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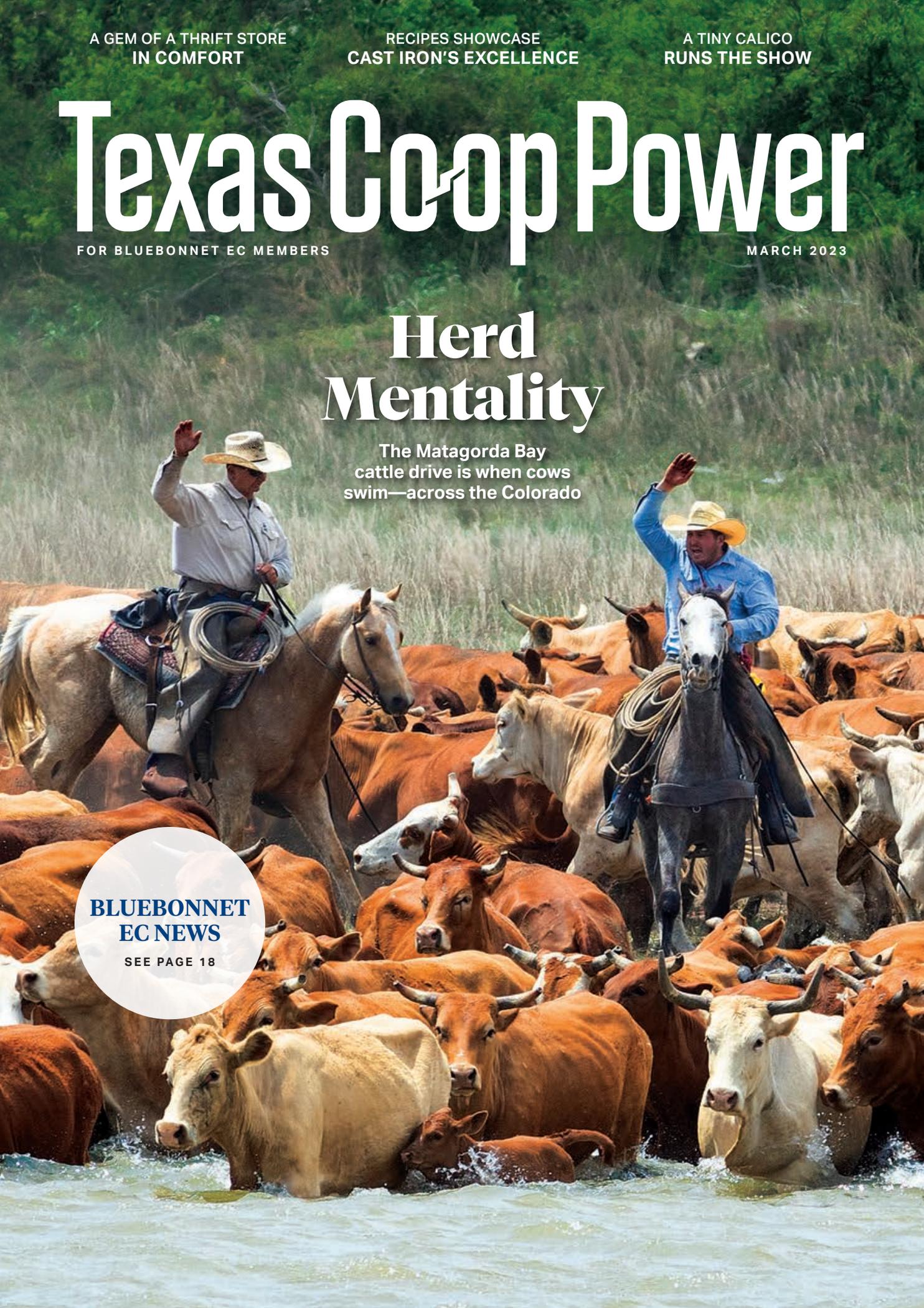
MARCH 2023

Herd Mentality

The Matagorda Bay
cattle drive is when cows
swim—across the Colorado

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18



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March 2023



08

Gently Used, Generously Shared

A small thrift shop in the Hill Country funds scholarships for local students.

*By Kristen Pettineo
Photos by Scott Van Osdol*

10 Until the Cows Swim Home

The Matagorda cattle drive runs right through a river—as it has for 106 years.

Story and photos by Erich Schlegel

ON THE COVER

Randy Duncan, left, and Riley Rodriguez drive cattle into the Colorado River.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

ABOVE

Sally Clogston, left, founder, with April Langston, manager, of Pass It On.

Photo by Scott Van Osdol

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Antsy Onslaught

SCIENTISTS LAST YEAR came up with a global ant census, and it's unfathomable: 20 quadrillion. That's 20 followed by 15 zeroes. Think of it this way: Ants outnumber humans at least 2.5 million to 1.

And, no, most of them don't live in Texas, though more than 250 of the 14,000-plus species worldwide are native to our state.

The dreaded fire ant isn't one. They're invasive in Texas.



Bragging Rights

Sam Bennett of Madisonville became the first Texas A&M University golfer to win the U.S. Amateur Championship, last year. The title earns him a spot at the Masters Tournament; watch for him April 6–9.

The All-American's family are members of MidSouth Electric Cooperative.

TCP *Contests and More*

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March 6

National Dentist's Day

Did you know Texas has four dental schools? There's Texas A&M in Dallas, Texas Tech in El Paso, and University of Texas branches in Houston and San Antonio.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

IF I COULD FLY,
I WOULD ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Below are some of the responses to our January prompt: **The greatest Texan ever is ...**

Willie Nelson. Seriously, how is that even a question?

SHELLI CONWAY
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
ANNA

Quanah Parker, who tried to do the best for his people in war and in peace.

MIKE DENEHY
PEDERNALES EC
LAGO VISTA

Lyndon B. Johnson, because he brought electricity to the rural Hill Country.

AARON DENMAN
TRINITY VALLEY EC
KEMP

George Strait.

JACKSON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
VIA FACEBOOK

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Roy P. Benavidez, who received a Medal of Honor for a series of daring and extremely valorous actions during the Vietnam War in 1968.

MATTHEW D. KONOPA
PEDERNALES EC
SPRING BRANCH

Visit our website to see more responses.

TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM



Women's History Month

MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, Katherine Anne Porter survived a pandemic. At 28, she was hospitalized for months with influenza, and her hair turned white. Porter's harrowing experience informed the title story in her trilogy, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

Known for her precise, lyrical prose, Porter won a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award in 1966 for her *Collected Stories*.

The author's childhood home in Kyle, now the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center, hosts readings by visiting writers and was designated a national literary landmark in 2002 with a benediction from Laura Bush. "This house now stands as a living memorial to one of our most beloved, and best, storytellers," Bush said.



COURTESY CHET GARNER

Afterlife Sentence

“Does anyone else think that’s carrying a grudge a little far? Really?”

LORENA BOREN
BAILEY COUNTY EC

Distant Relative?

According to the late El Paso historian Leon Metz, John Wesley Hardin’s father was a Methodist minister named James Hardin and moved from Virginia to Tennessee to Texas [*Afterlife Sentence*, January 2023].

Perhaps I am related to John. My great-grandfather was a Methodist minister named James Hardin and moved from Virginia to Tennessee to Texas. I wish to make three things clear: I do not own a gun; I am not a lawyer; and I want to believe that I am not a sociopath.

Vincent C. Kemendo
Pedernales EC
Canyon Lake

Thoroughbreds can do anything [*Stable Futures*, January 2023]. I’ve had 50 years working with them. I love them.

NANCY KEIM
VIA FACEBOOK

Welcoming an Opossum

I have always loved nature and try to read, read, read [*Oh! Possum!*, January 2023]. You gave me a wonder person, Martha Deeringer, who introduced me to an opossum. What a wonder that couple is, taking such care of this animal. She describes it in such fun ways.

Brenna Quebbemann
CECA
Comanche

I, too, have an opossum for a pet—one of God’s gentle creatures that unfortunately was given a very short life span. Ours is named Jones, and he travels with us when we visit state parks and other places in Texas. We rescued Jones from a county road where his momma met her fate. Thank you for letting readers know that North America’s only marsupial is actually a pretty cool critter.

Rick Martin
Coleman County EC
Santa Anna



KIRSTEN ULVE

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

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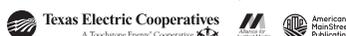
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POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

Gently Used, Generously Shared

A small thrift shop in Comfort gives local students a boost for schooling

ASK MERCEDES ELLIS about her favorite place to shop, and her answer may surprise you.

You might expect the Texas State University student to rattle off well-known fashion brands or influencer-approved Instagram boutiques. Instead, she'll name a teeny, tiny secondhand shop in the small town of Comfort: the aptly named Pass It On.

It's not just that Ellis, 20, enjoys sifting through racks of other people's castoffs—though she does enjoy that. (In fact, she once found a pair of Gucci shoes for under \$10.) It's that more than anything, Ellis loves Pass It On because the store provides for its Hill Country community.

The shop offers a little bit of everything—clothing, furniture, books, appliances and seemingly everything between—at rock bottom prices. There's not much they won't sell. The inventory is unpredictable and priced to move. Recently there was an old leather dentist's chair for sale on the shop floor.

But here's what really makes Pass It On unique and why Ellis says she'll always be a customer: Nearly every cent of the store's proceeds funds college scholarships for students in the Comfort school district. Ellis herself received one of them.

"This shop has made so much possible for me," she says. "Being a college student, every dollar really helps. This scholarship makes a big difference for me and my family. It's a cycle of generosity, and I feel so grateful to be a small part of it."

April Langston is also part of that cycle of generosity.

Langston, a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative, never expected to run the 25-year-old nonprofit thrift shop. She spent her career working in public education, advocating for students with special needs in the Northside and Boerne school districts. But in 2014, not long after retiring, Langston's husband died in a plane crash. They were married 37 years. Her world fell apart.

"That's when all of my plans changed," Langston says. "I was retired and widowed. Suddenly I had all this time. I had to learn a different life. And it led me to Pass It On."

In processing her grief, Langston felt drawn to volunteer work and community outreach. At Pass It On, she does both.

Langston leads a small army of volunteers who do pretty much everything—process donations, organize displays, help customers—whatever it takes to keep the doors open and the lights on.

The store is only open for eight hours each week—Fridays and Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m. Despite the limited hours, Pass It On has raised big money for Comfort students seeking education beyond high school. Langston says the store provided \$65,000 in scholarships last year, up from \$50,000 the year before. In all, 191 students have received \$760,000 in aid.

"I guess it's really not that different from what I've done all my career," Langston says. "I've always worked in education, and I've always helped kids. The opportunity to go to college can change a child's life. I don't want anyone to miss out on that chance because they couldn't afford it.

"And that's why we're all here at Pass It On."

Langston doesn't like to turn anyone down. For the past two years, Pass It On provided scholarships to every student who applied—all powered by people's donations and, according to Langston, "a whole lot of Windex."

But the store isn't just a source of scholarship money. It's a legitimate shopping destination in Comfort, a town of about 3,000. Langston says there's always a line of shoppers waiting outside the door when she opens.

"When I tell you we've got something for everyone, we've *really* got something for everyone here," she says, laughing. "If you come to Pass It On and leave empty-handed, you aren't looking hard enough."

And that's one thing Langston makes clear. She isn't in the business of selling junk. Of course, they get offerings that don't make it to the shop floor, and those get donated elsewhere. But she's seen Prada purses, Coach bags, delicate glassware and fine china all come through her door. Sometimes, even she's a customer. Sure enough, Langston checks the tag on her shirt. She got it from—where else?—Pass It On.

Despite the tens of thousands of dollars in scholarship money provided over the years, Langston will tell you *she's* the one who's grateful. After the tragedy of her husband's death, she found meaning and purpose at the storefront on Front Street. And for her, that's priceless.

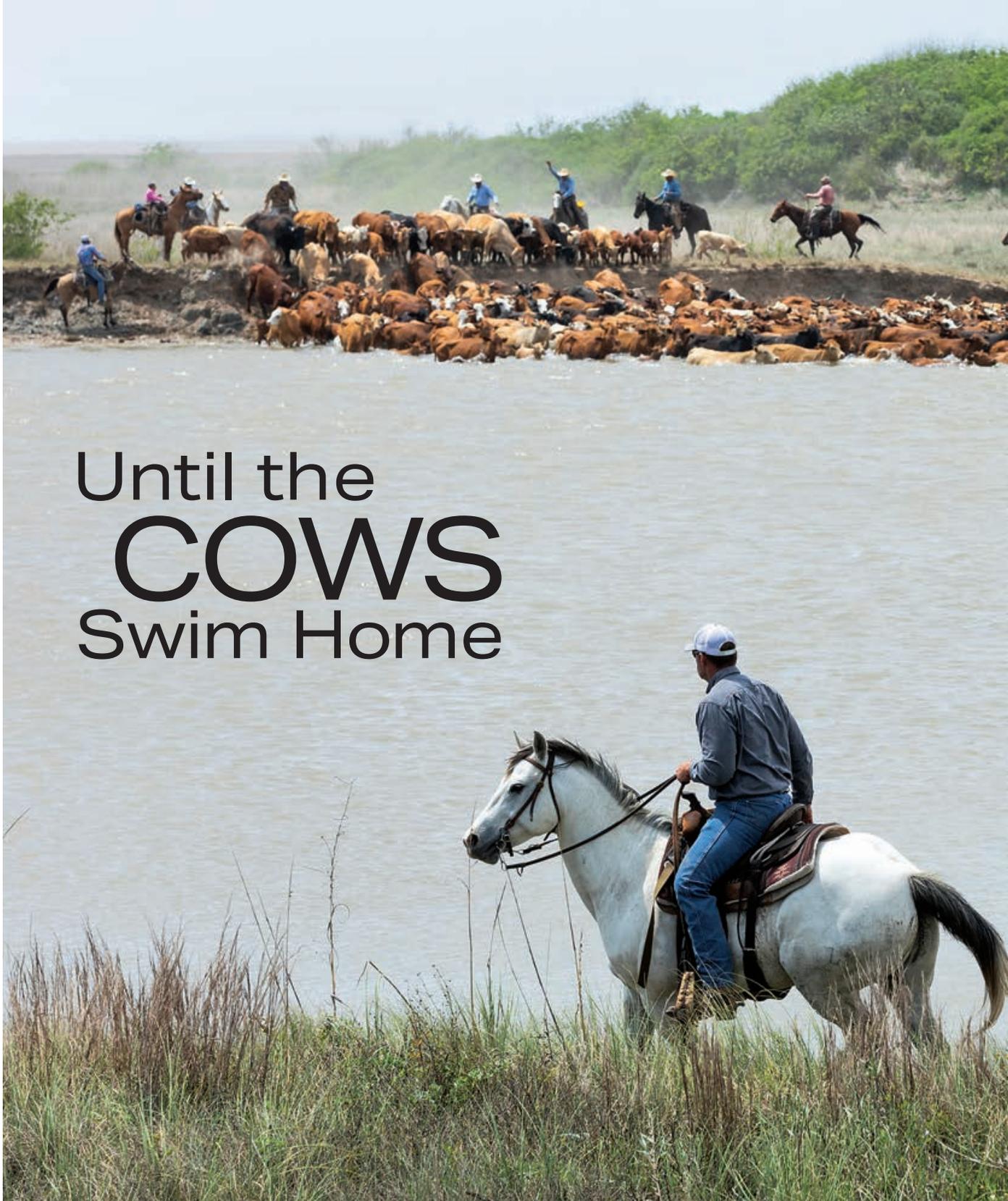
"I consider this my responsibility now," Langston says. "I feel God's hand over this work. And as long as I can keep up, I'll be here doing it." ■

TCP Visit Pass It On via video on our website.

YOU CAN HELP Pass It On accepts gently used items to support its scholarships. Make donations at 716 Front St., Comfort 78013.

OPPOSITE April Langston at Pass It On in Comfort.





Until the **COWS** Swim Home

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

Huebner Bros. Cattle Co. cowhands drive their cattle off Matagorda Peninsula and across the Colorado River for summer grazing near Bay City.

T'S A SCENE STRAIGHT out of a campy old Western.

After a long day of driving cattle—from 5 a.m. until dark—that ends with pushing the herd to a cattle trap by an old Army air base, full-time cowboy Stephen Weathers rendezvous with fellow cowboys finally relieved of their saddles.

“Then we’d sit around the campfire, cooking cans of pork and beans and have a great time joking around,” he says. “When we’d finally get to sleep in the bunkhouse, anyone snoring would get a cowboy boot thrown at him.”



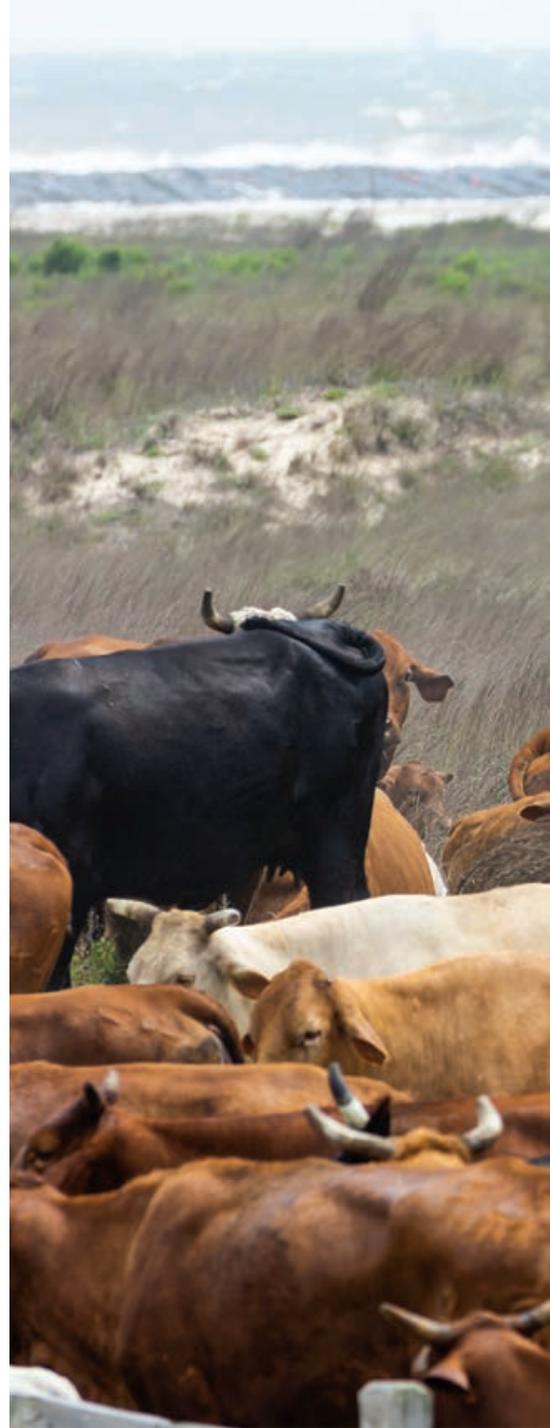
The Matagorda cattle drive runs right through a river—as it has for 106 years

Except this isn't a dusty trail to Abilene, Kansas, but a Gulf beach in Matagorda County. And instead of a marathon drive, it's more of a bovine biathlon.

The biannual Matagorda Bay cattle drive is one of the most historic and unique drives in the U.S. For more than 100 years, the Huebner Bros. Cattle Co. has been moving its herd back and forth between winter grazing pastures on the 30-mile-long Matagorda Peninsula and the summer pastures on the family's ranch south of Bay City. The operation involves

swimming the cattle across the 15-foot-deep Colorado River close to where it empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

Keith Meyer, Huebner Bros. ranch manager, is the fifth generation of cattlemen in his family to organize and run these drives. "Our family has been moving and swimming cattle on and off Matagorda Peninsula consecutively since 1917," says Meyer, who's been involved since he was 6 or 7. "I've grown up working this cattle drive alongside my father and grandfather."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Logan Meyer, 14, awaits the cattle as they reach Matagorda Bay Nature Park. Lauren Spanihel-Wahlberg and Randy Duncan keep watch over the spring herd of some 800 cattle.

The drives move the cattle to the peninsula for the winter months, then move them inland in the spring, just before hurricane season begins and storms threaten their safety. The cowboys time the crossings to occur during periods of slack current, when tidal motion is minimal.

Every November, just before Thanksgiving, about 550 head of cattle are moved in two-story 18-wheeler cattle trucks from the Huebner ranch to a holding pen near the beach. This area is part of the Lower Colorado River Authority's 1,333-acre Matagorda Bay Nature Park. After passing the coastal fishing town of Matagorda, the cattle are hauled down FM 2031, past homes on stilts along the Colorado River to the west and past 934 acres of protected Matagorda Bay wetlands to the east.

Once the cattle have been delivered to the holding pen and the road is blocked, Meyer and his team of 10–12 drovers lead



“Our family has been moving and swimming cattle on and off Matagorda Peninsula consecutively since 1917. I’ve grown up working this cattle drive alongside my father and grandfather.”

the herd toward the water. Some of them are local youngsters on horseback who are learning from the more seasoned veterans.

At Matagorda Bay Nature Park, the cattle drive takes a right-hand turn at the miniature golf course to the river’s edge, and the 100-yard swim to the peninsula begins. A small flotilla of cowboys on motorboats ensures the cattle don’t stray, and in about 15 minutes, all are across.

By the return trip in spring, the herd of 550 grows to about 800 bulls, cows and calves.

“I used to love the cattle drive,” says Weathers, a member of Jackson Electric Cooperative, which serves this corner of Matagorda County. He worked the drive for about 15 years. “We’d get on the peninsula early the first morning and start riding west down the beach. We’d split up our team. Some riders picking up cattle along the beach, some in the dunes covered in salt grass.”

Even though this Beefmaster breed of cattle is known for hardiness in harsh, humid coastal climates, the mosquitoes and biting flies on Matagorda Peninsula can be too much



"It's straight out of the Old West but with a 21st-century spin."

for the herd to handle as the weather warms. The seasonal change challenges the cowboys too.

"The warmer temperatures have brought the rattlesnakes out of hibernation," Weathers says. "You'll find rattlesnakes sunning themselves on top of the salt grass, perched about leg high as we ride. The snakes and the biting flies are enough to force some cattle to swim across the river on their own."

Thus begins the trek back to the Huebner ranch.

"Our ranch pastures have had time to rest over the winter, and the cattle and calves are ready to get going inland," Meyer says.

Jeralyn Novak, communications coordinator for Beefmaster Breeders United, calls the Matagorda Bay cattle drive a modern-day *Lonesome Dove*. It's "straight out of the Old West but with a 21st-century spin," she writes.

Jeff Crosby, executive director of the Colorado River Land Trust, a nonprofit that works to protect land and water in the Colorado River watershed, witnessed a spring cattle swim firsthand. "This is an important part of our historical Texas heritage," he says.

The cowboys don't set or share dates for the spring or fall drives, so lucky onlookers have only the weather and tides to go by. After more than a century of trial and error, these efficient workers have the drive down to a science.

"Cattle drives are still done the same way," Crosby says, "because moving cattle from one location to another was perfected long ago." ■



TOP The Matagorda drive includes moving the Beefmaster cattle along sidewalks. ABOVE Jacie Wahlberg, 7, helps with the roundup.

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Spa A



Giddings High School sophomore Clay Beisert works on his welding skills as part of a rigorous trade and technical curriculum. Welding, agricultural sciences and business are among the career-focused paths at the Lee County school.

In area high schools, job and technical courses are growing alongside the demand for specially trained workers.

Visits to classrooms at five Bluebonnet-area schools show the range of possibilities.



Instructor Faith Gaskamp offers guidance on dissecting a sheep's brain to Alexis Lara, a senior, in her anatomy and physiology class at Brenham High School. 'We have seen a return to the importance of trade-based programs,' said Gaskamp, who also teaches other health sciences classes.

orking CAREER PATH

Story by Sidni Carruthers ● Photos by Sarah Beal

MOST WEEKS, teachers and staff at Del Valle High School can pick a day to skip the cafeteria burgers and dine at Cardinal Cafe.

On a recent school day, William Maldonado, a sophomore, started at 8:45 a.m. to cook chili for approximately 100 Cafe diners. He works with other students in the school's spacious commercial kitchen, dining area and pastry kitchen, getting a feel for restaurant work by taking orders, waiting on tables and cleaning up after patrons leave.

The dining area is simple — no white tablecloths or fancy dishes. The freshly prepared meal, which staff and teachers pay for, includes an entrée, two sides, dessert and a drink. It's a treat for the faculty and valuable training for students.

Maldonado is learning about the culinary and hospitality field. His training ranges from the industry's history to the practical application of flavorings that bring out the best in a dish.

He is one of 470 students enrolled in Del Valle's culinary arts and hospitality services program. Students who complete the coursework have internship opportunities at area businesses, including the Hyatt Lost Pines Resort and Spa, the Austin Convention Center and hospitality venues at the Circuit of the Americas. They can graduate with certification of their training credentials in restaurant management.

If it has been a while since you went to high school — or you have a child or grandchild who isn't there yet — you might be surprised at the breadth of career paths that fall under the "career and technical" umbrella at schools across the Bluebonnet Electric

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Lockhart High School collision repair student Blayn Hernandez, right, gets directions on the intricate process of repairing a plastic bumper piece from his teacher and father, AJ Hernandez. The skill and precision it takes to use the high-tech plastic welding tool is necessary for career certification.



It's all hands on deck in a medical lab classroom at Del Valle High School, where students work on a computer-programmed mock 'patient' that can mimic symptoms of illness. The students, from left, are Emily Lopez-García, Jada Raymond, Liliana Riojas and Jennifer Alberto-Arevalo.

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Cooperative service area. A high school student can train to become a dental hygienist, medical assistant, pharmaceutical tech, welder, construction manager, HVAC technician, home inspector, pipefitter or dozens of other careers without needing a four-year bachelor's degree. Bluebonnet offers a four-year internship program in line worker training to area high school graduates. (See story, Page 20C)

In Texas, public high school students are required to take at least four college or career readiness courses, according to the Texas Education Agency website. More career and technical classes are being added at high schools, and, in the Bluebonnet region, more students are enrolling in the courses.

Career and technical jobs are abundant and they are the economic and employment mainstay of communities across the Bluebonnet region. Career and technical fields are expansive, essential and potentially lucrative. Trade industries are expected to grow 10% by 2028, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Area students can select from an ever-expanding variety of career and technical courses. Some offer certifications that can lead straight to a job. Other students plan to keep learning to get other certifications or an associate degree.

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative actively supports area high school students and has been awarding scholarships for decades. In the last five years, the cooperative has given out more than 130 scholarships totaling \$332,500, all earmarked for students planning to continue career and technical educations after they graduate from high school. Bluebonnet also offers academic scholarships for students planning to attend four-year college and universities. (See story, facing page)

Recent visits to five high schools within Bluebonnet's 3,800-square-mile service area offer glimpses into classrooms where students are learning skills for an array of careers.

Del Valle High School

Del Valle High School's career and technical education program is expansive and impressive. It has 22 four-year career programs, and about 80% of the high school's 3,400 students are enrolled in some career or technical sequence of classes.



William Maldonado, a sophomore in the culinary arts program at Del Valle High School, helps prepare lunch for faculty and staff in the school's roomy commercial training kitchen. Students can use the latest restaurant technology, such as kiosks, virtual orders and robotic servers.

Students in the southeastern Travis County school can choose from 34 industry-based certifications while in school, from graphic design and animation to finance to construction management.

In addition to these, Del Valle ISD has two other career-based high school paths. Early College High School allows a student to earn a high school diploma and an Austin Community College associate degree simultaneously. The Pathways in Technology program is another partnership with both ACC and area businesses to train students in advanced manufacturing or cybersecurity while they complete high school, plus earn a certification and/or an associate degree.

At Del Valle High School, many of the classrooms are nontra-



Lockhart High School student Julian Vega, a junior, repairs a piece of a vehicle bumper. His course is part of the school's four-year collision repair program. Students who complete coursework and certifications can begin a job immediately after graduation.

ditional. Some replicate medical labs complete with computer-programmed mannequins that simulate patients and can mimic symptoms of illness. There's a mock ambulance, too. The welding teaching area includes a large assortment of equipment and tools, including welders, pipe cutters, grinders and every machine in between. Graphic design classes are full of both computers and examples of student projects — including designs for mini cereal boxes, re-imagined record covers and mock-ups of new sneakers. Students can even work on their personal cars in the school's fully equipped auto mechanic shop.

J. Norris Sebastian III, director of career and technical education at the high school, said that about eight years ago the school district reorganized classes and areas of study to bring a more comprehensive approach to the career and technical program.

Sebastian, a former executive chef, believes the culinary arts graduates — who in high school learn to manage a kitchen, plan events and manage projects — will be able to begin a job with some seniority and higher pay.

Jocelyn Rosales, a 2021 graduate of the school's culinary arts program, is studying event planning at ACC. What she learned in high school helped her get through the first year of college. "The teachers (at Del Valle) helped me push through and follow my dreams. They convinced me to jump out of my little bubble. And I did," Rosales said.

Other Del Valle culinary arts graduates have also gone to ACC and the University of Houston, said instructor Ashley Jenkins. Students in Houston can go on to earn a bachelor's degree in global hospitality leadership or a doctorate in hospitality administration.

Deadline approaching to apply for \$2,500 scholarships for high school graduates

For more than 25 years, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative has been awarding service-area high school students with scholarships to continue their educations.

Several years ago, the cooperative began awarding \$2,500 Scholarships of Excellence to two groups of students: those planning to pursue an academic degree, and those who plan to pursue a trade or technical certificate, or associate's degree, in a vocational field.

If you know a high school student who has been studying a vocational field, a scholarship could be life-changing. Students who apply must plan to graduate in the 2022-2023 school year and live in the home of a parent or legal guardian who is a current Bluebonnet member with an active account.

Applications are available now on our website, at bluebonnet.coop/scholarships-youth-tour. (Click on the Scholarships - Trade & Technical tab). Interested students should review the application procedures, all eligibility requirements and judging criteria.

The deadline is approaching quickly: Applications must be completed and submitted online by 5 p.m. March 24.

Lockhart High School

Traffic crashes happen. If a vehicle collision occurs in Lockhart in Caldwell County, it's possible that the person repairing the car or truck involved was a graduate of Lockhart High School's 12-year-old collision repair program.

Students who finish the four-year course of study can work in the repair field immediately or soon after graduation. First-year students start with the basics of collision repair, then move to repair work in their second year. Juniors study paint and refinishing, and seniors put that knowledge to work as interns at auto body shops in Lockhart.

AJ Hernandez, the school's collision repair teacher since 2015, is proud of the program he has developed. "Students can go directly into the collision repair industry with the certifications they have earned. They can also go to tech school to get more knowledge and practice," he said.

Program graduates receive Level 1 certification in professional body repair work, based on industry standard ratings. To advance in the field and reach higher levels, students typically continue their education at schools where collision repair courses are an area of focus, such as Universal Technical Institute in Houston or Austin, or at ACC.

Instructor Hernandez's son, junior Blayn Hernandez, is in his third year of the program. His goals beyond high school aren't focused on collision repair, though. Hernandez wants to enter the medical field and eventually become a surgeon. He takes other

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Giddings High School instructor Greg Morris, left, and senior Billy Roschetzky discuss the final steps in welding a barbecue pit. Morris says there are more jobs available than there are students in the rigorous program.

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classes to further that goal, but why collision repair? “One of the things we do in collision is wrap cars or different objects” in a vinyl film that requires intricate cuts, he said. “Very intricate cuts are made in surgery as well.”

In one recent class, third-level juniors learned to repair plastic bumpers, a skill requiring precision. Careful sanding is followed by melting new plastic at a high temperature, then seamlessly smoothing it into the sanded groove. The work is repeated on the bumper’s flip side.

Right now, all five seniors in the program work as interns at Caliber Collision in Lockhart. It is their practicum, the final level of training in high school.

“Not including our first-year basic class, we have about 70 students in collision repair and paint and refinish,” Hernandez said.

About 93% of Lockhart High’s 1,969 students are in career and technical education courses. Students can choose from 16 focus options within the programs, including introductory courses in accounting and finance, as well as various certifications such as in emergency response.

Rachel Sotelo, the school’s career and technical education coordinator, said those students “can graduate with an industry-based and recognized certification. They are able to walk right into their career or pursue post-secondary education.”

Giddings High School

Welding, agriculture sciences and business are among the most popular classes in the career coursework at rural Giddings High School in Lee County.

The 643-student high school has seven career and technical “clusters,” according to interim principal Karla Sparks. Those groupings are business/marketing/finance, human services, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), agricultural/food/natural resources, manufacturing, teaching/learning and cosmetology.

Greg Morris, the school’s welding teacher, says there are more jobs



Taylor Wells, a junior at Giddings High School, checks his work before beginning the final welding that is part of his project. Wells, who has a Level 2 welding certification, plans to pursue welding as a career after graduating.

available in the welding field than there are students able to complete the rigorous four-year program.

Welding students are expected to work hard, consistently improve their skills and undertake projects for the community. The program requires a time commitment that some students aren’t able to meet, Morris said. Students who complete the welding courses can earn certifications and more easily get a job after high school.

Billy Roschetzky, a senior, plans to continue learning after high school. “I am going to Tulsa Welding School in Houston in July after I graduate,” he said. “I’m not sure what I want to study specifically, but probably structural and fabrication,” the art of building metal products from scratch.

Roschetzky tried his hand at welding before taking the high school classes, but Morris’ classroom is where he fell in love with the process. “I am surprised with how much technique it takes to be a good welder,” he said.

Morris is popular among his students. Taylor Wells, a junior who has been in welding classes for two years, said his teacher is the best

part of the course: “He is patient and helps us learn what we need to know.” Wells has Level 2 welding certifications and plans to continue in the field after graduation.

After finishing the welding program, many students such as Roschetzky go on to specialty schools to become pipefitters, fabricators, general welders or fill another of the many jobs in the trade. The American Welding Society says the nation will need an additional 375,000 welders to satisfy industry needs by the end of this year. The industry is growing, and older generations are leaving the field. Welders in Texas don’t have to take prerequisite courses, but certification usually requires some training.

Brett Schneider graduated from Giddings in 2021 after taking all of Morris’ courses and, with the teacher’s encouragement, went on to Tulsa Welding School. Today he is a structural welder at Perry & Perry Builders in Rockdale in Milam County, where he helps build large industrial buildings and other commercial structures.

Brenham High School

The students in Faith Gaskamp’s anatomy and physiology class at Brenham High School in Washington County didn’t seem too excited to start the day’s project: dissecting a preserved sheep’s brain. But even though they had the option to perform the lesson virtually, all of the students chose the hands-on experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted more students at Brenham High School — and at schools nationwide — to focus on career- or technical-oriented coursework, said Gaskamp, who also teaches other health science classes. The high cost of attending college is a factor, but not the only one. “We have seen a return to the importance of trade-based programs,” she said. “Trades are the backbone of our society and students want to become a part of this change.”

The 1,500-student high school has six career paths. In the health science arena, students can obtain certification as medical assistants. Other certifications are for veterinary assistant, two levels of welding, floral “knowledge base” (focused on floral design), Microsoft Word and ServSafe food safety.

Classes for the health science track at Brenham are full, with 25 students in each, and they are expected to grow, because of student interest along with state requirements for career study coursework.

With courses in anatomy and physiology, pathophysiology and medical terminology, students studying health sciences should be well-equipped to become medical assistants. They can also continue studying to earn other medical-related certifications or obtain

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Brett Wellman, a member of the 2021 class of line worker interns at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, is pictured climbing a power pole for the first time. After graduating as an apprentice, he now works out of the co-op’s Brenham service center.

Interested in becoming a Bluebonnet line worker intern?

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative offers line worker internship opportunities in order to hire and train the next generation of employees to master the difficult job.

The intern program, which began in 2018, focuses on hiring local candidates, including recent high school graduates. The program begins with six months of classroom instruction and field observation at Bluebonnet. There is an emphasis on safety — which is of utmost importance at the cooperative.

Interns receive technical instruction about line work, earn climbing certifications and obtain commercial driver licenses. After that, they begin as apprentices, training in the field alongside journeyman line workers. After four years — 672 hours of technical instruction and 8,000 hours of on-the-job learning — interns who successfully complete the program can become U.S. Department of Labor-certified journeyman line workers.

The program is part of the cooperative’s investment in the communities it serves. It also allows Bluebonnet to continue providing safe, reliable power to its members, now and in the future.

Applications will be available in late spring. Watch bluebonnet.coop and the cooperative’s social media for information about applications and when they will be accepted.

For more information about the cooperative’s apprentice line worker training program, go to bluebonnet.coop/careers.

— Sidni Carruthers



Brenham High School students, from left, Julissa Guerrero, Mikayla Moreno and Cheyann Nugent, listen to directions before dissecting a sheep’s brain. Nugent, a junior on the health science career track, said she enjoys ‘learning how the body works, especially the brain.’

What trade careers make top pay?

The highest paid in-demand trade jobs are typically in the construction, health care, energy or engineering industries. The jobs are often specialized and many require significant training, certifications, licensing and, sometimes, experience. Annual salaries (nationwide) include:

1. **Construction manager, \$108,210**
2. **Nuclear technician, \$99,340**
3. **Radiation therapist \$82,790**
4. **Commercial driver, \$82,010**
5. **Electrical line worker, \$79,060**
6. **Dental hygienist, \$77,810**
7. **Website developer, \$77,200**
8. **Building inspector, \$68,480**
9. **Respiratory therapist, \$68,190**
10. **Power plant operator, \$67,565**

Other trade jobs that earn, on average, \$60,000 or more annually include aircraft mechanic, real estate appraiser, electromechanical technician, elevator mechanic, industrial mechanic, electrician, plumber, boilermaker, construction inspector and landscape designer.

Health care trade jobs that are in demand and high on the list of annual pay include ultrasonographer, MRI technologist, surgical technician, occupational therapy assistant, physical therapy assistant and dental assistant.

Sources: *Money.com* (2022), *equipmentandcontracting.com* (2022), *LinkedIn.com* (2021)

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degrees at two- or four-year colleges.

In Texas, there is a shortage of medical assistants. That creates more work for existing office staff and can affect the number of patients who can be treated, according to the Texas Medical Association. Medical assistant is the most difficult position to fill because certified medical assistants have many opportunities for higher paying jobs elsewhere, the medical society reported in December 2022.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of certified medical assistants is projected to grow nationwide by 5% in the next eight years.

“Most of the students in the health sciences pathway attend some type of schooling or additional certification program after graduation . . . specializing in a health pathway they are passionate about,” Gaskamp said.

Cheyann Nugent, a junior on the health science track, said she enjoys “learning how the body works, especially the brain.” She is getting plenty of hands-on experience at Brenham High. “We do a dissection or lab at the end of every unit. We are about to dissect a lamb’s eye,” she added. Nugent plans to receive her medical assistant certification when she graduates in May 2024.

Somerville High School

Teachers in the agriculture program at Somerville High School in Burleson County pride themselves on offering practical education and skills to students in this rural community. Programs include turf management, plant soil science, floral design, and fabrication, which includes welding and construction.

“We hope that when students leave our ag program they have a better knowledge of where their food comes from, how it is raised, harvested and processed for consumption,” said Greg Moore, an agriculture teacher.

Out of the 205 high school students at Somerville High, 85%, are enrolled in agriculture classes.

Agriculture is more than “cows, sows and plows,” Moore said. It

A tissue-paper flower provides a design challenge to Somerville High School seniors, from left, Bryanna Surovik, Jocelyn Ponce, and Kaelyn Chavez, in their floral design class. Students who complete the coursework can earn a Texas State Florists’ Association certification, according to their teacher Greg Moore. *Laura Skelding photo*





Jaime Navarro is among the Somerville High School students who have access to a variety of trade and technical classes, including metal fabrication. *Laura Skelding photo*

is also about science, genetics and learning how to meet the demand for livestock while the interest in raising it is waning. “The ag industry has changed so much in the last ten years with the increased use of drone, GPS and additional technologies. I stress the importance of studying science along with agriculture,” he said.

This might be one reason he has seen a big change in his classroom in the last few years: Young people who do not fit the mold of “traditional” agriculture-studies students are joining his classes.

Nontraditional ag students are typically those who don’t show animals or participate in the school’s chapter of the Future Farmers of America. One of these students, Grace Casas, found herself in the agriculture program when she took the floral design class. However, she doesn’t foresee a career creating artistic floral arrangements. Casas plans to study for certification as an ultrasound technician when she graduates in May.

A student in the traditional ag student category, Natalie Shupak, has raised and shown pigs for the last few years. She has taken welding, landscape design and floral design classes and participates in FFA. But she wants to get a business degree and open a retail boutique when she graduates.

Elsewhere, in turf management classes, a favorite class project is to create a “stadium in a box.” Students grow their own grass, maintain it and create whatever type of sporting field they want in the boxes made from woodshop project scraps. Students have made baseball and soccer fields, and last year, one student made a food truck park.

While Moore and his welding and construction instructor colleague, Jonathan Meurin, encourage students to pursue their passions when considering education and careers, students often choose to stick with what they learn in class. Moore’s strategy of pairing agriculture with science and teaching the connection between them allows students to consider nontraditional agriculture careers.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts 9% growth in jobs for technicians in agriculture and food science. Somerville students who want to follow the career paths taught in Moore and Meurin’s classes must first take principles of food and natural resources. The teachers believe it is essential that students understand food sources and issues associated with that before they move ahead.

“Students have more awareness of where their food comes from and how it gets to the table. Because of this, our students are more aware of the opportunities that are available,” Moore said. “The world we know today will not be the same tomorrow, and the agriculture industry has to grow and change to meet those needs in producing food, fiber and construction materials.” ■

Keep on learning

TRADE AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS, COLLEGES IN THE REGION

Numerous programs, schools and specialized colleges in Central Texas offer training programs through which high school graduates can obtain certifications and degrees in many trade and technical fields. Among the largest that offer in-person, online or hybrid-learning options are:

■ **TEXAS STATE TECHNICAL COLLEGE**, with campuses in Waco, Austin and Hutto, has more than 40 programs and degrees in a variety of industries; in-person and online coursework; information online at tstc.edu/programs/

■ **BLINN COLLEGE’S APPLIED TECHNOLOGY, WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** programs offer certifications, associate of applied science degrees, industry credentials and continuing education courses at multiple campuses, including in Brenham and Bryan. Blinn’s A.W. Hodde, Jr. Technical Education Center in Brenham partners with local school districts and industries to offer training; information at blinn.edu/workforce/ and search on the site for the A.W. Hodde, Jr. Technical Education Center.

■ **THE TEXAS A&M ENGINEERING EXTENSION SERVICE** offers programs in fire and rescue, infrastructure and safety, law enforcement, economic and workforce development and homeland security; find a list of certificate programs and information at teex.org/certificate-programs/

■ **AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE** offers numerous programs ranging from computer science & IT, education and health sciences, as well as certifications in fields including welding, HVAC, plumbing; learn more online at continue.austincc.edu/career-and-technical

■ **UNIVERSAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE TRADE AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOL** in Austin (with other campuses in Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth) has training in automotive, diesel, HVACR and welding industries; more online at uti.edu/locations/texas/austin

■ **THE COLLEGE OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONS** offers numerous programs in the health care field at multiple campuses in Texas, including Austin, San Antonio and Houston, as well as some online programs; information at chcp.edu

RESOURCES

■ **THE TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD** reviews and approves career and applied technical degrees, and workforce certification programs at community, state and technical colleges; higher.texas.gov/our-work/equipping-our-workforce/

■ **THE TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION** licenses career schools and colleges, provide resources and a list of all accredited schools and colleges; twc.texas.gov/jobseekers/career-schools-colleges-students

SPEND A DAY IN *Luling*

By Harlye Bonorden

THE SCENT OF SWEET watermelon and smoky barbecue floats in the air of Luling, mixed with the subtle but unmistakable “smell of money” – oil – which gave the town a rich heritage and is still pumping in the region.

Luling has more than 5,000 residents and 170 businesses, and is centered at the intersections of U.S. highways 90 and 183 and Texas 80. The community straddles the Caldwell and Guadalupe county line. Luling was established in 1874 with the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad, when trains carried cotton, pecans and cattle, which were hauled from Mexico to Kansas. Those rough and tumble days and rowdy cowboys gave Luling the nickname “The Toughest Town in Texas.”

In 1922, the discovery of the Luling oilfield led to a population and business boom by the 1930s. Though the oil slump of the 1980s impacted growth, Luling’s crops and livestock remain economic mainstays.

Wondering if that’s a water tower or a giant floating watermelon on East Pierce Street? The community is still known far and wide for its celebration of the big beloved fruit at its annual Watermelon Thump festivities. The events began in 1954 and still attract big crowds the last Thursday-Sunday of every June. Go to newsite.watermelonthump.com for information.

WHAT TO DO

Luling Oil Museum, 421 E. Davis St., houses 100-year-old historic oil drilling tools and equipment, artifacts and documents that trace Luling’s history; admission \$2 for an adult, \$1 for children 12 and younger; open 9 a.m.- 4 p.m., Monday-Friday. After the museum, cruise the town’s major roads to see brightly painted oil pumpjacks that add color to history.

Luling Lavender Fields, home to nearly 2,000 budding plants and lots of lavender products, is near the intersection of Interstate 10 and U.S. 183, 5 Arrow Lane, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., daily.

The Luling Foundation’s Agriculture Demonstration Farm, 523 S. Mulberry Ave., on 1,123 acres, 1 mile west of downtown; the foundation was started in 1927 by Luling’s oil king, Edgar B. Davis, for agricultural diversity education. The 96th annual Farm Field Day is May 18. Call 830-875-2438 to schedule a tour, 8 a.m.-noon or 1-5 p.m., Monday-Friday.

Zedler Mill Museum and Park, 1170 S. Laurel Ave., a tranquil setting to learn about the mill and cotton gin’s history; 8 a.m.-3 p.m. daily, free admission. The park is also the takeout spot for the 6-mile Luling Zedler Mill Paddling Trail along the San Marcos River.

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Among the sights in Luling, from top: One of the colorful wall murals downtown, which are at Davis Street and North Magnolia and Walnut avenues; a display at the Luling Oil Museum, which traces the city’s rich oil-business history; Zedler Mill Museum and Park is a tranquil setting for educational tours, plus a popular swimming hole and canoe take-out spot on the Luling Zedler Mill Paddling Trail; the city’s trademark fruit is celebrated by crowds at the popular Watermelon Thump events every June. *Sarah Beal photos*

Continued from previous page

Palmetto State Park, just 9 miles south of Luling, 78 Park Road 11 S., Gonzales; visitors can hike, swim, fish or camp; 8:15 a.m.-4:45 p.m., daily. Day passes \$3 a person, free for children 12 and younger.

GRAB A BITE

City Market, 633 E. Davis St., 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday-Saturday; a stop on the Texas barbecue trail and regularly featured in Texas Monthly's list of the best barbecue restaurants. Try the ribs, sausage and beef brisket.

Other dining options ranked in Tripadvisor's top restaurants in Luling are:

Blake's Cafe, 621 E. Davis St., 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday-Tuesday; 11 a.m.-8 p.m., Wednesday-Saturday.

Mom's Front Porch, 401 E. Davis St., 6 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday-Friday; 6 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday.

Meme's Mexican Restaurant, 942 E. Pierce St., 6 a.m.-2 p.m., Monday-Saturday.

STOP AND SHOP

Luling has several boutiques and gift shops run by local entrepreneurs. Here are four located on East Davis Street, the town's main street.

Luling Original Farmer's Market, 708-798 E. Davis St., a variety of vendors sell produce, landscaping products, plants and other seasonal goods; 9 a.m.-7 p.m., daily.

For quilters, **Holly Dee Quilts**, 509 E. Davis St., sells fabric, thread, books and notions; 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday. Owner Denise Green hosts a variety of weekly quilting classes for all skill levels; information and schedule online at hollydquilts.com.

KK's Antiques & Collectibles, 527 E. Davis St., also sells art, plus vintage candy and soda; 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday-Saturday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday.

Luling Emporium, 609 E. Davis St., sells antiques, furniture, gifts and collectibles; 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Saturday and 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday.

OTHER SHOPPING STOPS

Craving Beaver Nuggets? Visit **Buc-ee's**, 10070 W. I-10, for gifts, food and everything in between; open 24/7/365. A 75,000-square-foot Buc-ee's under construction at the location will become the largest in the U.S. and is slated to open in 2024.

Luling Icehouse Pottery, 1115 E. Davis St., sells and displays clay-crafted pottery, and hosts pottery classes for children and adults; 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday, Thursday-Saturday; 1-5 p.m. Sunday.

TIPS FROM LOCALS

If you don't know how much meat to order by the pound at popular City Market, speak to the staff in sandwich terms. "Tell them 'I want enough sliced brisket for 3 sandwiches' and they know how much you need," said Ashley Flores, Luling Chamber of Commerce executive director. Plus, don't forget the bread, pickles, onion and peppers in the back room.

This is part of a series of guides on spending a day in one of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area communities.

SAVE THE DATE

Your co-op, your Annual Meeting



The crowd at a previous Annual Meeting of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. This year's meeting will be May 9 at The Silos on 77 near Giddings. *Joe Stafford photo*

BLUEBONNET Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting will be Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at The Silos on 77 in Giddings. The traditional in-person meeting is back for the first time since 2019. Four of nine seats on the Board of Directors are up for election that day.

One of the benefits of being a Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member is voting to elect the cooperative's Board of Directors. Board members serve staggered three-year terms. The four seats up for election in 2023 are District 3, Bastrop County; District 4, Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; District 6, Austin and Fayette counties; and District 7, Washington County. For this election, the term for the District 7 seat will be for four years to evenly distribute the number of director seats up for future elections. The deadline to file the required documentation and fees for nomination for candidacy for a seat on the Board was Feb. 8.

Members can vote for candidates by submitting their proxy form by May 2, 2023, or by attending the Annual Meeting in person on May 9.

Proxy forms will be mailed to all Bluebonnet members this month. Proxy voting allows a member to designate another person to vote in their place. On the proxy, members can assign their vote to either Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee or to another member. The Proxy Committee is composed of all Bluebonnet Board members whose terms are not currently up for election. If a vote is assigned to another member, that member must vote in person at the Annual Meeting. Get information on how to complete your proxy form at bluebonnet.coop/vote.

Completed proxy forms must be postmarked or dropped off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor by 5 p.m. May 2.

The Silos on 77 is at 1031 County Road 223, south of Giddings. Learn more about Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting, Board of Directors and voting at bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting, by calling 800-842-7708 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, or by emailing memberservices@bluebonnet.coop. Look for more information in Bluebonnet's April issue of Texas Co-op Power magazine.



We never forget:
We're a cooperative.

OUR
power
COMES FROM
you



“The area has changed a lot over the years and Bluebonnet has grown with it, but the service hasn’t changed. Each May I look forward to seeing a credit on my Bluebonnet bill. These capital credits are benefits that pay off big time for members. Thank you, Bluebonnet!”

— **Calvin Boecker,**
55-year Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member,
Brenham

Thank you, Mr. Boecker.

Heidi Exner, Bluebonnet’s controller, oversees financial operations. She has seen more than \$78 million returned to Bluebonnet members in capital credits in her 17 years at the cooperative.

Capital credits are excess revenue above what it takes to run the cooperative, and they’re just one benefit of being a co-op member. When Bluebonnet is successful, it pays off for everyone.

Grants support community groups, VFD improvements

BLUEBONNET Electric Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently provided grants to community nonprofit organizations and projects as part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale

electric customers and is proud to partner with LCRA to support its members and communities. Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted in July 2023. More information about this program and the application can be found at lcra.org/cdpp.

A \$4,463 grant from Bluebonnet and the LCRA will help the Maxwell Social Club replace seven metal single-pane windows with double-pane windows and solar screens, enhancing the comfort and appearance of the building, which is used to host community events in Maxwell in Caldwell County. Pictured, from left, are David Kristynic, Maxwell Social Club past president; Rick Arnic, LCRA regional affairs representative; Darrell Hess, club first vice president; Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Board member; Jeff Van Horn, club president; Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; Benny Hilburn, club past vice president; Kirk Smith, club treasurer; Ronda Reagan, club vice president; Dennis Engelke, Caldwell County grant administrator; and Jo Anna Gilland, Bluebonnet's Lockhart-area community representative.



A \$23,055 grant from Bluebonnet and the LCRA will help the McMahan Community Women's Club replace a failing, outdated HVAC system at the 1920s-era event center in Caldwell County. The club provided \$5,764 in matching funds. The facility is used for Meals on Wheels every Wednesday as well as other community and private events. Pictured, from left on the front row, are Jan Walter, club grants and publicity; Allen Reed, club president; Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; and Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Board member. From left on the middle row, are Candyce Mueller, club secretary; Annette Wells, club treasurer; Brad Walter, club member; Barbara Shelton, Caldwell County commissioner, Precinct 2; and Jo Anna Gilland, Bluebonnet's Lockhart-area community representative; and Rick Arnic, LCRA regional affairs representative. From left on the back row, are Ann Scot, club programs; Nora Warren, club rentals; Jessie Scot, club member; Archie Sonsel, club grounds and special projects; Tom Will, Caldwell County constable, Precinct 2; and Dennis Engelke, Caldwell County grant administrator.

A \$15,654 grant from Bluebonnet and the LCRA will help the Washington Volunteer Fire Department in northeastern Washington County replace eight sets of personal protective gear. The department provided \$3,914 in matching funds. Pictured, from left, are John Durrenberger, Washington County judge; Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet's Brenham-area community representative; Robert Mikeska, Bluebonnet Board Secretary/Treasurer; Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; Clyde Miller, fire chief; Billy Ray Jensen, firefighter; Eric Dehmer, firefighter; Kate Ramzinski, LCRA regional affairs representative; and Bill Kennedy, firefighter.



Photos courtesy LCRA



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Quinta Mazatlan is an urban sanctuary for pollinators and native plants.

TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



hill that overlooked the vast and sunny Rio Grande delta to the south. The 10,000-square-foot mansion was believed to be the largest adobe house in Texas at that time, 1935. It was built in a Spanish Revival style with imported Talavera tile, red clay tiles for the roof, wrought-iron gates and huge carved doors. The couple wanted their home to look like the elegantly appointed homes they had seen in the finer districts of Mexico.

After the Matthews died, the house was sold to a grapefruit millionaire, Frank Schultz, who added features like stone balustrades. Eventually the home was sold again and began to suffer from neglect.

The city of McAllen stepped in and saved it in 1998, and today Quinta Mazatlan and its 20 acres are a crown jewel of the city, described as a “mansion with a mission.” The world-class educational facility located in a Tamaulipan thorn forest is part of the World Birding Center and hosts the annual Monarch Fest to support the struggling monarch butterfly population.

Quinta Mazatlan’s grounds are teeming with native plants and serve as a rejuvenating garden for migrating exotic birds and pollinators. The property’s magical ambiance has made it a sought-after venue for couples wanting to say “I do” in a place they’ll always treasure remembering.

The Matthews were honored to know that the dream they had for their beloved home has been magnificently surpassed. ■

Of Birds, Butterflies and Brides

Quinta Mazatlan and its massive adobe mansion remain a McAllen jewel

BY W. F. STRONG

THE ROMAN PHILOSOPHER Cicero said, “If you have a library and a garden, you have all that you need.” Enter the gates of Quinta Mazatlan, and you’ll understand that wisdom.

This inviting refuge is seemingly a world away from the hustle and bustle of McAllen right outside the gates. Jason Chilton Matthews, who built the mansion in the 1930s, wanted it that way.

In every corner, there are Old World influences. There’s a tiled Roman bathtub, 9 feet long and 3 feet deep, and a tiled mural that has the words “*Labor Omnia Vincit*,” Latin for “work conquers

all,” which is Virgil’s praise for the life of the farmer in his poem *Georgics*.

Matthews was a renaissance man—a publisher, writer, composer, poet, scientist, soldier and pilot. He fought in 11 battles in World War I.

After Matthews traveled the world extensively, involved in various business enterprises with Marcia, his oil heiress wife from Pennsylvania, they settled in McAllen because he said it was the “crossroads of the Western Hemisphere.” He wanted to build a home that would be a showplace to entertain friends, and he found the highest point in McAllen: a

Cast Iron

Trusted cookware provides timeless value, indoors and out

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

There's no tool more cherished in a home kitchen than a well-seasoned cast-iron pan. Whether your skillet has been passed down for generations or is just starting to see its full potential, it's a go-to for many dishes. This tart lemon pie, from Fredericksburg Cast Iron Co., uses your pan in a somewhat unexpected way.

Lemon Skillet Pie

PIE

**½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted,
plus more for the pan**
1½ cups crushed graham crackers
½ cup sugar
3 cups sweetened condensed milk
3 egg yolks
¾ cup lemon juice
Pinch salt

TOPPING

1 cup heavy cream
3 tablespoons powdered sugar
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

GARNISH

Sliced lemons
Lemon zest
Fresh mint leaves

- 1. PIE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees and lightly coat a 12-inch cast-iron skillet with butter.
- 2.** In a bowl, combine graham crackers and sugar. Stir in melted butter until well blended. Press the crumb mixture into the bottom and sides of the prepared pan. Bake until firm, about 8 minutes.
- 3.** Meanwhile, combine the sweetened condensed milk, egg yolks, lemon juice and salt and beat with a mixer for 4 minutes.
- 4.** Pour mixture into baked pie crust and return the pan to the oven. Bake until the center is set, about 10 minutes.
- 5.** Let the pie cool at room temperature for 30 minutes. Cover and then transfer to the refrigerator to chill until set, at least 1 hour.
- 6. TOPPING** When ready to serve, make the topping. In a large bowl or using a stand mixer, beat the cream, powdered sugar and vanilla until fluffy. Spread onto pie and garnish as desired.

SERVES 8-10

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Texas Tater Tot Casserole.





Creamy Salsa Verde Pasta

JAZMIN ROMO
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

Creamy and herbal with just the right amount of heat, this salsa verde pasta features an easy-to-make sauce. Romo recommends using the extra sauce as a dip or spread on a toasted bagel.

- 3 teaspoons salt, divided use**
- 8 ounces linguine**
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened**
- 1 cup cilantro**
- ½ cup sour cream**
- ½ cup water**
- 3 green tomatoes, quartered**
- ¼ cup basil leaves**
- 2 serrano peppers, deseeded**
- 3 cloves garlic**
- 1 cube chicken bouillon**
- ¼ teaspoon pepper**
- 1 onion, divided use**
- 3 tablespoons butter**
- 1 cup shredded pepper jack cheese**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add 2 teaspoons salt and linguine. Cook pasta to al dente according to package directions.

2. Meanwhile, in a blender combine cream cheese, cilantro, sour cream, water, tomatoes, basil, serranos, garlic, bouillon cube, pepper and remaining 1 teaspoon salt. Quarter the onion and add 1 quarter to the blender. Dice the remaining onion to yield ¾ cup and set aside. Blend sauce until smooth, taste, and add more salt or pepper to taste.

3. Heat a 9- or 10-inch cast-iron pan over medium. Add butter. Once melted, add reserved diced onions and sauté until soft. Pour in blended sauce (you might

CONTINUED >



\$500 WINNER

Henry's Heavenly Chili

HELEN SANDERS
UNITED COOPERATIVE
SERVICES



Sanders' late husband, Henry, above, created this chili for the annual family reunion, where he would cook it over an open flame in a cast-iron wash kettle. If you prefer, leave out the alcohol.

SERVES 4-6

- 2 tablespoons bacon grease or vegetable oil**
- 1 pound ground beef**
- 1 pound ground pork**
- 1 onion, chopped**
- 2 jalapeño peppers, deseeded and chopped**
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped**
- 1 can diced tomatoes (14.5 ounces)**
- 1 can diced Hatch chiles (4 ounces)**
- 2 tablespoons diced chipotle in adobo sauce**
- ¼ cup chili powder**
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano leaves**
- 2 teaspoons cumin**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 1-2 teaspoons pepper**
- 2 cups beef stock**
- 2 ounces beer**
- 1 ounce reposado tequila**

1. Heat a cast-iron Dutch oven over medium-high and add bacon grease. Once melted, add beef and pork and cook about 10 minutes, until no pink remains.

2. Add the onion, jalapeños and garlic and cook until vegetables are soft. Stir in tomatoes, chiles and chipotle. Add chili powder, oregano, cumin, salt and pepper and mix well, then add beef stock, beer and tequila and stir again. Reduce heat to medium. Cook 20 minutes, stirring often.

3. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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Sheet pans are perfect for preparing meals in a snap. What do you whip up, whether it's for breakfast, lunch or dinner? Submit your recipes on our website by March 10 for a chance to win \$500.



RECIPES CONTINUED

not use it all) and stir slowly to mix. Bring to a boil for 1 minute, then remove from heat.

4. Drain pasta and add to the cast-iron pan, carefully tossing with tongs to coat with sauce. Sprinkle with cheese and bake 15 minutes. Broil 2 minutes to brown the cheese. Garnish with more cilantro and basil, if desired.

SERVES 2-3

Dutch Apple Pancakes

GWEN JONES
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

Oven-baked pancakes are impressive with their highly puffed sides. This Dutch apple version is wonderfully spiced and makes for a great breakfast or dessert.

4 eggs

½ cup flour

½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar,
divided use



- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- Pinch salt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg, divided use
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 large tart apple, peeled, cored and thinly sliced

1. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, flour, 1 tablespoon sugar, baking powder

and salt. Gradually whisk in milk until smooth, then whisk in melted butter, vanilla and ½ teaspoon nutmeg. Let batter rest at least 30 minutes and up to overnight.

2. When ready to bake, preheat oven to 425 degrees.

3. Heat a 10-inch cast-iron skillet over medium and add 4 tablespoons butter. Once melted, brush butter up sides of pan and remove from heat.

4. In a small bowl, combine ¼ cup sugar, cinnamon and remaining ½ teaspoon nutmeg, then sprinkle evenly over the melted butter. Arrange the apple slices over the sugar mixture, then sprinkle the remaining ¼ cup sugar over the apples.

5. Place the pan over medium-high heat and cook just until the liquid starts to bubble. Remove from heat and evenly pour the batter over the apples.

6. Bake 15 minutes, then reduce heat to 375 and bake 10 minutes more. Serve immediately.

SERVES 4



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Old Pete was a retired stuntman bursting with stories. There was the time he stared down a grizzly bear. There was the time he won a competition and got to kiss a Hollywood starlet as the prize. And there was the time he got into a fistfight with the Duke. Many stories. Some were probably even true. I know two things for sure: that he had an excellent collection of turquoise and that he owed me for a poker game he lost. The last time I saw him, he opened a drawer and pulled out a collection of beautiful Navajo turquoise jewelry to repay his debt. Pete's jewelry inspired our Tucson Sun Turquoise Collection.

This jewelry set features turquoise that's been gently enhanced to bring out its finest shades in a Southwestern motif. Finished with oxidized silver, this jewelry set captures the beauty and mystery of the Arizona desert. The rarest and most valuable turquoise is found right here in the American Southwest, but the future of the blue beauty is unclear. I recently spoke with turquoise traders who explained that less than 5% of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry. Once thriving, many Southwest mines have closed.

But Stauer saw this coming and is now one of the largest owners of gem-grade turquoise in the U.S. Don't miss your chance to own the diamond of the desert. Act now. This is one of our fastest sellers, and we only have a limited supply of Arizona turquoise available for this ad. See why Stauer remains the best bang for your buck!

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

'Lonesome' in a Library

Texas State University houses memorabilia from the TV miniseries

BY CHET GARNER

WHEN I THINK OF the Wild West and the grit it took to be a cowboy, I don't think of yodeling Roy Rogers or Hollywood-perfect John Wayne. I think of Woodrow Call and Gus McCrae, covered in sweat and driving cattle in *Lonesome Dove*. I remember watching the 1989 miniseries with my parents and thinking, "Now these are real cowboys."

Every year thousands of faithful fans like me make a pilgrimage to San Marcos to visit a permanent exhibit dedicated to the classic production.

I rolled onto the campus of Texas State University and wandered past students to the seventh floor of the Alkek Library, which houses the Wittliff Collections. Screenwriter Bill Wittliff and his wife, Sally, collected writers' papers for years and decided to open them to the public. There are priceless papers from writers like Cormac McCarthy and Sam Shepard, but most come to see the work of Wittliff himself. He was the screenwriter who adapted Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* novel into the award-winning miniseries.

Inside the exhibit, you'll find the cowboy outfits worn by Robert Duvall (McCrae) and Tommy Lee Jones (Call). There are arrows shot by Comanches as well as hats, guns and the wooden sign for the Hat Creek Cattle Co. that hung outside the fictional headquarters. They even have the deceased body of Gus that Call dragged back to Texas as a final act of friendship. Most amazing to me was the script used by Wittliff on set, with his tweaks and changes to lines to tell the best story possible.

I left inspired to tell more stories about the West—but only after I had properly binge-watched all six-plus hours of *Lonesome Dove* one more time. ■

ABOVE Chet alongside the cowboy garb worn by Tommy Lee Jones as the character Woodrow Call.

TCP Chet visits the mementos of real TV cowboys. Check out the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details.

MARCH

08

Elgin S.H.E.: Women in Business, (512) 285-4515, elgintxchamber.com

09

Abilene All That Jazz, (325) 676-9620, paramountabilene.com

Denton [9–12] Texas Storytelling Festival, (940) 380-9320, tejasstorytelling.com

Irving [9–12] Texas Steel Guitar Association Jamboree, (817) 558-3481, texassteelguitar.org

10

Lindale Keeton Coffman, (430) 235-2100, outhousetickets.com

Round Rock Destination: Hope, (512) 868-2822, casawilco.org

Amarillo [10–12] Western Antiques and Collectibles Show, (806) 378-3096, amarillociviccenter.com

Mansfield [10–13] Arts Week, (817) 728-3383, visitmansfieldtexas.com

Bastrop [10–12, 17–19, 24–26] The Addams Family: A New Musical Comedy, (512) 200-3826, bastropoperahouse.org

11

Beaumont Bee Gees Gold: The Tribute, (409) 838-3435, beaumonteventstx.com

Burton Texas Ranger Day, (979) 803-0393, burtonheritagesociety.org

Corpus Christi Wine Festival, (361) 779-7326, corpuschristiwinefestival.com

Livingston Pioneer and Settler Day, (936) 365-2201, tpwd.texas.gov

Lufkin Gene Watson, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

13

Fredericksburg [13-18] Spring Break at the Pioneer Museum, (830) 990-8441, pioneermuseum.org

16

Canton [16-18] Van Zandt County Bluegrass Festival, (214) 802-5999, krlivemusic.com

17

Bryan [17-18] Watercolor Batik Workshop, (979) 704-3090, degallery.us

Denton [17-18] The Muse Invitational Motorcycle Show, (512) 522-5445, ridetexas.com

Tolar [17-18] Ceramic Expo and Handcrafted Items, (254) 716-5227, westceramicshow.com

Fredericksburg [17-19] Trade Days, (210) 846-4094, fbgtradedays.com

Tyler [17-19] Vintage Market Days of East Texas, vintagemarketdays.com

18

Brenham The Celtic Angels, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

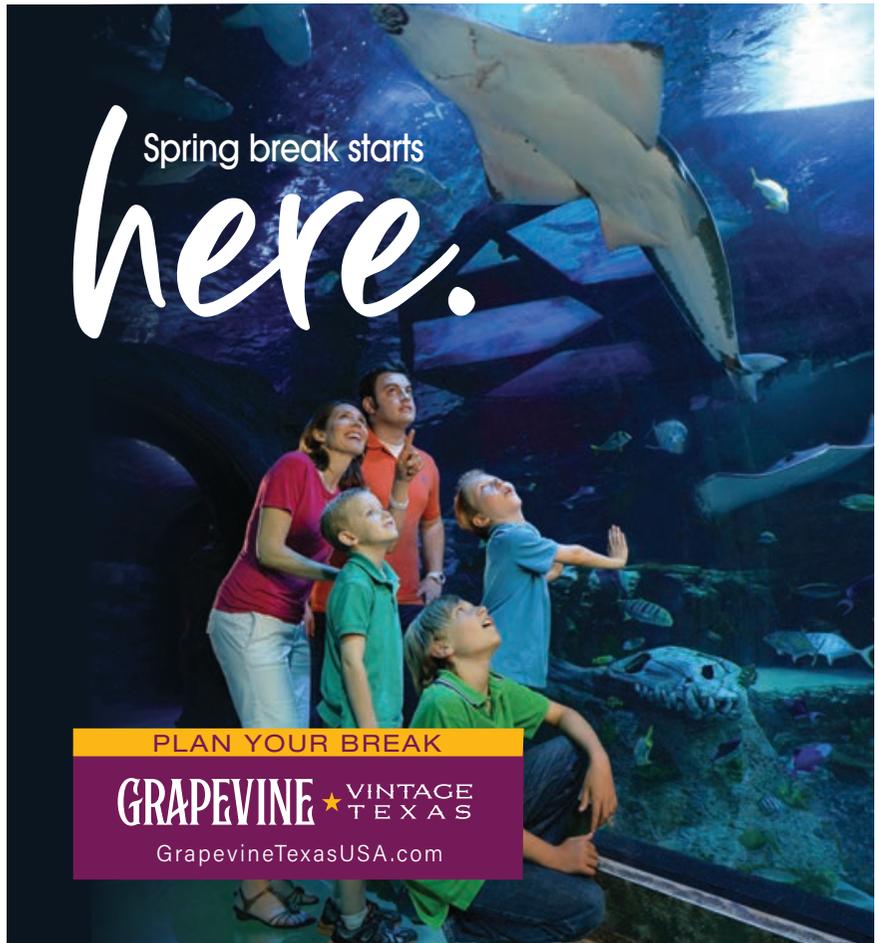
Del Rio Texas State Parks Centennial Dark Skies Celebration, (830) 395-2133, tpwd.texas.gov

Fredericksburg Hill Country Indian Artifact Show, (830) 329-2636, hillcountryindianartifacts.com

[MORE EVENTS >](#)

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Pick of the Month

Herb Festival at the Wynne Home
Huntsville, March 25
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texasthymeunit.org

Jump-start your spring by celebrating fragrant herbs and healthy veggies. Expect vendors, speakers, music, children's activities and plenty of plants at this free festival.

MARCH EVENTS CONTINUED

18 **Lewisville St. Paddy's Texas Style**, (972) 219-3401, cityoflewisville.com

Angleton [18-19] Market Days, (979) 849-4364, angleton.tx.us

19 **The Colony Luck of the Irish Triathlon**, (214) 370-9010, playtri.com

24 **Georgetown [24-25] Quilt Show**, (512) 869-1812, handcraftsunlimited.com

Hallettsville [24-26] South Texas Polka and Sausage Fest, (361) 798-2311, hallettsville.com

Burton [24-April 1] LaBahia Antiques Show, (979) 289-2684, labahiaantiques.com

25 **Bandera Ranching Heritage Day**, (830) 796-4413, banderatex.com

The Colony Mother and Son Adventure Day, (972) 625-1106, visitthecolonytx.com

Sabinal [25-26] Wild Hog Festival and Craft Fair, sabinalwildhogfestival.com

28

College Station [28-29] Anastasia, (979) 845-1234, opastickets.org

31

Kerrville Napoleon Dynamite: A Conversation With Jon Heder, Efrén Ramirez and Jon Gries; (830) 315-5483; thearcadialive.org

Abilene [31-April 1] Outlaws and Legends Music Festival, outlawsandlegends.com

Victoria [31-April 1] Friends of Flint Rifle Invitational Scholarship Shoot and State Cookoff, (210) 439-4191, friendsofflint.com

APRIL

01

Brenham Southern Raised, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Bryan Starlight Affair, (979) 485-5473, rmhc-ctx.org

Mason Spring Art & Wine Fest, (325) 347-5758, masontxcoc.com

Port Arthur Cajun Heritage Fest, (409) 985-7822, cajunheritagefest.com

Bellville [1-2] Texas Select Custom Cutlery Event, (713) 724-6813, texasselectevent.com

San Antonio [1-2] Fiesta of Gems, (830) 387-1766, swgms.org

Land, Sea or Sky

By land, by sea and by air, these Texans take the world by storm. Come along as we visit the scenic parts of Texas. When it comes to natural beauty, the sky's the limit.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 MARK HOLLY
BANDERA EC

"Little did we know that a major hurricane was about to impact Port Aransas. It was so sad to see the city devastated shortly after we left."

2 CASEY BRUNO
PEDERNALES EC

Sunset over Waterford Harbor Marina in Kemah.

3 PAIGE KILLIAN
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

"Please don't touch me!"

4 LARRY SELMAN
TRI-COUNTY EC

"This was taken by my wife, Gigi Selman. While driving down the road, she saw this hidden scene."



Upcoming Contests

- DUE MAR 10** Waterfalls
- DUE APR 10** Hoof and Horn
- DUE MAY 10** Night Sky



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Land, Sea or Sky photos from readers.



A Pet Project

An ailing feline finds her place at the head of the table

BY JESSICA RIDGE
ILLUSTRATION BY
STEPHANIE SINGLETON

I SET THE DELICATE china saucer before her, a tiny calico queen curled up on a quilt. On the dish is a dainty portion of cat food, heated to make it more enticing. The plate was a wedding gift a decade ago, shortly before my husband and I brought our little feline gourmand home.

Only the best for miss priss. She gives this morning's delicacy, whitefish and tuna, an imperious sniff, then looks up at me. *Is that the best you can do, lady?* Next up, canned salmon.

Isobel is 12 now, and she is dying.

Her green eyes gaze with the same peaceful focus, and she still flops over for belly rubs and purrs contentedly, but her decline, which had been happening in fits and starts, has gained momentum. And my husband, Jon, and I find ourselves vested with the worst, most

painful power—deciding when to let her go. It's a desperate sort of daily divination. *How much has she eaten today? Three bites earlier? Fantastic.* As she grows thinner.

And yet as best we can tell, she isn't suffering. So with our vet's blessing, we persist. I imagine Isobel as a discerning diner at a Michelin-starred restaurant for which I'm the hapless chef, subject to the mercy of her palate's whims. No thank you to tuna in oil today; yes please to catnip-laced crunchy treats.

Her haughtiness has hung on in other ways, too. She still emits an irritated squeak when our dog, Brienne, gets too close for her liking. She's never been a big fan of our coltish pup. Too friendly, too in her face.

But Isobel warmed up to us quickly. The day we brought her home, a volunteer at the animal shelter had asked if we'd like to meet the sweetest kitty in the whole place. Sure, we said. Almost as soon as Isobel emerged from her little metal crate, she settled into my arms. More like a puppy than a 2-year-old cat, really. The sad din of the shelter faded into the background as she stared up at me. Sold.

That night, she hid under the sofa in our apartment until I got home from work, when she finally ventured out from beneath her chenille hideout, to our soft-spoken jubilation.

We go back to the vet tomorrow, where I know the news won't be good. I've begun the steps to volunteer at the shelter where we found Isobel; I hope to guide another family to a cat as sweet as ours.

Until then, I've got plenty to keep me busy—a finicky, affectionate Isobel, as likely to snuggle up close as she is to turn up her nose. ■



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