The plan was to reach this goal by December, but by May, just one month later, 4,000 devices already had been enrolled.

"The demand is there for devices like smart thermostats and smart TVs," says Oscar Martinez, director of communications for CoServ, an electric cooperative headquartered in Corinth, north of the Metroplex. "Yes, they want to save energy and save money, but it's about more than that. They see that these gadgets have a lot of potential for changing the way they live."

CoServ members who bought the smart thermostats were creating part of what experts call "the connected home," which is powered by the "internet of things." Connected homes are about more than simply being connected to your co-op's system.

At its most basic, the internet of things refers to the ability of devices to communicate and work with each other over Wi-Fi, thanks to a computer chip embedded in each lightbulb, thermostat, camera or appliance.

The technology in a smart thermostat is another step forward on the road that gave us email, video chat and music streaming. The connected home makes it as easy to control appliances, lights and air conditioning as it is to send a text message.

One essential point to keep in mind about the connected home, explains Alan Shedd, director of energy solutions for Touchstone Energy Cooperatives, is that these solutions assume you have in-home Wi-Fi. Without that connectivity, Shedd points out, you will have access to only some of the functionality of a product like a Nest thermostat, but you cannot implement the comprehensive solution.

"This represents an important enabling technology," Shedd says, "but make sure your expectations are in line with reality." Start with the most basic ways to use new technology because that is where you realize tangible benefits.

"One of the best ways to approach this is to look for the low-hanging fruit," says Will Holford, manager of public affairs for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, headquartered in Bastrop and serving parts of 14 Central Texas counties. "Focus on the most bang for your buck. And that is often going to be a smart thermostat because that's going to do more to cut [energy] use than blinds or lightbulbs."

A critical consideration when it comes to connecting devices is the strength of your Wi-Fi signal. None of this will work unless the signal is strong enough to allow the devices to talk to each other, and there are dozens of reasons why your signal may not be strong enough. That your house may be too big is not even the most important. In some cases, Wi-Fi signals can even lose strength in a small apartment. Among the culprits: fish tanks, because the signal can't pass through water; interference from neighboring Wi-Fi, cordless phones or even a baby monitor, which can overwhelm the radio channels available for the signal; and too much concrete, brick or metal in a building, which can slow or even block the signal. One way to check Wi-Fi signal strength is via the website speedtest.net.

"Be sure you have the bandwidth to make it all work," Holford says. "Is your signal strong enough so that all of the devices can work together effectively? That's one thing in an urban area but may be quite different in a rural area."

## What Makes a Smart Home?

One of the reasons the idea of a smart or connected home seems so daunting is that no one can quite agree on what makes a home smart.

The simplest definition says a home becomes connected when it has three smart devices—lightbulbs, say, plus a thermostat and programmable window blinds. Typically, you control these devices separately through phone apps, so that what the thermostat does won't have any effect on what the blinds or lightbulbs do.

"The main thing to understand is what you want to get out of these gadgets," says Brian Sloboda, program and product manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. "This is not *The Jetsons*. This is not science fiction. This is about your comfort and convenience. They are there to make your life a little easier, and that's what you need to understand."

Some say a home can only be called connected when the smart devices can talk to each other through what's called a hub—a device such as an Amazon Echo or Google Home—or through a website or phone app, such as Samsung SmartThings, which lets you control each device from one place. That way, the lights can be programmed to come on at the same time the blinds go down.

The availability of these devices varies from co-op to co-op, and there is no single right answer for how best to use the technology. NRECA is launching a pilot this year to test a hub for smart devices, in which a home with all its connected devices

# Wi-Fi Explained

The easiest way to understand Wi-Fi is to consider an average home or business since most of them support Wi-Fi access. The main requirement for Wi-Fi is that there's a device that can transmit the wireless signal, like a router, phone or computer.

In a typical home, a router transmits an internet connection coming from outside the network, like an ISP, and delivers that service to nearby devices that can reach the wireless signal. Phones and computers can share wireless or wired internet connections with other devices by creating a Wi-Fi hot spot, which functions similarly to a router.

No matter how the Wi-Fi is being used or what its source of connection is, the result is always the same: a wireless signal that lets other devices connect to the main transmitter for communication, like to transfer files or carry voice messages.

Wi-Fi, from the user's perspective, is just internet access from a wireless-capable device like a phone, tablet or laptop.

—Lifewire



will learn how to manage electricity use—through lights, heating and cooling, hot water, and the stove. The goal, says Sloboda, is to develop a system that understands the homeowner's needs: to save money, to be comfortable or both, then, over time, to control electricity use and provide that desired result to the homeowner.

"The problem here is that too many people see a smart home as technology for technology's sake," says Wesley Higbee, a software developer and consultant. "Then, it's just a lot of buzzwords, and the smart devices don't really make our lives easier."

Case in point: Home computers make our lives easier by allowing us to pay bills, talk to family through Skype or FaceTime, and send emails. But does a smart lightbulb, working by itself, do the same thing? Probably not, says Higbee, because it still has to be turned on and off like a regular lightbulb.

This is the reason, say several experts, that coordinating smart devices through a hub seems to be the most likely future for the connected home.

"That's why it's not about a single device but about the idea of multiple devices working together to do something for you that is easier than you doing it yourself," says Walt Zerbe, senior director of technology and standards for the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association, a trade group for home technology and networking companies. "And that's the difference between smart and connected: It's that the devices are connected to each other and that you don't have to connect them yourself."

Even though this concept is practical, it still may sound far-fetched. But go back to the home computer example. Who would have thought, even a few decades ago, that you would be able to video chat with someone thousands of miles away without a telephone or expensive camera?

Consumer awareness is the only thing in the way, says Johan Fagerberg, CEO of Berg Insight, which tracks connected home technology.

"The consumer awareness barrier is, however, gradually being overcome," he says. "Smart home solutions are becoming more common on the market, and smart home solution vendors are investing substantial resources in marketing to raise awareness and educate consumers about the benefits of these solutions. In addition, many smart home ecosystems are underdeveloped, and products are often complicated to use. More devices that work with each other and that have well-implemented user interfaces are needed in order to accelerate the market. Smart home devices must be easy to set up and use."

## Security Matters

Any time Wi-Fi is involved, security matters. One key to security success, Zerbe says, is to use a password to protect your network, and update your software and hardware regularly. In addition, understand that most connected devices aren't made to last; rather, like cell-phones, they have a relatively short shelf life and need to be replaced as the technology they use becomes more sophisticated. Older software and hardware are more prone to flaws.

One connected home scenario depends on geofencing, which uses GPS technology to create a virtual geographic boundary around your house. When a connected device in your car senses you've crossed the geofence, for example, it transmits the signal to open the garage door. The rest follows, based on how you use your hub to set up your interconnected devices. Of course, you can program the devices to do the reverse when the garage door closes: The lights go off, the blinds close, the thermostat moves higher and the camera follows the dog into the bedroom, where he flops on the bed and goes to sleep.

Duane Paulson, a vice president at Fing, where he helps clients incorporate the firm's connectivity platform into security and home-automation systems, says the future is here. The first two choices—about cost and how extensively consumers want to improve device connectivity in their homes—are straightforward. The third choice is more complicated: Is the connected home a do-it-yourself project, or should someone be hired to assemble the package?

"I always compare it to cutting my grass," he says with a laugh. "I know how to cut my grass. But I don't want to do it. It's the same here. I can install a couple of devices and set up a hub, but do I want to spend the time? Do I want to Google something when I can't get it to work or to wait on hold with customer support?"

Because, in the end, the connected home is about making our lives easier.

Learn more about writer **Jeff Siegel** at [winecurmudgeon.com](http://winecurmudgeon.com).

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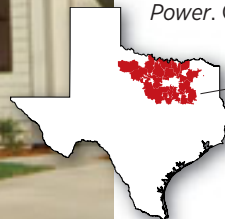
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In Central Texas, rolling homes and the parks where they

# HOME WITH A Changing

Story by Sharon Jayson  
Photos by Sarah Beal

**W**hen he's on the road again, Willie Nelson has plenty of company. The music legend has spent many nights sleeping in the most famous Texas luxury home on wheels, but now he's joined by a rapidly growing number of younger people who like to roam.

Central Texas, in particular, is a magnet for the moveable set. The number and size of RV campgrounds has grown, and more are opening to meet the demands of those who like to sleep behind — or on top of — the wheel.

"We have more activity than any other state in terms of new parks," said Brian Schaeffer, president of the Texas Association of Campground Owners. Texas has more RV retail registrations than any other state, with almost 42,000 in 2017.

The Lone Star State has led the nation in RV owners since 2010, when it overtook California, according to Statistical Surveys, a company in Grand Rapids, Mich., which tracks national retail sales.

At the state group's convention in April, Schaeffer said they estimate there are 550 to 600 RV parks in Texas today, and one-quarter of them are in Central Texas.

Just as the demographics of those enjoying RVs shift and grow, the RV park scene is changing, too. The Bluebonnet Electric

Cooperative service area, which covers all or part of 14 Central Texas counties, is at the heart of the boom. New parks have recently opened, and others are under construction or about to break ground. They include Pinewood RV Park in Smithville, which opened in February, and Sunny Oaks RV Park in Bastrop, which opened in mid-March. Construction is scheduled to begin in July on Thousand Oaks RV Park in Paige, which is expected to open in fall 2019.

While the number of RV campers in Central Texas has grown, visits to South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley have decreased, Schaeffer said. The latter have long been winter destinations for older RV-driving retirees — "winter Texans" or "snowbirds" — from colder Northern states.

"In the days of old, traditionalists went back to the Valley and they were their own entertainment," Schaeffer said. "Now, the demographic is more interested in being entertained and finding things to see and do."

Today's RV buyers have a more active lifestyle, and their vehicles are increasingly designed for those uses. "They want to take the hunting trip or take their motorcycles or ATVs with them," said Kevin Broom of the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association.

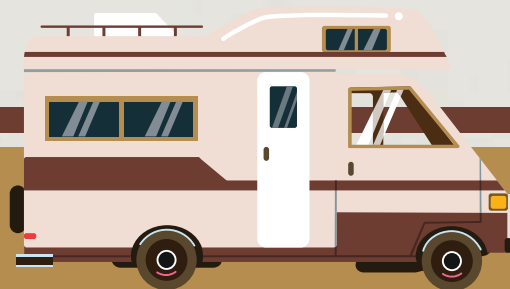
Continued on page 20

The sun sets on a beautiful spring day at the Bastrop RV Park, left. Texas has more RV owners than any other state, and new owners are shifting their destinations, from the traditional Rio Grande Valley region to Central Texas. *Photo courtesy Barb Pape*



stay are growing in record numbers

# ing View



Bluebonnet



## Blind Salamander RV Park

2025 N. Old Bastrop Hwy.  
San Marcos

[blindsalamanderrvpark.com](http://blindsalamanderrvpark.com)

**OWNERS:** Alan and Jennifer Cummings

**SPACES:** 40 **SITE SPECS:** 10 acres

**HISTORY:** The site had been farmland with a few small homes before the RV park was constructed. Alan Cummings' parents bought the property in 1993, and he and Jennifer bought it from his parents in 2003. It opened in 2009.

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** Easy access to the San Marcos River; near Texas State University

**FROM A RESIDENT:** "This is by far the cheapest way to live by yourself," says park resident Mason Moore, a student at Texas State University, at left, with his dog, Waylon.

**FROM THE OWNERS:** "The other RV parks around us seemed to be full. It seemed like something that would work. We've got a few construction folks and quite a few retired people. Maybe 20-25 percent would be students. Most are long-term stay," says owner Alan Cummings, below, left, with caretaker Eddie Galindo.



## Lake Falling Star RV Resort

7355 FM 713

Dale

[lakefallingstarrvresort.com](http://lakefallingstarrvresort.com)

**OWNERS:** Kelly and Walter Stephens

**SPACES:** 50

**SITE SPECS:** 64 acres (including Tinney Lake)

**HISTORY:** The owners bought Tinney Lake and surrounding land, then started buying the surrounding lots. They opened the RV park in 2006.

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** In addition to outdoor activities at Tinney Lake, there's a swimming pool and laundry for guests. The clubhouse provides a spot for social gatherings, including scheduled potluck dinners, board games, crafting and quilting.

**FROM A RESIDENT:** "We both grew up accustomed to being mobile," said Rick Neff, at right with his wife, Julie, and their dog, Baby. The couple, right, hails from Eagle River, Alaska.

**FROM THE OWNERS:** "It used to be all retirees traveling," said Kelly Stephens, below. "We still have families camping on weekends. But now, we're seeing more and more people who are not retired that are living in the camper, fifth wheel or motor home as a lifestyle. Austin has gotten so expensive. I'm seeing a lot more families doing this full time. They're finding this lifestyle a bit cheaper than getting into a house and having to hook up the utilities. If they don't like something or get transferred, they can just pick up and move."



### Continued from page 18

Now, younger owners — including millennials with young families, and even college students — are getting into what's known in the industry as camping. Don't look for any tents, though. These new RV owners stay connected using smart technology 24/7, all while exploring new places and saving money. Workforce flexibility and a healthy economy make the open road even more alluring.

Younger buyers "like the independence and play whatever music they want and cook what they want," said Phil Elam, executive director of the Texas Recre-

ational Vehicle Association. "They have so many choices, they really have begun to value the RV industry as an option for their entertainment dollar."

Proximity to Austin and surrounding areas is part of the appeal of Central Texas.

Another sizable segment of RV owners wants to downsize, be minimalist or simply save money. They are putting down roots and turning their rolling homes into permanent residences. Temporary workers make up another demographic. Oil field workers, nurses or educators, for example, may stay in the area for a few months or a year.

Rick and Julie Neff of Alaska enjoy



## Pleasant Grove RV Park

568 Pleasant Grove Road  
Elgin

[elginrvpark.com](http://elginrvpark.com)

**OWNERS:** Dorothy Smith (formerly with late husband Charley Smith)

**SPACES:** 35 **SITE SPECS:** 21 acres

**HISTORY:** Dorothy and Charley Smith bought the land in the early 1980s and decided to build on it as a sideline business. He worked for Southwestern Bell and she owned a women's boutique.

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** A family-owned and operated RV park since 1984; located in a pecan orchard with more than 200 pecan trees.

**FROM A RESIDENT:** Ken and Debbie Heneise, left, have lived in an RV for 6 years and in Pecan Grove for 2½ years. "Oftentimes we put so much value in our possessions," Ken said. "But we've learned that when you let go of your 'things,' you begin to find the deeper value of life's experiences." What does he miss most after downsizing? His collection of books, he said. For Debbie, the hardest thing was living without pets, she said. But cats, like Boots, often just show up and join the family, she said.

**FROM THE OWNERS:** "In 1984, we decided to try something. We advertised three cabins and cooking facilities and not much of anything else. We sort of felt our way. Eventually, those three cabins we built ended up in storage. We never really intended to have more than probably 12-15 spaces, but as the demand grew, we grew with it," said Dorothy Smith, above right, and her daughter, Kathy Cannon, with dog Brownie. Cannon runs the business.

staying in Caldwell County at the Lake Falling Star RV Resort in Dale. It's home base for their 44-foot Charleston, a luxury motor home they bought new in 2016.

The Neffs say wanderlust inspires them to follow NASCAR races around the country in their RV, even though they still own a 2,600-square-foot home in the community of Eagle River near Anchorage. "We both grew up accustomed to being mobile," said Rick Neff, who has five sisters in the Bastrop and Smithville area.

Rick Neff has retired twice: in 1994 from the U.S. Air Force, where he worked as a radar technician, and again in 2015, from the Federal Aviation Administration, where he was a maintenance supervisor.

The Neffs' impressive motor home features a master bedroom with a king-size

bed, two bathrooms, five televisions, a washer and dryer, dishwasher, convection oven, standard size refrigerator, electric fireplace and an outdoor chest freezer.

Recreational vehicles are also an alternative to in-demand and high-priced student apartments in San Marcos and surrounding areas. Mason Moore, a sophomore at Austin Community College's campus in Hays County, just north of San Marcos, bought a 27-foot camper trailer and has lived at the Blind Salamander RV Park in San Marcos for more than two years.

"Moneywise, this is a good option," he said. "I didn't really want to live with anybody. This is by far the cheapest way to live by yourself."

Just as there is a wide variety of RV owners, there is an equal variety of vehicles, in

all sizes, styles and prices.

"Buyers are looking for something that feels like home. They want space, and they want it to look nice," said Paul Krauss, sales manager at Crestview RV on Interstate 35 in Buda, south of Austin. Krauss has been selling RVs for 15 years, and the dealership in Buda has been in business for more than 30 years, he said.

Krauss said the most popular RVs are "bunkhouse travel trailers" that don't require a truck and have bunk beds to sleep kids.

Recreational vehicles overall "have a more residential look — better cabinets, better countertops, nicer sinks," he said. "They're looking more and more like a home every day."

Continued on next page

## Thousand Oaks RV Park (under construction)

U.S. 290 at FM 2104  
Paige

**OWNER:** Bailey Elliott

**SPACES:** 91

**SITE SPECS:** 11 acres

**HISTORY:** Elliott bought the property in March 2017 to develop into an RV park. Construction is planned to begin in July and he expects the park to open in fall 2019.

**WHAT WILL MAKE IT SPECIAL:** The heavily wooded site will have paved roads with lighting. The park will have a pool, hot tub and barbecue area, as well as a general store, a propane station and a 3,000-square-foot pavilion for gatherings, Elliott said.

**FROM THE OWNER:** "I've got an RV and I love the parks," said Elliott, right. "Look around Central Texas. All the ones I went to were virtually full, which told me there's a need for more parks that are nice and a little higher quality."



## Pinewood RV Park

1256 W. Texas 71  
Smithville

**pinewoodrv.com**

**OWNERS:** Cody and Stacy Mauck are co-owners with family members Cammey and Clinton Burns

**SPACES:** 60

**SITE SPECS:** 10 acres

**HISTORY:** The owners bought the former Toad Hollow RV Park and closed it in January 2017. Since then, they constructed a new RV park and opened in February under the new name.

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

Although it was previously an RV park, the owners did a "total overhaul" and took more than a year to construct it.

**FROM THE OWNERS:** "It's a different way of life — almost like this minimalism that's big in Austin. This is another step in that direction," Cody Mauck said.

## Sunny Oaks RV Park

744 Texas 95 North  
Bastrop

**sunnyoaksvpark.com**

**OWNERS:** Dusty Farrell, in a limited partnership with his brother, David Farrell **SPACES:** 60 **SITE SPECS:** 8 acres

**HISTORY:** The owners bought the property in 2003 and built a rental house there. Construction on the RV park began in mid-2017. Today, the office building for Sunny Oaks sits on land once occupied by a fireworks store.

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** It's the first RV park the Farrell brothers have owned, but they've studied the business a long time.

**FROM THE OWNERS:** "An RV park is much simpler than residential duplexes and houses because there are hardly any structures to maintain. It's a lot simpler because the tenants are mobile," Dusty Farrell said.

### Continued from previous page

Customers come to this showroom from across the state, but most live within a 50-mile radius, which includes a large swath of Bluebonnet's service area.

Krauss said prices range from about \$11,900 for a small trailer to well over \$300,000 for a top-of-the-line motor home that could include theater seating with heated seats.

While most of this area's RV parks are independently owned and operated, corporate park ownership is becoming more common across the country, said Schaeffer of the Texas campground owners' group.

"In the last 10 years, these entities have bought up a bunch of properties in Texas," he said. "The larger (the parks) are, in terms of number of sites or the revenue they generate, the more they're acquired by corporate entities. This corporate trend is national but probably hits the Sunbelt states more."

Kampgrounds of America has more than 500 campgrounds in North America. "We're a major player in Texas," spokesman Mike Gast said. "In our directory, we list 24 locations in Texas alone. It's on par with California, which has 31 and Florida with 21."

In private RV parks in Texas, daily or weekly guests typically pay an all-inclusive

fee for a site and hookups to electricity, sewage, water and cable TV. Those who stay a month or longer are considered extended-stay guests and typically pay a much lower site fee, but are often charged for the electricity they use. Many, but not all, RV parks have sub-metered sites, so guests pay for their power use along with a fee to the RV park for making power available, Schaeffer said.

For example, the daily rate at Sunny Oaks, with all utilities and cable included, is \$28 or \$30 (depending upon the type of space needed). The weekly rate includes the same options for \$175 or \$200. Monthly rates are \$375 or \$400, but electricity is charged separately (including a



## Bastrop RV Park

689 Texas 71  
Bastrop

[rvtexas.net](http://rvtexas.net)

**OWNERS:** Barb and Paul Pape (who is also Bastrop County Judge)

**SPACES:** 120

**SITE SPECS:** 25 acres, including 8-10 acres serving as pasture for animals

**HISTORY:** The Papes bought an RV and mobile home park in 1984 called By the Way Campground, which was about half the size of the current site. The owners changed the name in the early 1990s.

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** The RV Park is the permanent home for a group of widows and widowers.

**FROM A RESIDENT:** "We get together. We have cookouts. We go out to eat once a week. And if anybody needs anything, we help each other. I really like it," said Carolyn Norman, at left.

**FROM THE OWNERS:** "They will get together and have cookouts at their RV sites. They look out for each other. They walk each other's dogs. This is a community and this is their home," said Barb Pape, below.

\$150 power deposit).

At Bastrop RV Park, just west of Bastrop on Texas 71, sites aren't metered and guests pay a flat rate for electricity (based on their vehicle's amperage). The Bastrop park's daily rate is \$37, including all utilities and cable. The weekly rate is \$160 or \$180, and long-term guests pay either \$460 or \$500 a month.

Along with the newer, more mobile RV travelers, many RV parks in the Bluebonnet area are the permanent home for some, including older adults.

Carolyn Norman has lived at Bastrop RV Park for six years. Originally from West Texas, she moved to the area in 2007 to be near family after her husband died. She bought her 29-foot trailer last year, but she has owned others.

"Overall, RV living, to me, is just

what I needed," Norman said. "I wanted something small and where I could see (from) one end to the other. I had been married 52 years, and I hadn't been alone, and I didn't want to be by myself."

Her "neighborhood" at the RV park has several older adults who socialize often, including Sunday breakfasts.

"My son's here if I need anything," she said. "But my neighbors, they are so wonderful to me. We get together. We have cookouts. We go out to eat once a week. And if anybody needs anything, we help each other. I really like it." ■

For information about RV campgrounds in Texas, go to the Texas Association of Campground Owners, [texascampgrounds.com](http://texascampgrounds.com), and the Texas Recreational Vehicle Association, [trva.org](http://trva.org).



SHOWCASING THEIR SKILLS

# Linemen, apprentices set to compete in July rodeo

A team of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative line workers — journeymen and apprentices — will once again compete against their peers from across Texas in the 22nd annual Texas Lineman’s Rodeo on July 21 at Nolte Island Park near Seguin. The linemen will compete in a variety of timed events that mirror much of the work they do daily: climbing poles, repairing power lines and working on equipment. There is even an event involving a pole-top rescue of a mannequin the size and weight of an injured lineman.

Apprentices also take a written test, and there’s a competitive barbecue cook-off.

Bluebonnet plans to send one journeyman lineman team, eight apprentices, six judges, one barbecue team and numerous other volunteers. The competition takes place in a Guadalupe River-bottom field studded with non-energized utility poles.

The public is welcome to attend. Come cheer on Bluebonnet’s teams in person or keep track of their progress via Bluebonnet’s social media coverage throughout that day. For more information, visit [tla.org](http://tla.org).



Bluebonnet sends competitors every year to the Texas Lineman’s Rodeo, scheduled this year for July 21. *Joe Stafford photo*

## Do hazards lurk in your laundry room?

When you think about laundry accidents, you’re likely to picture a stubborn stain. But real hazards lurk in your laundry room.

### WATER HAZARDS

- We all know water and electricity don’t mix, so outlets in your laundry room should have ground-fault circuit interrupters. If your home doesn’t have these, have an electrician install them. Also, inspect hoses for cracks and replace them at the first sign of wear.
- Be sure to clean any spills quickly. Liquid laundry detergent and other cleaning fluids can be slippery. Don’t store cleaning products on top of the washer or dryer because vibrations can cause them to fall from shelves.

### DRYERS

- The most important safety step in operating a dryer is to remove lint from the filter after every use and periodically inspect the outside vent to ensure it is clear of lint and other debris. Never operate the dryer without a lint filter. More than 20,000 house fires each year are caused by clothes dryers, most commonly due to lint buildup.
- Use rigid or flexible metal venting material to help maintain proper airflow and drying times. Plug the dryer directly into a safe wall outlet — do not use extension cords or adapters.

### KEEP KIDS (AND PETS!) SAFE

- Big machines, colorful detergent bottles and detergent pods that look like candy can be attractive to kids. Keep laundry products out of their reach. Close the laundry detergent container immediately after each use and put it away. In 2015, laundry packets were the third most common cause of unintentional poisoning in children under 5. Keep your pets safe, too — dryer sheets can be toxic to them.



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Magazine questions? Contact Lisa Ogle at **512-332-7968** or email [lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop).

### BOARD MEETING

Bluebonnet’s Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. June 19 at Bluebonnet’s Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave. (formerly 650 Texas Hwy. 21 East), Bastrop.



# Bracewell brings legacy of family business to co-op's Board

By Melissa Segrest

**T**exas barbecue pro and civic leader Bryan Bracewell is the newest member of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board of Directors. He joined the board in May as one of the District 3, Bastrop County, directors, replacing James Kershaw, who retired after 36 years of service.

Bracewell brings a legacy of his own to the position. He is the third generation of Bracewells to own Southside Market & Barbeque, a business founded in downtown Elgin in 1882 and renowned as the birthplace of Elgin hot sausage. His grandfather, Ernest Bracewell, bought the business in 1968 and relocated it to what is now U.S. 290. That original hot sausage is still on the menu.

A 350-seat Southside location opened in Bastrop on Texas 71 in 2014, and a new Hutto location is expected to open in the spring of 2019, Bryan Bracewell said. Southside distributes sausage to all major grocers in the Austin area, to H-E-Bs in Central and North Texas, and to Walmart, which sells the sausage in Texas and four other states. Bracewell started working at Southside at age 12, like his father, Ernest Bracewell, Jr.

Bryan Bracewell grew up in Elgin. After graduating from Texas A&M University in 1998 with a degree in food science and technology, he returned to work alongside his grandfather and father until 2010, when he took the reins of the business. "I had a strong desire to grow the business and keep us on that growth path," he said. Today, Southside has more than 140 employees.

Bracewell's business philosophies are straightforward. "We aspire to be servant leaders. Our mission is to enrich the lives of the people we encounter daily. Sausage and barbecue are the details of what we do, but at the end of the day, it's really all about people. We add value by serving others.... People do business with people, not with places."

He is active in Elgin and Bastrop commu-



**Bryan Bracewell joined Bluebonnet's Board of Directors in May to represent District 3, Bastrop County. He is the third-generation owner of Southside Market & Barbeque. Behind him is the Elgin Chamber of Commerce building. Sarah Beal photo**

nity organizations. He is on the Elgin Chamber of Commerce's board of directors and executive committee, and he has twice been the chamber's chairman. Bracewell is on the boards of the Elgin Economic Development Corporation, the Bastrop Central Appraisal District and the Bastrop-based nonprofit, Feed the Need Missions. He also serves on the First National Bank of Bastrop's Elgin Community Advisory Board and served on the Central Texas Food Bank's board of directors.

Bluebonnet has experienced rapid growth on the western side of the service area, and Bracewell sees growth pushing into Elgin. That growth presents the city with opportunities and challenges. "Other communities in our service area have gone through it. It's Elgin's turn," he said. "As Austin grows and prices itself out of the range of a lot of families, then Elgin is an attractive option."

Elgin's downtown has flourished in the last few years, and that helps preserve the city's culture and history. "If we embrace growth and do it in a proper way, Elgin can

grow in an intentional and productive manner," Bracewell said.

Joining the Bluebonnet Electric board is an honor, Bracewell said. "I'm looking forward to the challenge of learning the business of Bluebonnet and the industry. Bluebonnet is held in such high esteem in its service area," he said. "It's a privilege to be selected for the board. It's also humbling and intimidating. It's a big job. I don't take that lightly."

Bracewell and his wife, Rachel, who is a part of the marketing team at Southside were high school sweethearts. They married in 1998, and live in downtown Bastrop. They have twin sons, Chase and Nathan.

When Bracewell isn't at work or taking on a community project, he and Rachel are involved in their sons' sports activities. But when there's a chance to get away, they opt for the outdoors: camping, hunting, fishing and hiking.

And, just like their father and grandfather, his sons work at Southside today at age 12. "They clean tables and wash dishes, just like I did," Bracewell said. ■

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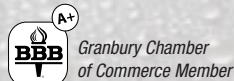


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# Bear Dogs of El Paso

Extinct ancestor of modern dogs once roamed Texas

BY MARTHA DEERINGER

OF THE PREHISTORIC CREATURES THAT once roamed the land now defined as Texas, one that might seem suited for modern times is the bear dog. These ancient mammals, ancestral to both bears and dogs, colonized Texas during the Eocene Epoch, 56 million–33.9 million years ago.

“The extinct family Amphicyonidae, commonly called bear dogs, represents a major group of carnivores with a rich evolutionary history of more than 30 million years, extending from the Middle Eocene to the Late Miocene,” write Susumu Tomiya, a vertebrate paleontologist at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and Jack Tseng, an anatomist at the University at Buffalo. “During the course of their evolution, bear dogs spread to all northern continents as well as Africa and included not only bear-like forms but also small fox-sized animals and wolf-like pursuit animals.”

Although Tomiya came across an odd fossil in a dusty drawer in Chicago’s Field Museum, the Chihuahua-sized jaw had been unearthed near El Paso in 1966. Nobody was sure what it was, so Tomiya and Tseng decided to take a closer look.

“The teeth reminded me of some of the later and much larger carnivores known as bear dogs,” Tomiya said. The best-known types of bear dogs were as big as modern-day brown bears, however the Texas variety was diminutive by comparison. To be certain of the identity of the skull, Tomiya and Tseng studied a micro-CT scan of the rock-encrusted fossil, which they used to create 3D reconstructions of the skulls.

“These scans,” Tseng explained, “helped to unlock important anatomical features on the inside of the specimens, and that information allowed us to determine the true identity of these very old fossil skulls



as amphicyonids.”

“What’s remarkable about this discovery,” Tomiya added, “is that it gives us a new understanding of where these incredibly successful hunters evolved.” Earlier research suggested that bear dogs crossed from Eurasia into North America, but the newer study, which also compared the fossils to similar discoveries housed at the University of Texas, suggests that the bear dog could have arisen first in North America. It also pinpoints Southwest Texas as a key location for this incredibly successful group of predators.

Bear dogs were ferocious hunters with huge jaws and crushing teeth. The enormous bear dogs of the Miocene may have resembled modern bears, but the Texas variety, which date to much earlier, looked more like tiny dogs or foxes. Unlike dogs, however, they had a heavier build and walked with their feet flat on the ground (like bears) instead of off the ground with the foot bone serving as an extension of the legs as is the case with modern dogs.

Tomiya estimates that the Texas bear dogs may have weighed about 5 pounds and had molars that allowed it to feast on small mammals, fruit and insects much

as foxes do today.

“Bear dogs and true dogs shared a common ancestor,” Tseng pointed out, “but there is little evidence that true dogs are direct descendants of bear dogs.” At some point, the family Amphicyonidae was gradually displaced by more modern forms of bears and dogs, which were better adapted to compete.

Although bear dogs roamed Texas for more than 30 million years, increasing aridity and changing landscapes made hunting tougher. Early forms of pack-hunting wolves and dogs likely outmaneuvered bear dogs.

“Bear dogs happen to be extinct today,” Tomiya reported, “but their history is relevant to understanding where living bears and dogs come from and how their diversity has been shaped over millions of years while they coexisted.”

“In a way, bear dogs were variants of nature’s evolutionary experiments on the predatory lifestyle,” Tseng added, “making them helpful in putting modern predator adaptations into context.”

**Martha Deeringer**, a member of Heart of Texas EC, lives near McGregor. Her new book, *Elephant Dreams*, is available online.

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## Your Best Grilled Cheese

WARM, GOOEY CHEESE BETWEEN crisp, buttery bread—aka grilled cheese—is the ultimate comfort food. This month, readers shared their favorites, including a sumptuous peppered bacon and fig jam combo, and a French knife-and-fork sandwich known as a *croque monsieur*. I love this recipe from *Grilled Cheese Kitchen* by Heidi Gibson, the winner of seven grilled cheese championships and co-owner of American Grilled Cheese Kitchen in San Francisco. The Hawaiian is inspired by the classic pizza: a combination of gooey mozzarella, sweet-tart pineapple, savory ham and spicy tomato sauce. The sandwich “is one of our guilty pleasures,” Gibson writes. Aloha!

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

### Hawaiian Grilled Cheese

- 4 slices fresh pineapple (about ¼-inch thick), cored, or 4 slices canned pineapple rings, drained
  - 6–8 slices ripe plum tomato (about ¼-inch thick)
  - 1 tablespoon butter, softened
  - 4 slices Hawaiian bread (slightly sweet white bread) or artisan white bread
  - 4 slices fontina cheese
  - 4 ounces sliced ham
  - 3 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced
- Pinch red pepper flakes

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment or aluminum foil.
2. Arrange the pineapple and tomato slices on the baking sheet and bake for 12 minutes, or until the surfaces appear dry but not yet browned, turning the pieces over halfway through. Remove from the oven and set aside.
3. Heat a cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium-low heat.
4. Spread the butter on one side of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

# Recipes

## Your Best Grilled Cheese

### THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

SHANNON KELEHER | COSERV

Keleher has fond childhood memories of spending summers with her mom's parents, Nan and Granddad. "My sister and I had only ever had a regular grilled cheese until Nan introduced us to the *croque monsieur*, a recipe she learned when my grandfather was stationed overseas in the Army." French for "mister crunch," this luxurious sandwich is made with ham and cheese sauce and finished under the broiler to create a crispy browned crust. Serve it with tart pickles like cornichons and a green salad. To make this a *croque madame*, serve topped with a fried egg.

### Nan's Croque Monsieur

#### CHEESE SAUCE

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1½ cups milk, heated
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- Pinch nutmeg
- ½ cup grated Gruyère cheese

#### SANDWICHES

- 8 slices white sandwich bread, crusts removed, if desired
- Dijon mustard
- 8 ounces sliced Virginia ham
- 3½ cups grated Gruyère cheese

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. CHEESE SAUCE: Melt the butter over

low heat and stir (or whisk) in the flour. Stir with a wooden spoon for 2–3 minutes. Pour in the warmed milk and stir constantly until the sauce thickens; remove from heat. Stir in the Parmesan, salt, pepper, nutmeg and ½ cup of Gruyère.

3. SANDWICHES: Lightly toast bread in the oven on a baking sheet for approximately 5 minutes on each side. Spread Dijon on one side of each piece of bread. Place slices of ham and a handful of Gruyère on four slices of bread, and top with remaining bread slices. Pour cheese sauce on top of each sandwich (using a knife to spread over top) and top with another handful of Gruyère. Bake sandwiches for approximately 5 minutes, until warmed through.

4. Broil until cheese sauce and cheese become brown and bubbly. Serve immediately. ▶ Makes 4 sandwiches.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

each bread slice, dividing it evenly. Place two slices, buttered-side down, on a clean cutting board. Layer two slices of the fontina, half of the ham, three or four slices of roasted tomato, two rings of roasted pineapple, and half of the mozzarella on top of each. Sprinkle with red pepper flakes. Finish with the remaining slices of bread, buttered-side up.

5. Using a wide spatula, place both sandwiches in the pan, cover, and cook until the bottoms are nicely browned, about 4 minutes. Turn and cook until the second sides are browned, the cheese is melted and the other ingredients are heated through, about 4 minutes longer.

6. Cut the sandwiches in half and serve immediately. ▶ Makes 2 sandwiches.

Reprinted from *Grilled Cheese Kitchen* (Chronicle Books, 2016)

### Grilled Goat Cheese and Asparagus Panini

KATHERINE TITTERINGTON | RUSK COUNTY EC

A combination of bright, tangy and savory flavors creates a satisfying sandwich. Coating the bread with onion-infused olive oil highlights and complements each ingredient. Feel free to use the thin, tender stems in addition to the asparagus tips (or slice thicker stems into ¼-inch diagonal slices).

- 1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 4–5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 bunch (about 1¼ cups) asparagus tips, fresh or frozen

#### Salt

- 6 ounces chèvre (soft goat cheese)
- 2 tablespoons buttermilk
- 8 thick slices Italian bread

1. Sauté the onion in 2–3 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until caramelized (about 10–12 minutes), then remove from heat. Add remaining olive oil to the pan and stir to infuse it with the onion flavor.

2. Meanwhile, blanch asparagus tips in salted water until just tender, 1–2 minutes. Drain in a colander, rinse with cold water then place them on a plate lined with paper towels to dry.

3. Using a fork, combine the chèvre and buttermilk until soft and smooth. Spread a thin layer of cheese on each slice of bread, then divide asparagus and onions



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evenly between four slices and top with remaining bread. Brush the remaining onion oil on the outside of the bread (adding more olive oil to pan if needed).

**4.** Grill the sandwiches on a panini press or with flat-sided waffle iron until cheese is melted and bread toasted.

► Makes 4 sandwiches.

**COOK'S TIP** For the best flavor, season the onions and asparagus with salt and pepper to taste before assembling sandwich. Consider adding chopped fresh basil, mint or parsley to the goat cheese spread, or adding a layer of olive purée (tapenade) or pickled hot peppers to the sandwich. If you don't have a panini press, cook the sandwiches in a cast-iron skillet, top them with a layer of parchment or aluminum foil then weigh them down with an additional skillet.

## Fig and Bacon Grilled Cheese

JENNIFER POMEROY | HAMILTON COUNTY EC

Fig jam delivers unexpected sweetness that plays beautifully against peppery bacon and the rich-

ness of Muenster and aged white cheddar. Feel free to use another type of jam, any style of bacon or a different bread. Preheating the skillet (preferably cast-iron) creates perfectly crisp results.

- 6 slices black pepper bacon
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter, softened
- 4 slices sourdough bread
- 2 teaspoons fig jam (or more as desired)
- 4 slices aged white cheddar cheese
- 4 slices Muenster cheese

**1.** Cook bacon as desired. (Pomeroy's preferred method is to bake in a 400-degree oven for 20–30 minutes.)

**2.** Butter both sides of bread and spread fig jam on one side of two slices. Place a slice of aged cheddar and Muenster on top of the jam, top with three strips of bacon and another slice of cheddar and Muenster.

**3.** Heat a skillet over medium-high heat. Cook the sandwiches on the preheated pan until both sides are golden brown. Slice in half, if desired, and serve warm.

► Makes 2 sandwiches.

## Build a Better Grilled Cheese

Technically, a grilled cheese sandwich requires nothing more than bread, cheese and butter. But mixing up the players and adding other ingredients adds delicious texture, surprising flavor and intrigue. Here are some fun ways to enliven a classic. —PD

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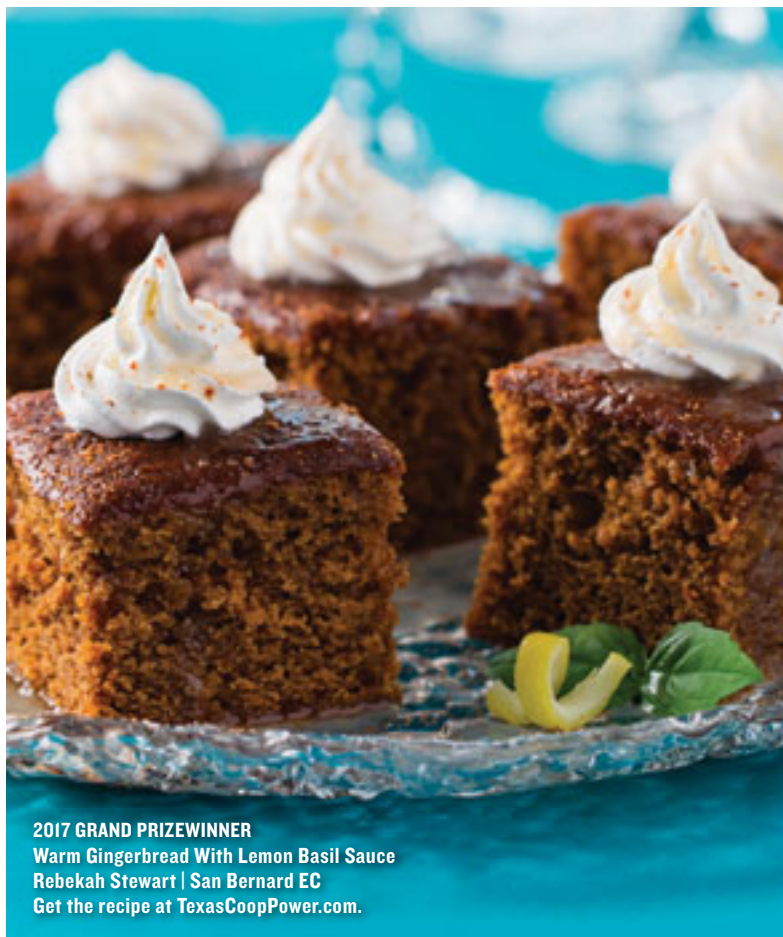
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Pickles  
Tomatoes  
Cucumbers  
Sautéed greens

### CONDIMENTS

Flavored mustards  
Olive or pepper purées  
Hot pepper jelly  
Fruit jams, jellies or marmalade



**2017 GRAND PRIZEWINNER**  
Warm Gingerbread With Lemon Basil Sauce  
Rebekah Stewart | San Bernard EC  
Get the recipe at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).

## 14TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY RECIPE CONTEST

# \$2,500 IN PRIZES

**\$1,000 GRAND PRIZEWINNER**

One \$500 Best Savory Winner  
One \$500 Best Sweet Winner  
Two \$250 Honorable Mention Winners

### Share your best original recipes!

Show us how you add your personal touch to every part of a meal—from savory beginnings to sweet endings—for fun and festive holiday gatherings.

Send us your best ORIGINAL holiday recipes—ones you've developed, not copied from a friend or found in a book or magazine. Winners will be featured in our November 2018 issue. Enter by June 8 at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).

Go to [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com) for details and official rules.

## TEXAS CO-OP POWER

**Deadline:  
JUNE 8**

Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com). Each entry MUST include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your Texas electric cooperative, or it will be disqualified. Specify which category you are entering, Sweet or Savory, on each recipe. Mail entries to: Texas Co-op Power/Holiday Recipe Contest, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You can also fax entries to (512) 763-3401. Up to three total entries are allowed per co-op membership. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper if mailed or faxed. Mailed entries all can be sent in one envelope. No email entries will be accepted. For official rules, visit [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com). **Entry deadline: June 8, 2018.**

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**1 TON CAPACITY FOLDABLE SHOP CRANE**

- Boom extends from 36-1/4" to 50-1/4"
- Crane height adjusts from 82" to 94"

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$999**

COMPARE TO **\$1799**

SAVE \$80

ITEM 69512/61858/69445 shown

21033613

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**PITTSBURGH** #1 SELLING JACKS IN AMERICA **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**RAPID PUMP® 3 TON STEEL HEAVY DUTY LOW PROFILE SERVICE JACK**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

- Weighs 73 lbs.

COMPARE TO **\$149.98**

SAVE \$69

**NOW \$79.99**

ITEM 62326/61282/61253 shown

21033838

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**FREE** WITH ANY PURCHASE

**PITTSBURGH** LIFETIME WARRANTY

**1" x 25 FT. TAPE MEASURE**

COMPARE TO **KOMELON \$6.98**

MODEL: L4253V

- Thumb Lock
- Rubber Wrapped Case

ITEM 69080/69030/69031 shown

21025150

Cannot be used with other discounts or prior purchases. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 10/7/18 while supplies last. Limit 1 FREE Gift per customer per day.

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**20% OFF**

ANY SINGLE ITEM\*

21012350

LIMIT 1 coupon per customer per day. Save 20% on any 1 item purchased. \*Cannot be used with other discount, coupon or any of the following items or brands: Inside Truck Club Membership, Extended Service Plan, gift cards, open box items, 2 Day Parking Lot State Items, compressors, floor jacks, cables, saw mills, storage cabinets, chests or carts, trailers, trenchers, welders, Kaminist, Ames, Blawie, Solera, Compro, Daykin, Eastwood, Flares, Hercules, Icon, Jipullez, Lytax, Pionair, Predator, Tanglefoot, Viking, Vulcan, Zurich. Not valid on prior purchases. Non-transferable. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 10/7/18.

**U.S. GENERAL** SERIES 2 **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**30", 4 DRAWER TECH CART**

- 12,600 cu. in. of storage
- 580 lb. capacity
- Heavy duty gas struts hold lid open at 90 degrees

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$999**

COMPARE TO **\$1499**

NEW

Side tray sold separately.

COMPARE TO **\$799.95**

SAVE \$699

ITEM 64096

21042995

LIMIT 2 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**PREDATOR** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**8750 MAX. STARTING/7000 RUNNING WATTS 13 HP (420 CC) GAS GENERATOR**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**SUPER QUIET**

ITEM 68530/63086/63085 shown

ITEM 68525/63087/63088, CALIFORNIA ONLY

- GFCI outlets

COMPARE TO **\$2,169**

SAVE \$216.9

**NOW \$1,952.99**

COMPARE TO **HONDA \$2,699**

MODEL: EM6800SKZCAT

Wheel kit and battery sold separately.

21043584

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**BADLAND** Battle Tested **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**2500 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH WIRELESS REMOTE CONTROL**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

- Weighs 14.3 lbs.
- 11-1/8" L x 4-1/2" H

**NOW \$499**

COMPARE TO **\$179.99**

SAVE \$130

**NOW \$69.99**

Voted Best Winches

ITEM 61840/61297/63476/61258 shown

21054874

LIMIT 2 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**CENTRAL PNEUMATIC** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**21 GALLON, 2.5 HP, 125 PSI VERTICAL OIL-LUBE AIR COMPRESSOR**

- Air delivery: 5.8 CFM @ 40 PSI, 4.7 CFM @ 90 PSI

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$149.99**

COMPARE TO **\$219**

SAVE \$69

ITEM 69091/61454

HUSKY MODEL: C201H 62803/63635/67847 shown

21056867

LIMIT 5\* - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**COBRA** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**8 CHANNEL SURVEILLANCE DVR WITH 4 HD CAMERAS AND MOBILE MONITORING CAPABILITIES**

- Night vision

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$229.99**

COMPARE TO **\$349.99**

SAVE \$120

**NOW \$269.99**

ITEM 63890

21067090

LIMIT 2 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**10" PNEUMATIC TIRE**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$3.99**

COMPARE TO **\$10**

SAVE 60%

**NOW \$5.99**

ITEM 69385/62388/62409

FARM & RANCH MODEL: FR1055 62698/30900 shown

21067181

LIMIT 6 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**PITTSBURGH** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**301 PIECE MASTER MECHANIC'S TOOL KIT**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

LIFETIME WARRANTY

SAE AND METRIC

**NOW \$159.99**

COMPARE TO **\$249.99**

SAVE \$90

**NOW \$199.99**

CLUTCH MODEL: 42994

ITEM 63457/69312/63464/45951 shown

21072773

LIMIT 2 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**HEAVY DUTY FOLDABLE ALUMINUM SPORTS CHAIR**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$19.99**

COMPARE TO **\$49.99**

SAVE 60%

**NOW \$29.99**

ITEM 62314/63066

COLEMAN MODEL: 200020293 66383 shown

21074623

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**WARRIOR** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**29 PIECE TITANIUM DRILL BIT SET**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$9.99**

COMPARE TO **\$60**

SAVE 83%

**NOW \$17.99**

ITEM 62281

DEWALT MODEL: DW1369 61637 shown

21082185

LIMIT 2 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**luminar** **OUTDOOR** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**24 FT., 18 BULB, 12 SOCKET OUTDOOR STRING LIGHTS**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$19.99**

COMPARE TO **\$39.98**

SAVE 50%

**NOW \$25.99**

ITEM 64486/63483 shown

PORTFOLIO MODEL: SLC12BK 21087844

LIMIT 6 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**HaulMaster** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**3/8" x 14 FT., GRADE 43 TOWING CHAIN**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

- 5400 lb. capacity

**NOW \$19.99**

COMPARE TO **\$64.99**

SAVE 69%

**NOW \$39.99**

ITEM 60658/97711 shown

MIBRO MODEL: 426920 21087859

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**Bunker Hill Security** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**60 LED SOLAR SECURITY LIGHT**

Includes 6V, 900 mAh NiCd battery pack.

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$29.99**

COMPARE TO **\$48.94**

SAVE 38%

**NOW \$39.99**

ITEM 62534

EATON MODEL: MSLED180W 69643 shown 21088780

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**PITTSBURGH** AUTOMOTIVE **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**ATV/LAWN MOWER LIFT**

- 300 lb. capacity
- Weighs 72.5 lbs.

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$79.99**

COMPARE TO **\$179.99**

SAVE \$100

ITEM 60395/62325

62493/61523 shown

21094386

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**HaulMaster** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**STEP STOOL/WORKING PLATFORM**

- 350 lb. capacity

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$199**

COMPARE TO **\$57.55**

SAVE 65%

**NOW \$29.99**

ITEM 62515/66911 shown

GPL MODEL: H-21 21097241

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**HARDY** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

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

- 5 mil thickness

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**12¢ PER PAIR**

**NOW \$5.99**

COMPARE TO **\$7.99**

SAVE 55%

ITEM 61363, 68497, 61360, 61359, 68498, 68496 shown

21169936

LIMIT 6 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

**CENTECH** **SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

**2/10/50 AMP, 12 VOLT BATTERY CHARGER/ENGINE STARTER**

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**NOW \$29.99**

COMPARE TO **\$69.99**

SAVE 57%

**NOW \$49.99**

ITEM 60581

SCHUMACHER ELECTRIC MODEL: SE-1250 60653 shown

21174063

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/7/18\*

\*Original coupon only. No use on prior purchases after 30 days from original purchase or without original receipt. Valid through 10/7/18.

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# Tractors

FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS, the agricultural community has implemented tractors in Texas, making them a beloved and iconic fixture in the landscape.

This month's photo entries were curated by Cedar Park High School student Cailin Sylvester, and the intro was written by Rouse High School student Nalani Nuylan. They participated in Leander Independent School District's Career Opportunities on Location Week at *Texas Co-op Power*.

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



▲ **M'LYNN JOHNSON**, Bryan Texas Utilities: Johnson's 3-year-old daughter, Quinn Grace Johnson, "loves the farm life. She is the future of agriculture."

▼ **LISA GRIFFIS**, Mid-South Synergy: "My neighbor has several bluebird boxes on his property. This male bluebird decided to catch a ride to deliver his takeout dinner."



▲ **MICHAEL MITCHELL**, J-A-C EC: Tractors in Munday

▶ **BILL GALLOWAY**, Pedernales EC: "Retired antique tractor fenced in by barbed wire and tasajillo, near Granite Shoals"



▲ **GENE DOMEK**, Jasper-Newton EC: Tractor hay rake in the back pasture after an early-morning snowfall in Southeast Texas last December

## UPCOMING CONTESTS

OCTOBER	CLOCKS	DUE JUNE 10
NOVEMBER	ABANDONED BUILDINGS	DUE JULY 10
DECEMBER	HIGH CONTRAST	DUE AUGUST 10

All entries must include name, address, daytime phone and co-op affiliation, plus the contest topic and a brief description of your photo.

**ONLINE:** Submit highest-resolution digital images at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests). **MAIL:** Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We do not accept entries via email. We regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.



## Pick of the Month Kosse Homecoming

**Kosse** June 8-9  
(254) 375-2212, [kossetexas.com/homecoming](http://kossetexas.com/homecoming)

Homecoming weekend has been the signature fundraising event in this North Central Texas town every year since the 1920s. Proceeds support the Kosse Community Center, the Kosse Heritage Society, the Kosse Volunteer Fire Department and community projects. Festivities include a barbecue cook-off, parade, kids events and music both nights.

KOSSE: COURTESY KOSSE HOMECOMING COMMITTEE. PIE: ELENATHEWISE | DREAMSTIME.COM. FIREWORKS: MARILYNGOULD | DREAMSTIME.COM

## June 8

**Abilene** [8-9] Stars Over Abilene Regional Quilt Show, (325) 733-3935, [facebook.com/abilenequiltersguild](https://facebook.com/abilenequiltersguild)

**Burnet** [8-9] Burnet County Area Fair, (512) 355-2633, [burnetcountyfair.com](http://burnetcountyfair.com)

**Nacogdoches** [8-9] Blueberry Festival of Quilts, (936) 615-0095, [nacquilters.org/blueberry-festival-of-quilts](http://nacquilters.org/blueberry-festival-of-quilts)

**Salado** [8-10] Texas History Days, (254) 466-9065, [texashistorysalado.com](http://texashistorysalado.com)

**Ingram** [8-9, 15-16, 22-23] *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, (830) 367-5121, [hcaf.com](http://hcaf.com)

## 9

**Athens** Glow Run, (903) 675-5630, [easttexasarboretum.org](http://easttexasarboretum.org)

**East Bernard** Kolache-Klobase Festival, (979) 335-7907, [kkfest.com](http://kkfest.com)

**Jacksonville** Tomato Fest, (903) 586-2217, [jacksonvilletexas.com](http://jacksonvilletexas.com)

**San Marcos Texas Water Safari**, (512) 738-6607, [texaswatersafari.org](http://texaswatersafari.org)

**Greenville** [9-10] Cotton Boll ArtFest, (903) 450-4502, [amacmuseum.com](http://amacmuseum.com)

## 15

**Cisco** [15-16] TX Pie Fest, (254) 442-2259, [ciscotxpiefest.com](http://ciscotxpiefest.com)



June 15  
Cisco  
TX Pie Fest

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**Stonewall** [15-16] Peach JAMboree and Rodeo, (830) 644-2735, stonewalltexas.com

## 16

**El Paso** Magoffin Home Victorian Sci-Fi Book and Tea Club, (915) 533-5147, thc.texas.gov

**Saint Jo** Real Cowboy Symposium: From Drover to Ranch Hand, (940) 995-2786, therealcowboysymposium.com

**Terrell** Barn Open House, (214) 244-6139, awalkinghorseranch.com

**Victoria** Hwy 87 Trade Days, (361) 576-9899, hwy87tradedays.com

## 17

**Palestine** Throw Papa on the Train, (855) 632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

## 21

**Levelland** [21-23] Golden Spread Classic Steer and Heifer Show, (806) 894-4161, malleventcenter.com

**Bastrop** [22-24] Department of Texas Marine Corps League Annual Convention, (512) 965-6176, lpl1384.org

**Luling** [21-24] Watermelon Thump, (830) 875-3214, watermelonthump.com



July 4  
Columbus  
Fourth of July  
Celebration

## 22

**Conroe** [22-23] Bloomin' Crazy For Quilts, (832) 687-4662, waqg.org

**Giddings** [22-23] Happy Hearts Quilt Show, (979) 249-6755

## 23

**Boerne** Chili on the Guadalupe, (210) 274-4952, centraltexaschili.com

**Luckenbach Hill Country Food Truck Festival**, (830) 997-3224, luckenbachtexas.com

**Meridian NCBC & Chamber of Commerce Catfish Dinner**, (254) 435-2966, meridian-chamber.com

## July

### 3

**Granbury** [3-4] Old-Fashioned 4th of July Celebration, (817) 573-1622, granburychamber.com

### 4

**Columbus** Fourth of July Celebration, (979) 732-8385, columbus.texas.org

**Kyle** Independence Day Celebration Fireworks Show, (512) 262-3939, cityofkyle.com/recreation

**Little Elm** July Jubilee, (972) 731-1468, lakefrontlittleelm.com

## Submit Your Event!

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

**GET AWAY TO Frisco**

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# Happy in Hico

Hints of history and legend pepper modern life in northern Hill Country town

BY GENE FOWLER

WHO AMONG US WOULD NOT WISH TO dwell “Where Everybody is Somebody?” That’s the happy motto of Hico, a gem of a town southwest of Fort Worth. In the mid-20th century, one old-timer there was *really* somebody. Brushy Bill Roberts, folks say, was actually a still-living Billy the Kid.

History contends that Pat Garrett dispatched the Kid to the Everlasting in 1881. But at Hico’s *Billy the Kid Museum*, you get the whole nine-lives yarn on how Billy escaped and rode with Buffalo Bill and Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders.

Photographs of old Hico (pronounced HIGH-co) recall the days when it served as a cotton-ginning center. Resident historian Jane Klein says the town had several thousand residents in the early 1900s. “But then we had the boll weevil, a bad flood and finally the stock market crash,” she explains.

More vintage Hico images are displayed in the renovated *Midland Hotel*, which dates to 1896; in comfort-food diner *Koffee Kup Family Restaurant*, where “pie fixes everything”; and at *Blue Star Trading*, a sprawling furnishings store, art gallery and ranch outfitter.

Photographer Rufus Frank Wiseman came to Hico in 1886 and documented local life for decades, selling his photography business before his death in 1954. The new owner loaded up Wiseman’s archive and took it to the dump. Hico native James Hefner, who had worked for Wiseman as a boy, was able to rescue the archive.

Kevin and LaDonne Wenzel keep the photographer’s name alive today with *Wiseman House Chocolates*. The couple’s retail store, located in the home built by the lensman in 1903, sells handmade chocolate treats that, as their website states, offer “the same richness and flavor that inspired



the Ancient Mayans to revere chocolate as the nectar of the gods.”

The Wiseman re-tail outlet occupies a historic house adjacent to the Koffee Kup, but the company makes its toffees, truffles, mocha crunches and pecan-caramel clusters in a Pecan Street storefront.

A stroll along Pecan leads to unique shopping and cultural experiences. I’m a softie for ghost signs, both restored and faded, and Hico has several of the bygone exterior wall graphics. A Star Tobacco advertisement adorns the side of Blue Star Trading. Others include murals for Bright and Early Coffee and Tea and Eveready Radio Batteries.

At *Flacas Fitness & Brews*, health-conscious visitors can wolf down salads, sandwiches and wraps then work off the calories with kickboxing and yoga. A bit south of downtown, you can get a workout ascending the innards of a former grain silo at *Siloville Climbing Gym*.

Kevin and Holly Stahnke escaped from Austin to bring “ag tourism” to Hico. Their *Two Clay Birds Farm & Garden Market* on U.S. Highway 281 offers organic produce from

**Downtown buildings feature weathered advertising murals known as ghost signs.**

their small farm as well as from other area growers.

“The soil here is Bosque clay loam,”

Holly Stahnke explains. “My brother, who is with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, just touched it and said, ‘Yes, buy that land!’ ”

Bridging Hico’s past and future, the Stahnkes bought a 100-year-old house that old-timers say was built on top of the town’s former railroad scales.

In the storied tradition of Brushy Bill, it’s not too hard to imagine another ancient resident whispering that he’s a still-living half of the notorious Bonnie and Clyde. Though the Hico Barrows were not among his kin, local lore holds that bank-robbing Clyde would visit them, hiding in furniture store caskets when he feared the law was wise.

Gene Fowler is an Austin writer who specializes in history.

 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see more photos from Hico.



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