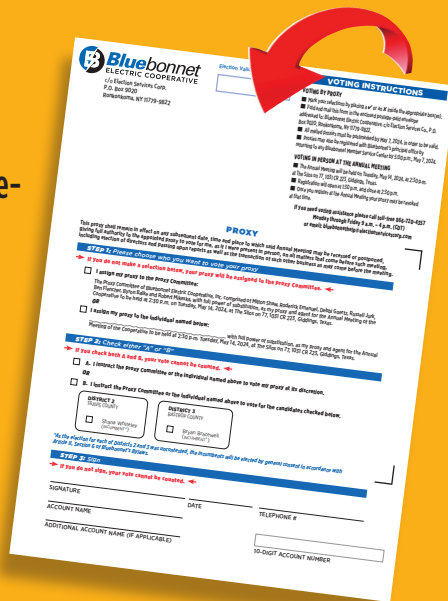


Your co-op, your voice.

**Can't make
the meeting?
Submit your proxy
form!**

You can make your voice heard
by filling out your proxy.
Forms were mailed in March.

To vote by proxy, fill out the form and mail it back using the blue, self-addressed, postage-prepaid envelope provided. You can also take it to any of our five member service centers. If you cannot find your form, you can pick up a new one at a Bluebonnet member service center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.



Completed proxy forms must be postmarked by May 7, 2024, or given to a representative at a member service center by 5 p.m. May 7.

Get more information at bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting or call 800-842-7708.

2024 CANDIDATES FOR BLUEBONNET'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Shana Whiteley
District 2
Travis County

Whiteley has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2017. She earned her Credentialed Cooperative Director certification in 2020 from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. She is a member of Bluebonnet's Member & Employee Services Committee and the cooperative's Energy Services Committee. Whiteley is the founder and owner of two restaurants, the Good Luck Grill in Manor, which she opened in 2007, and the Lucky Duck Cafe in Taylor, which she opened in 2015. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in restaurant, hotel and institutional management from Texas Tech University and earning a master's degree in business

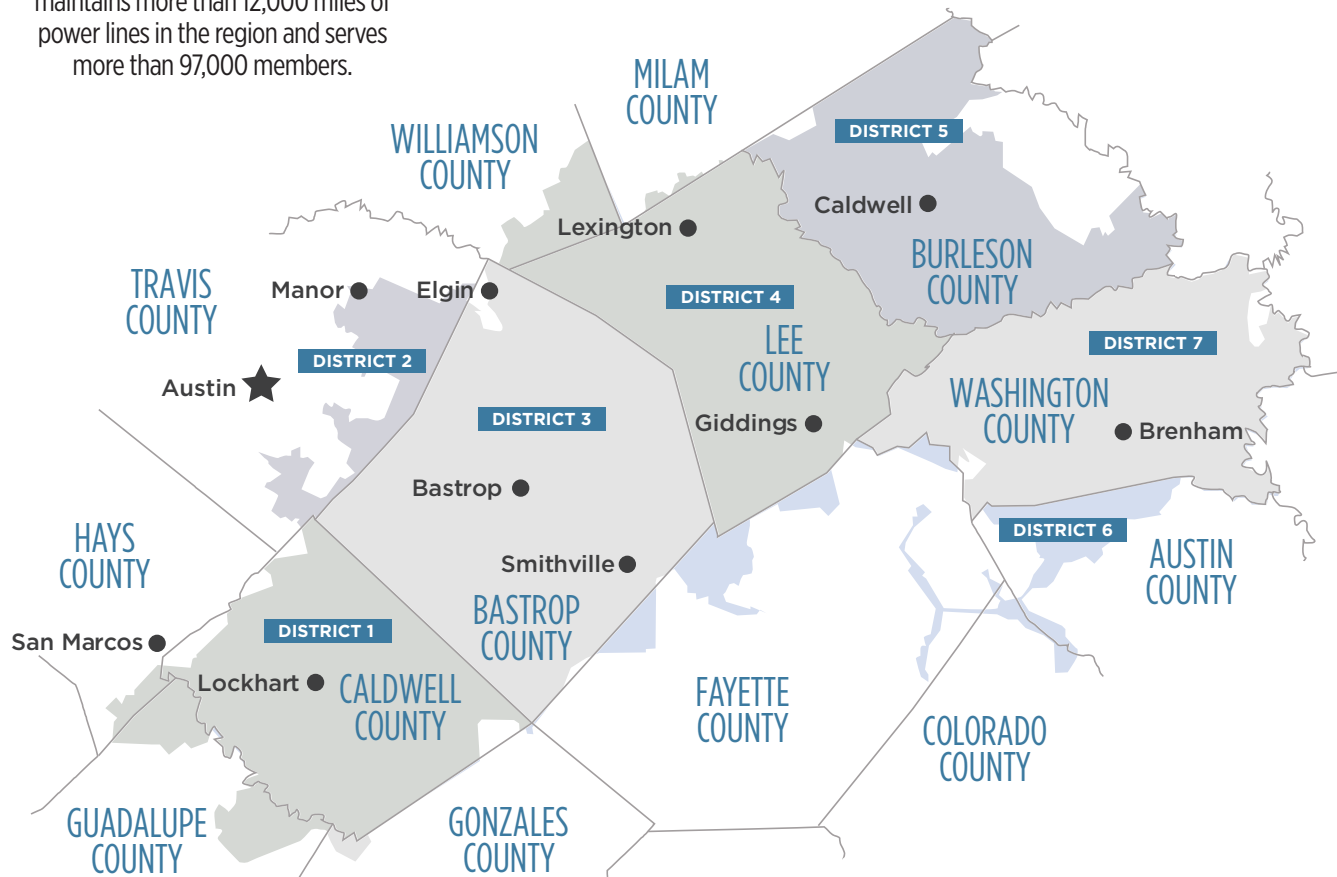
administration from Texas State University, she traveled to Ukraine as a business development volunteer for the U.S. Peace Corps. Whiteley returned to the United States in 1998 and worked as a sales executive for the Lubbock Convention and Visitors Bureau. After that, she was general manager of the Boat House Grill near Lake Travis. Whiteley is a member of the Taylor and Manor chambers of commerce and served as president of the Manor chamber in 2012. She is involved in numerous community organizations and contributes to the Travis County Youth Show, Rodeo Austin and other area nonprofit groups. She grew up on a 100-acre farm between Pflugerville and Manor in Travis County and lives there today with her son, Wesley Bocanegra, and her father, James Whiteley. Wesley will attend Texas Tech University in the fall. As a child, Whiteley was active in 4-H, and her son carries on the tradition as an active member. She continues to support the program and is the club manager of Wilbarger Creek 4-H.



Bryan Bracewell
District 3
Bastrop County

Bracewell has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2018. He is a member of Bluebonnet's Audit & Finance Committee and the Member & Employee Services Committee. He is the third generation of Bracewells to own Southside Market & Barbeque. The original business was founded in Elgin in 1882. Today there are Southside restaurant locations in Elgin, Bastrop, Austin and Hutto, as well as sausage distribution to all major grocers in the Austin area, H-E-Bs in Central and North Texas, and Walmart stores in Texas. Bracewell grew up in Elgin and started working at Southside at age 12 alongside his grandfather and father. He graduated from Elgin High School in 1994. After graduating from Texas A&M University in 1998 with a degree in food science and technology, Bracewell returned to work at the family business. He and his wife, Rachel, purchased the business from his family in 2010, and have worked to grow it since then. Bracewell serves on the Elgin Economic Development Corporation board, the First National Bank of Bastrop's Elgin Community Advisory Board and a Vistage peer advisory and business development board. He and Rachel have twin sons, Chase and Nathan, who will both attend Texas A&M University in the fall. The twins started helping out at the family business at age 11. Bracewell and his family attend River Valley Christian Fellowship in Bastrop. He and his wife are involved in their sons' sports activities, and the family enjoys camping, hunting, fishing and hiking.

The Bluebonnet service territory spans some 3,800 square miles in all or part of 14 counties. Bluebonnet owns and maintains more than 12,000 miles of power lines in the region and serves more than 97,000 members.



In 2024, Bluebonnet celebrates 85 years of providing safe, reliable and affordable electric service to its fast-growing membership. Throughout the year, join us in celebrating this milestone as we honor our past and plan for the future.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

TUESDAY, MAY 14

Join us for our ANNUAL MEETING

Hosted at The Silos on 77
1031 County Road 223, Giddings
Registration at 1:30 p.m.
Meeting starts at 2:30 p.m.



Every member who votes by proxy or registers at the Annual Meeting will be entered to

WIN A TRUCK

that is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet.

See details inside the magazine, Page 23

Plus: Drawings for door prizes, refreshments, and Bluebonnet updates and news.

2024 ANNUAL MEETING & BOARD ELECTION Q&A

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting will be Tuesday, May 14, 2024, at The Silos on 77, 1031 County Road 223 in Giddings. Registration is from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. The meeting will begin at 2:30 p.m. Look for more information about the meeting in the coming weeks with your bill, in Bluebonnet's pages in Texas Co-op Power magazine, on our social media and on our website, bluebonnet.coop.

How many Board of Director seats are up for election?

Two of the nine seats on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors were up for election this year. The seats are from District 2, Travis County, and District 3, Bastrop County.

What are the eligibility requirements to vote by proxy?

All active Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members are eligible to submit a proxy form. Members can vote in person at the Annual Meeting on May 14, 2024, or designate another member to vote in their place by submitting a proxy form.

Bluebonnet's service area is divided into seven districts. Can I vote for candidates in all districts or just the district in which I live?

During Board elections, co-op members can vote for directors in all districts. The districts in the co-op's service area were drawn along Bluebonnet's service-area boundary and county lines. The seven districts are represented by one to three directors based on, among other things, the number of meters in each district. There are no contested elections in 2024.

What are my voting options?

Members may vote for Board candidates by submitting their proxy form by May 7, 2024, or by attending the Annual Meeting in person on May 14. There are currently no additional agenda items to be voted on this year. However, items can be added to the Annual Meeting agenda that would require a vote by members. Your proxy could be used in that vote, which is why your proxy selection is important.

What is proxy voting, and how does it work?

Proxy voting allows members to designate another person to vote in his or her place. On the proxy, members can assign their vote to either Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee or to an individual. Proxies are counted to ensure at least 1% of Bluebonnet's membership is present at the Annual Meeting to constitute a quorum.

Who serves on Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee?

This year's Proxy Committee members are Milton Shaw, Roderick Emanuel, Debbi Goertz, Russell Jurk, Ben Flencher, Byron Balke and Robert Mikeska.

How do I vote by proxy?

Complete and sign the proxy form mailed to you in March and return it by mail or drop it off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor. If you misplace the proxy form, pick one up at a member service center. Proxies must either be hand-delivered to a member service center by 5 p.m. May 7, 2024, or mailed to:

**Bluebonnet Elections Processing
c/o Election Services Co.
P.O. Box 9020
Ronkonkoma, NY 11779-9822**

Mailed proxies must be postmarked by May 7, 2024.

Can this proxy be used again at future Annual Meetings?

No, the proxy is valid only for the meeting specified on the proxy form.

Can I vote at the Annual Meeting if I send in a proxy form?

Yes. When you register at the meeting, you may revoke your proxy and then vote in person.

Who administers the election?

Election Services Co., which is a third-party, independent vendor that specializes in administering corporate elections nationwide. It has the experience to efficiently and accurately tally proxies and votes while protecting members' confidential account information.

What if I have more questions?

Visit bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting, call a member service representative at **800-842-7708** between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, or email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop.

Join us for

BLUEBONNET'S 2024 ANNUAL MEETING



MAY 14, 2024

The tradition continues:
Your cooperative, your voice,
your Annual Meeting



that was
THEN



Top photo: Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting in 1946 was at the Lee County Courthouse, and business was conducted using a blackboard.

Above: Cindy Shafer, a member service representative, uses an iPad to register Bluebonnet member Caroline Iselt of Lexington at the 2023 Annual Meeting at The Silos on 77 in Giddings.

this is
NOW

 LOOK INSIDE FOR MORE DETAILS!

A VILLAGE OF HOPE
IN BANDERA

TEXAS RAISES
THE AMERICAN FLAG

A NEIGHBORHOOD'S
SEED SAVER

Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

APRIL 2024

Vanishing Act

Conservationists
work to save
native plants in decline

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

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—DIANE, U.S. MONEY RESERVE CLIENT

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April 2024



06

Thorny Task 12 Holding Promise

Scientists, landowners and plant lovers work to preserve hundreds of threatened Texas natives.

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

Bandera's Helping Hand puts relief within reach for neighbors in need.

Story and photos by Laura Jenkins

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By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

ON THE COVER

The flower of the rare night-blooming cereus can be seen just one night a year.

Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE

The Hinckley oak is an evergreen shrub in the Chihuahuan Desert.

Photo by Keeper Trout | Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Wow! The eclipse was ...

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.

Here are some of the responses to our February prompt: **Campfires remind me of ...**

Telling scary stories as kids.

CATHY ONDREJ
HILCO EC
AQUILLA

Me and my dad camping. We would stare at the fire for hours and say, "This is much better than watching TV."

MIKE EARLY
VIA FACEBOOK

The time I set our tent on fire!

HOOMALIMALI PAULO
VIA FACEBOOK

The possibility of a nostalgic gathering and the surety of an asthma attack.

SHELLY REID
SOUTH PLAINS EC
BECTON

Fresh air, boiled cowboy coffee, staring at the embers.

DURENA KRILEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

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Textures

RECOMMENDED READING
Ten years ago we looked at the problems caused by the growing population of feral hogs in Texas. See *Here a Pig, There a Pig* from April 2014 on our website.

Wiring the American Dream

ON LINEWORKER Appreciation Day, April 8, we celebrate the 20 Texas electric cooperative lineworkers who brought electricity to Matasanos, a rural village in Guatemala. They spent two weeks there in November as part of NRECA International, a program that for more than 60 years has delivered electricity to remote places that had none—exactly what co-ops did in rural Texas 85 years ago.

Ten South Texas co-ops sent two crew members each, plus support staff. When they finished, 60 homes had each been wired with four lights, two switches and two outlets. Villagers helped the lineworkers move equipment up the mountain.

"I believe we take the American dream on the road and transplant it to other countries," says Jim Coleman, general manager at Jackson Electric Cooperative in Edna, who has participated in several international projects. He was joined in Guatemala by GMs from four other Texas co-ops.



No Fooling

Some historians say April Fools' Day customs have been around since the 16th century, when France's King Charles IX decreed the new year would begin January 1—not on Easter. Those who clung to the old ways were called April fools.



R.J. HINKLE PHOTOS

Pieces of Art

We became a fan of Puzzles of Color after meeting them at the Texas State Fair and absolutely loved the artwork of the woman playing bass [Puzzling Times, February 2024]. I made a custom frame for it, and it hangs in our guest bedroom.

Peter Hill
Pernales EC
Austin

The Reality of Gators

We don't always have a resident gator at Magnolia Beach, but most times there's one or two [Later, Gators?, February 2024].

My son and I were fishing when two teens were swimming nearby. I casually asked if they were watching for gators. "What gators?" came back sarcastically. "The one with his nostrils and eyes sticking up under the walking bridge behind you," I replied.

I swear they walked on water getting to the bank.

Jim Evans
Victoria EC
Port Lavaca



DAVID MOORE

The Real Bowie

Yes, Jim Bowie's knife was quite a sensation, and I'm glad you cast some doubt as to his actions at the Alamo, but it might be worth mentioning a bit more of his biography [A Cut Above, February 2024].

He was a slave owner, slave trader, smuggler and an associate of pirates. He also was a land speculator with a suspicious reputation.

Georgia Xydes
Pernales EC
Austin

Shamrock Memories

Glenn McCarthy's two daughters were at Lamar High School when I was [The Green Carpet, January 2024]. The Cork Club was opened on Sunday afternoons for teens to come, dance to a small orchestra and have nonalcoholic drinks.

In 1952, my date and I went with another couple. The featured singer for the week came to entertain us—Tony Bennett. Hearing I Left My Heart in San Francisco always reminds me of that very special afternoon.

Betty Akin Morris
Pernales EC
Canyon Lake

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

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

The Favorite

"I pay for some magazines, but my very favorite one is yours. Great publication."

NONA GARDNER
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC
GARRISON

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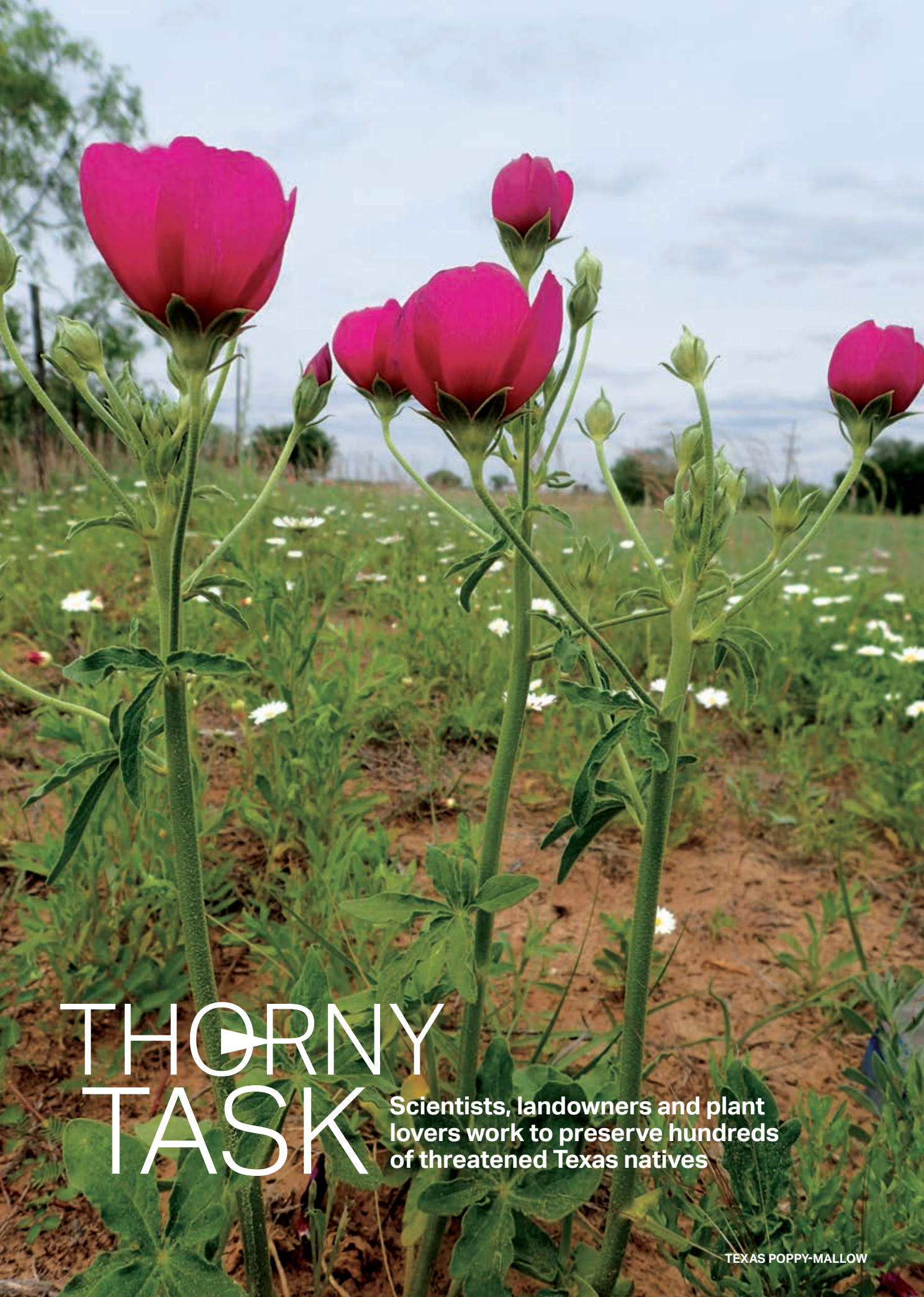
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THORNY TASK

Scientists, landowners and plant lovers work to preserve hundreds of threatened Texas natives

Randy Deming often walks his 10 acres of rural land in Callahan County, near Abilene, always on the lookout for a flower, insect or bird he hasn't spotted before.

Using an app called iNaturalist, he documents the native grasses, yuccas, Ashe junipers, live oaks and other plants that grow there. Thanks to the app, Deming learned in 2021 that one of his flowering species could be one of only a few remaining populations in Texas.

"I took pictures of a pretty flower and forgot about it," recalls Deming, a member of the Texas Master Naturalist Program and Taylor Electric Cooperative. "A few months later, I was skeptical when someone contacted me through iNaturalist and asked to see my large-flower beardtongues.

"When they told me how rare they are, I was excited," Deming says. "I could have mowed them down! Now I'm watching over them."

In the future, large-flower beardtongues—a tall, erect perennial with tubular purple blooms—could be legally protected if researchers collect enough ecological data to substantiate the designation. In the meantime, 437 other Texas plants have already been designated by the state as "species of greatest conservation need," meaning they're in decline and need attention. Some of those species require even more urgent measures. These are further labeled as threatened or endangered.

The two legal terms stem from the Endangered Species Act, a federal law enacted in 1973 to protect and help recover the nation's imperiled plant and animal species and their habitats. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service oversees the federal list and partners with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which manages the Texas list. A species can be federally and state protected, such as shrubby Texas snowbells in the Hill Country, or just one or the other.

However, the process for federally listing a species can stretch out for years. Consider the bracted twistflower, a tall annual with lavender flowers that has been increasingly lost to urban sprawl and hungry herbivores. Found only within the Edwards Plateau, the wildflower has been marked as imperiled since 1975 and was petitioned for



TURNER'S CLIFF THISTLE

federal listing in 2014. In May 2023—nine years later—the USFWS finally listed the bracted twistflower as threatened. In Coryell County, the imperiled Texabama croton faces similar challenges.

Plants of all kinds in Texas face many pressures. Every year, development scrapes away one natural area after another. Invasive plants, agriculture, poaching, mining, weather, loss of pollinators, and land and water management also negatively impact the state's flora.

But does it really matter if a few of Texas' estimated 5,000-plus native plant species go away? The answer is yes.

"We have biodiversity for a reason," says Anna Strong, a rare species botanist with TPWD. "Each organism interacts with others in specific ways. Regardless of whether it's rare or common, if we take out one organism, we don't know the implications amongst all the organisms. If we take out one flower, we may take a food source away from a specific insect that relies on that species."

At the San Antonio Botanical Garden, botanist Michael Eason works to conserve and propagate rare Texas plants. "We have more than 90 species in our collections," Eason says. "Some are displayed in our gardens, which helps to educate the public. Others are seed collections, which haven't been propagated yet."

One of those species, prostrate milkweed, a low-growing perennial, is endemic only to Starr and Zapata counties and northeastern Mexico. Since at least 1980, invasive



Glossary

An endangered species is defined under the Endangered Species Act as “any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

A threatened species is defined under the ESA as “any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

Imperiled is not a legal term. Biologically, it refers to unprotected species that are in decline and may be in danger of extinction.

Rare plants have very limited ranges or exist in low numbers.

buffelgrass, road construction and development have drastically reduced its numbers. After several petitions to the USFWS, prostrate milkweed—an important monarch butterfly host plant—was federally listed as endangered in March 2023. The agency also designated 661 acres as critical habitat needed by the species to survive.

For his part, Eason spent five years tracking down the scarce milkweeds and collecting seeds, then having a milkweed specialist grow the plants to maturity. “We ended up with 150 plants,” he says. “We passed some to other botanical gardens. We’ll install some in our rare plant gardens. The remainder will be kept for perhaps reintroductions in South Texas and donations to other institutions with the Center for Plant Conservation.”

Headquartered in Escondido, California, the CPC is a



TEXAS SNOWBELL

TEXAS SNOWBELL: CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD. TEXABAMA CROTON: RAY MATHEWS | LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

Grassroots Efforts

The Texas Department of Transportation monitors for rare plants prior to road construction and along state highways and rights of way. Edd Paradise, a TxDOT environmental planner in Pharr and a Magic Valley Electric Cooperative member, worked with USFWS to relocate endangered Zapata bladder-pods in Starr County.

Aaron Lincoln—a biodiversity manager with Lhoist, a global corporation—oversees a pilot project to restore grasslands and a pocket prairie at a 3,000-acre chemical lime plant and quarry in Bosque County. So far, he’s documented glandular blazing stars, Hall’s prairie clover, lemonscent and other declining species. Lincoln also hopes to set aside 122 acres as a refuge for white troutlilies and morel mushrooms.

The Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery in Dallas rallied to transform the historic cemetery’s neglected grounds into native habitat. Today, the Constellation of Living Memorials pilot project includes eight old cemeteries and will serve as an example for revitalizing the state’s 5,000-plus historic cemeteries. One project goal is to encourage the recovery of threatened and endangered plant species.



TEXABAMA CROTON

nationwide network of organizations working together to save imperiled native plants. The San Antonio Botanical Garden partners with the CPC, as do the Botanical Research Institute of Texas at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, Mercer Botanic Gardens in Humble and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.

As part of its conservation efforts, the wildflower center stores seeds of 575 Texas plant species for research and sharing with botanical gardens and conservation organizations. The seed bank, housed mostly in freezers, also serves as an insurance policy against the loss of imperiled species.

“We visit wild populations that we have permission to access, either on public land or through contacting land-owners,” explains Jonathan Flickinger, conservation collections manager at the wildflower center. “We harvest seeds



BRACED TWISTFLOWER

from plants, but we don't take too many because our priority is to conserve the plants in their natural habitat."

In some cases, researchers may rescue plants by digging them up. That happened with the Texas poppy-mallow, listed as federally endangered in 1981. The tall perennial with reddish purple flowers grows in deep sandy soils along the Colorado River in four counties.

In 2010, some conservation-minded landowners asked that a population of poppy-mallows be removed from a future construction site on their property. That summer, wildflower center staff and other colleagues extracted 54 plants and fostered them in pots for three years.

"We harvested more than 3,000 seeds from them for our seed bank," Flickinger says. "Then we identified another site where they were reintroduced."

Landowners play a huge role in plant conservation, namely because about 95% of Texas' land is privately owned. When threatened or endangered plants grow on private land, landowners are not legally required to manage them under the Endangered Species Act (the law differs for listed birds and animals).

Botanists and other officials must always ask permission before accessing private land. Typically, they want to survey plant species, perhaps harvest a small amount of seeds and collect plant material for herbarium vouchers.

The Fish and Wildlife Service offers a program that provides property owners with free technical and financial assistance for improving wildlife habitat on their land. "We're always looking for opportunities to work with landowners," says Chris Best, USFWS botanist. "Most of the ones I've met want to protect their land's natural resources."

That aptly describes attorney Liz Rogers, a Medina Electric Cooperative member. For more than two decades, she's welcomed researchers onto her family's 8,000-acre cattle ranch in southeastern Brewster County, along the Mexico border. "They always show me cool things, which has made me appreciate our ranch even more," she says.

Eason has been among many plant conservationists who have botanized the ranch's Trans-Pecos deserts, canyons and mountainsides. "Liz has an assortment of rare plants found along cliff faces and other protected areas," he says. "We've collected plants such as Turner's cliff thistle, rock-daisy and Barton's dalea. She also has a small population of night-blooming cereus."

Whether rare or not, showy or inconspicuous, every native plant matters. "We shouldn't focus conservation merely on species that have declined so far that they're teetering on the brink of extinction," Best says. "We should be working to keep common plants common." ■



Noah's Arks for Seeds

Just as the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin stores seeds of 575 Texas plant species for research, national and global seed vaults do the same—preserving plant types in case they are wiped out by natural or human-made disasters.

The National Laboratory for Genetic Resources Preservation on the campus of Colorado State University is run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It houses more than 850,000 plant seeds and materials, as well as DNA samples from about 160 breeds of livestock.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, located about halfway between the North Pole and the coast of Norway, is more than 300 feet inside a mountain, where the permafrost maintains a stable temperature between 26 and 39 degrees. Three large concrete chambers have the capacity to hold 3.5 million seed samples.



HOLDING PROMISE

BANDERA'S **HELPING HAND** PUTS RELIEF WITHIN REACH FOR NEIGHBORS IN NEED



FROM THE ROAD, it doesn't stand out from any other small office complex you might find in the Hill Country. But once you pass through the towering iron gate, get out of your car and start walking, the landscape becomes much more inviting: winding paths that lead to a peaceful courtyard and a sprawling pergola nestled against a scenic lily pond.

This is what hope looks like. More specifically, the Village of Hope—the cluster of buildings owned by Bandera County Helping Hand, a haven for residents facing a personal crisis. Are you sick? There's a free medical clinic. Is your cupboard bare? Head over to the food pantry. Do you need shoes, clothes or basic household items? The thrift store has what you need.

Since 1984, Bandera Helping Hand has been a steadfast safety net for folks who have hit hard times.

"We're here to help people get on their feet," says Jesse Parks, executive director of Helping Hand. "You never know what tomorrow will bring. Everything's great until all of a sudden there's a car wreck and somebody's gone or there's a flood or a fire and you've lost everything. It's devastating."

Parks speaks from experience. In the late 1990s, she and her husband uprooted their lives in Corpus Christi and moved to Medina, just west of Bandera, where they signed a long-term lease on a piece of land and started working on their dream: building a facility for teens experiencing crisis. Two years later, without warning, the landowner sold it out from under them, including the structures and improvements they'd funded with their own money.

They lost everything. To make ends meet, Parks got a job at the Apple Store in Medina (which actually sells fruit). One day a friend came in and told her that she'd recommended Parks for the director position at Helping Hand. Even though she'd never worked at a nonprofit, Parks accepted the position and has led the organization since 2000.

Helping Hand began 16 years earlier, in 1984, when local churches came together to assist neighbors in need. The aim was to pool resources and provide a central place where people could go for help. In the early days, Helping Hand operated a thrift store and a food pantry and provided school supplies for children. It also helped struggling residents pay their utility bills.

But when the Medina River swept through the town during the devastating South Texas floods of 2002, it demolished Helping Hand's facilities. Quite suddenly they were among those in crisis.

"Our building was completely destroyed," Parks remembers, "so we set up shop in a warehouse and started gathering donations from other food banks. The Salvation Army came in and helped us provide aid for flood victims as well."

Seeing how generously and efficiently Helping Hand had been serving the community, Bandera's city council offered them space so they could continue helping residents while they figured out how to start over themselves. And that's when offers of help started pouring in.

"A retired grant writer by the name of Dan Wise got in touch and offered to help us raise funds to rebuild," says Parks, a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative. "I looked forever for land that was not in a flood plain and finally found this 3.77 acres. We bought it with money we borrowed from Bandera Bank but were able to pay it back within a year using the grants that Mr. Wise helped us get from various foundations."

By early 2004, Helping Hand's crisis intervention center was complete. At the building's dedication, then-board President Comellia Rue announced that the next structure they would build was a free medical clinic to serve the county's uninsured residents. But no one had any idea where the money would come from.

Enter Kerrville businessman Arthur Nagel, who approached the pastor of a local church and told him God had given him a vision to start a medical clinic in Bandera. The pastor introduced Parks to Nagel, who donated \$150,000 to construct the shell of the clinic building on the Village of Hope grounds. Within a year, Helping Hand had raised enough money to complete the clinic and operate it for a year. The clinic formed its own nonprofit and opened its door to patients in 2008.

Today the Arthur Nagel Community Clinic is open three days a week. In addition to primary care, the clinic offers mental health services and teen and elder care programs. Healthy cooking and cardio fitness classes are also available. The clinic provided an estimated \$1.9 million in health services to 443 Bandera County residents in 2023, says clinic director Chuck Lutke.

The food pantry stays stocked thanks to food and cash donations from individuals and contributions from other food banks. As a result, Helping Hand can feed an average of 130 families a month.

At the thrift store, which thrives on steady donations of gently used clothing and household items, residents purchase what they need at affordable prices. Sales cover nearly three-fourths of Helping Hand's annual operating budget.

"Helping Hand is about community," Parks says. "We all work as a team. I see us as a community of 'hands' that resources pass through. Each one of us has been through hard times and knows what a little compassion and love can mean in a crisis situation.

"Helping people get back on their feet and feeling good about themselves as they overcome whatever they're going through is a privilege.

"It's not a *handout*, it's a *hand up*." ■

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The Village of Hope welcomes folks who have hit hard times. Angelica Hernandez greets patients at the medical clinic, which is open three days a week. The food pantry can feed 130 families a month.

TCP See this story on our website to donate to the Village of Hope.

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⁵Using U.S. and imported parts.

Joe M. Lockhart was a district manager at Pedernales Electric Cooperative. His son, Joe M.T. Lockhart, is a journeyman lineworker at Bluebonnet. They are part of a four-generation lineage of lineworkers.



The **LOCKHART** lineage

Four generations in this Central Texas family have carried on a tradition that began in 1917 and continues today at Bluebonnet.

Story by Alyssa Meinke ● Photos by Sarah Beal

GROWING UP, Joe M.T. Lockhart briefly dreamed that he might become a second baseman for the Texas Rangers. As they typically do, childhood dreams usually give way to adult realities. “I needed a career that would support a family. It didn’t take long for me to realize that career was line work,” he said.

Line work is what the Lockhart family does. The young man would follow the same path as his father, grandfather and great-great-grandfather.

He is the fourth generation of the Lockhart family to work on electric lines in Texas. The first was Tom Womack, a veteran of the Spanish-American War who got a job in 1917 stringing lines at a Waco military base. Joe M.T.’s grandfather, Joe P. Lockhart, was a lineworker and his father, Joe M. Lockhart, began his career as a

lineworker. Now, Joe M.T. Lockhart, 32, is a journeyman lineworker at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

Finding several generations of lineworkers in one family isn’t rare. Bluebonnet employs 118 lineworkers who restore power and help maintain more than 12,800 miles of power lines, and of those, 18 are following in their father’s — or grandfather’s or father-in-law’s — footsteps.

“It’s an act of service that fosters a sense of pride and connection,” said Joe M.T. Lockhart, who works out of Bluebonnet’s Maxwell service center in Caldwell County.

The work is complicated and dangerous, and, as with police, firefighters and other first responders, line work can become part of who you are. Not many can do it. Communities and rural residents cannot function without the work of people who build, repair and protect the

Story continued on Page 19

Lineworker LEGACIES



At Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, many have followed in the footsteps of their family members. Today, the next generation of lineworkers keeps the lights on, builds new power lines, maintains the electric system and watches out for each other. It's not just a job — it's a calling.



Doug Schlemmer holds his son, Jakob, at the 2003 Texas Lineman's Rodeo in Seguin. Jakob followed his father into the line work field. Read more about the Schlemmers on **Page 18C**. *Family photo*



At left, Trey Townsend descends a pole behind his father, Bubba, at a new construction site in Red Rock. Read more about them on **Page 18**.

INSIDE THIS SECTION

- Profiles of 14 families with a legacy of line work **PAGES 18-18D**
- Find out about Bluebonnet's lineworker internship program **PAGE 18D**
- Thank a lineworker **PAGE 18D**



Trevor Eckert started as a Bluebonnet lineworker in 2020.

Johnnie and Trevor Eckert

Father: Johnnie Eckert, 64
Lives in: Brenham **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2000-2020
Previously: Journeyman lineworker

"I had been wanting to start working at the cooperative for a while, but I didn't want to leave my work with my dad. So when he sold the business, I knew it was time to go to Bluebonnet. I enjoyed being a lineman and learning all I could in my time there."

Son: Trevor Eckert, 35
Lives in: Brenham **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2020-present
Currently: Journeyman lineworker
Previously: Seven years as lineworker for the city of Brenham

"I knew that it was in my blood. I knew what the reward was, as well as the sacrifices."



Johnnie Eckert, pictured in 2003.



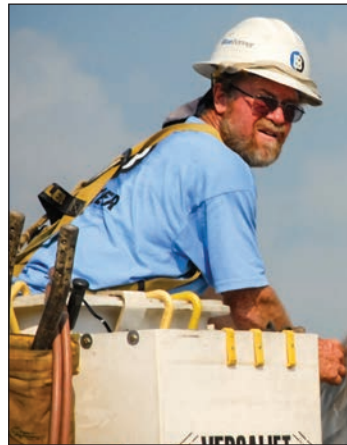
Trey Townsend, left, and his dad, Bubba.

Bubba and Trey Townsend

Father: Bubba Townsend, 52
Lives in: Bastrop
Previously: General electrician helper in high school, worked two years at Bluebonnet; lineworker crew supervisor for Austin Energy; lineworker crew supervisor for city of Bastrop
Years at Bluebonnet: 2022-present
Currently: Lineworker crew supervisor

Son: Trey Townsend, 23
Lives in: Rockne
Years at Bluebonnet: 2019-present
Currently: Apprentice lineworker
Previously: Worked on a ranch in Bastrop

"I would tell (would-be lineworkers) what my dad told me when I said I wanted to do this work: You have to be willing to work hard, but it is a very rewarding career. It is great to be able to see a problem through until the lights are back on for members."



Larry Bittner, above, shown in 2006. His son-in-law Kyle Kasper, right, started at Bluebonnet in 2005.



Monroe Bittner, Larry Bittner and Kyle Kasper

Father: Monroe Bittner, died at 80 in 2013
Worked in: Giddings **Years at Bluebonnet:** 1957-1993
Worked as: Journeyman lineworker
Previously: Built telephone lines for U.S. Army

Son: Larry Bittner, 63
Lives in: Giddings **Years at Bluebonnet:** 1978-2022
Previously: Journeyman lineworker

"My dad taught me the most out of anyone at Bluebonnet. I worked with him as a helper from a young age. He taught me how to climb on a pole outside of our house."

Son-in-law: Kyle Kasper, 40
Lives in: Giddings **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2005-present **Currently:** Lineworker crew supervisor
Previously: Member of Bluebonnet's first class of apprentice lineworkers

"Larry has taught me how to manage the time away from family, the sacrifices your family has to make because of your job, and how to be there for them. I got pretty lucky with a wife who understands the nature of the job."



Monroe Bittner worked for Bluebonnet for more than 35 years.

Ernest and Izaac Estrada

Father: Ernest Estrada, 45
Lives in: Gonzales **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2010-present
Currently: Contractor inspector
Previously: Lineworker crew supervisor, electrician
"When I joined Bluebonnet, I knew I would be home almost every night. My boys could count on that."

Son: Izaac Estrada, 24
Lives in: Gonzales **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2023-present
Currently: Apprentice lineworker
Previously: Army Reserves
"You have to sacrifice being comfortable. When it is hot, cold, raining, snowing, or any other kind of bad weather, the linemen are out in it."



Ernest Estrada, right, became a Bluebonnet lineworker in 2010. His son, Izaac, joined Bluebonnet in 2023.



Family photos, above

Walter Urban, left, around 1944. His son, Vernon Urban, center, worked alongside him for Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative, which became Bluebonnet in 1965. Garrett Urban, right.

Walter, Vernon and Garrett Urban

Great-grandfather: Walter Urban, died at 62 in 1965
Lived in: Giddings **Years at Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative (the co-op's name before it was Bluebonnet):** 1939-early '50s
Worked as: Lineworker

Grandfather: Vernon Urban, died at 42 in 1966
Years at LCREC (Bluebonnet): Mid-1940s-early 1950s
Lived in: Giddings **Worked as:** Lineworker
Lineage: His son, Gene Urban, 66, has worked at Bluebonnet for 33 years, and today is the cooperative's manager of facilities

Great-grandson: Garrett Urban, 36
Lineage: Gene's son, Vernon's grandson and Walter's great-grandson
Lives in: Giddings **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2020-present
Currently: Journeyman lineworker

"It is a great trade to learn, and the field is ever-growing. It's rewarding when you can get members' power restored during a storm, but it is also a challenge. You have to be willing to work hard in bad weather."

David, Douglas and Tyler Grimm

Father/grandfather: David Grimm, died at 67 in 2020
Lived in: Lincoln
Years at Bluebonnet: 1973-2020
Worked as: Lineworker crew supervisor, right-of-way superintendent

Son: Douglas Grimm, 42
Lives in: Lexington
Years at Bluebonnet: 2001-present
Currently: Contractor inspector
Previously: Lineworker crew supervisor

Grandson/nephew: Tyler Grimm, 25 (Douglas' nephew and David's grandson)
Lives in: Giddings
Years at Bluebonnet: 2022-present
Currently: Apprentice lineworker

"My grandfather taught me a lot about taking my time with a job. He showed a lot of patience and persistence when teaching me stuff when I was younger. That showed me how I needed to approach line work and the other linemen I work with. My uncle has taught me that you will learn something new every day, and to never stop learning."



Douglas Grimm, left, and his nephew Tyler Grimm. Douglas holds a photo of his father, David, who died in 2020.



Kenneth Saegert, below, has worked in the electric distribution industry more than 30 years. His son, Tucker, left, joined Bluebonnet in 2022.



Kenneth and Tucker Saegert

Father: Kenneth Saegert, 52
Lives in: Elgin
Previously: Lineworker at Bluebonnet for two years in the early 1990s; worked at Austin Energy for 29 years, retired
Currently: Returned to work at Austin Energy in 2021, inspecting poles

Son: Tucker Saegert, 19
Lives in: Elgin
Previously: Manager of a Bastrop barbecue restaurant
Years at Bluebonnet: 2022-present
Currently: Apprentice lineworker

"I worried about my dad when he was gone when I was younger, but knowing the guys around him were going to make sure he got home safely made those worries go away as I got older."



Lloyd Catchings, left, and his grandson Joseph Carrillo, had a snapshot taken together following Hurricane Laura in 2020. They were helping restore power for different companies, but were working in the same area. *Family photo*

Lloyd Catchings and Joseph Carrillo

Grandfather: Lloyd Catchings, 73
Lives in: Bastrop County
Previously: Began working at electric utilities in 1968; lineworker at LCRA; lineworker and lineworker crew supervisor at Austin Energy; retired in 2023

Grandson: Joseph Carrillo, 31
Lives in: Cedar Creek
Years at Bluebonnet: 2022-present
Currently: Journeyman lineworker
Previously: In the electric utility business since 2011; power-line contract companies

"Being a lineman will teach you a lot about yourself and the things you can accomplish, both mentally and physically. My grandfather taught me to approach a job by breaking it down into steps, and to look for the safest way possible to complete a job."



Dean Meinke, above, has worked at Bluebonnet 37 years. His son Colton, left, started at Bluebonnet in 2016.

Dean and Colton Meinke

Father: Dean Meinke, 61
Lives in: Ledbetter **Years at Bluebonnet:** 1983-2020 (full-time, started as lineworker), 2021-present (part-time)
Worked as: Lineworker crew supervisor, maintenance supervisor, other positions
Currently: Part-time maintenance specialist

Son: Colton Meinke, 31
Lives in: Ledbetter **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2016-present
Currently: Substation technician; assists lineworkers with power restoration
Previously: Control center operator

"I've learned a lot from my dad, from names of parts to field lingo, how things work and their purpose. I call him a lot of times to get his reassurance that I'm doing things right."

Jim, David, Joey, James, Dalton and Austin Tobola, Phillip Ellis

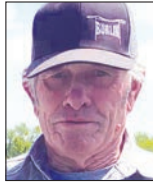
Father: Jim Tobola, died at 74 in 2022
Lives in: Giddings **Experience:** 55 years at power-line construction contractors; majority on Bluebonnet's electric system
Previously: Built communications lines for the U.S. Army

Son: David Tobola, 48
Lives in: Giddings **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2002-present
Worked as: Journeyman lineworker, lineworker crew supervisor, field operations superintendent
Currently: Manager of field operations

"The best part about this job is the bonds we have with everyone. They aren't just co-workers, they are family."

Son: Joey Tobola, 45
Lives in: Bastrop
Years at Bluebonnet: 2002-2014, 2019-present
Worked as: Journeyman lineworker, field operations superintendent
Currently: Manager of contractor operations
Previously: Lineworker and supervisor at power-line construction contractors

"My favorite part of line work is making something out of nothing and caring for power lines, equipment and people."



H.J. 'Jim' Tobola, upper left, was the father of David Tobola, above left, the grandfather of Austin and Dalton and the father of Joey, right. His son-in-law, Phillip Ellis, center left, and son James, lower left.

Son: James Tobola, 51
Lives in: Bastrop
Currently: Lineworker crew supervisor at power-line construction contractors

Son-in-law: Phillip Ellis, 48
Lives in: Giddings
Years at Bluebonnet: 2005-present
Worked as: Journeyman lineworker, substation and transmission supervisor
Currently: Manager of technical services

Grandson: Dalton Tobola, 24, James Tobola's son
Lives in: Bastrop **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2024-present
Currently: Journeyman lineworker **Previously:** Five years at power-line construction contractors

"Being able to help a team of people working toward the goal of getting the power back on is the best part of line work."

Grandson: Austin Tobola, 19, David Tobola's son
Lives in: Giddings
Currently: Lineworker at power-line construction contractors since 2023 high school graduation

Alton Sommerfield, left, began his line work career for the city of Brenham. His son, Eric, works for Bluebonnet.



Alton and Eric Sommerfield

Father: Alton Sommerfield, 63
Lives in: Brenham
Currently: City of Brenham's deputy general manager of utilities since 2020
Previously: Lineworker for the city of Brenham since 1979

Son: Eric Sommerfield, 35
Lives in: Brenham
Years at Bluebonnet: 2018-present
Currently: Lineworker crew supervisor in Brenham
Previously: Six years at power-line construction contractors

"When I started, my dad always reminded me to wear my gloves and other personal protective equipment. Now that I have a family, I see why he was so adamant about that."

Doug and Jakob Schlemmer

Father: Doug Schlemmer, 57
Lives in: La Grange
Years at Bluebonnet: 1984-2006; 2014-present
Currently: Contractor inspector
Previously: Meter reader, line-design technician, lineworker crew supervisor

"I tried to teach him to be safe. Something I always told him is that he should come home the way he left. And that he should always check these three things: hard hat, gloves and ground chains. I still worry about him every day, though."

Son: Jakob Schlemmer, 24
Currently: Journeyman lineworker for Texas New Mexico Power
Previously: Lineworker helper at Bluebonnet



Doug Schlemmer, left, a Bluebonnet lineworker for 32 years, with his son Jakob, who has been a lineworker for five years for Texas New Mexico Power.

Doug and Stephen Braneff

Father: Doug Braneff, 76

Lives in: Bastrop **Years at Bluebonnet:** 1985-2006

Worked as: Lineworker crew supervisor, superintendent of operations

Previously and after: 33 years at power-line construction companies

"Even with all the safety practices, there are still elements out there that can be dangerous. A lot of people say you're not your brother's keeper, but whenever you're on a line crew, you are your brother's keeper."

Son: Stephen Braneff, 34

Lives in: Bastrop **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2023-present

Works as: Apprentice lineworker

Previously: 14 years as a lineworker at power-line construction contractors

"You sacrifice your time away from your family to ensure everyone has power, and as a lineman, there's no greater feeling than to get somebody's lights on who's been without power."



Stephen, left, is one of four Braneff sons who followed their father Doug into the electric distribution industry.

Bill and John Matejcek

Father: Bill Matejcek, 69

Lives in: Giddings **Years at Bluebonnet:** 1982-1995

Worked as: Lineworker, manager of safety

After: Ten years at power-line construction contractors

"If you want to become a lineman, make sure you go to a good company that cares about their employees, that is very safety-oriented, like Bluebonnet, and learn from them."

Son: John Matejcek, 45

Lives in: Giddings **Years at Bluebonnet:** 2005-present

Works as: Journeyman lineworker

Previously: Eight years at power-line construction contractors

"What made my dad a good lineman was his patience in teaching someone who had no idea about the job. You have to do the job safely. That's the priority. So everybody goes home at night."



Bill Matejcek, left, and his son, John, both pursued careers in line work.

Bluebonnet's lineworker internship program

BLUEBONNET Electric Cooperative offers lineworker internships to hire and train the next generation of employees to master the difficult job.

The intern program began in 2018 and focuses on hiring local candidates, including recent high school graduates. The program starts with six months of classroom instruction and field observation at Bluebonnet. There is a strong 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's licenses. After that, they start as apprentices, training in the field alongside journeyman lineworkers.

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 lineworkers.

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

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 lineworker training program, go to bluebonnet.coop/careers.

Thank a lineworker

NATIONAL Lineworker Appreciation Day is April 8. It is a chance to thank the men and women who work day and night, 365 days a year, to build, restore and maintain the nation's — and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's — power supply system.

Electric cooperatives observe the second Monday in April as National Lineworker Appreciation Day, after a 2014 decision by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Check Bluebonnet's social media on April 8 for a video tribute to lineworkers, describing the qualities and skills their jobs entail. You can help us thank the cooperative's lineworkers by leaving a comment on our video or by sending us a private message.

Story continued from Page 16

power lines that snake across Bluebonnet's 3,800-square-mile service area. The lineworkers keep electricity flowing to homes and grocery stores, farms and hospital emergency rooms, small shops and big factories.

Still, the Lockhart family history is remarkable. In a rapidly changing world where fewer and fewer children step into their parents' professions, four generations in the same challenging career is unusual. The Lockharts also reflect not just one family's work, but that of the thousands of men and women, companies and politicians who brought electric power to Texas.

The story has played out for more than a century, beginning during World War I with a man named Foster Boone "Tom" Womack, skipping a generation and continuing through three generations of Lockharts, each named Joe.

The fourth generation: Joe M.T. Lockhart

As a child, Joe M.T. Lockhart would occasionally go to work with his dad. At age 6, he saw his father on the equipment loading dock as a lineworker. When he was 11, he watched his dad in a control center of Texas Power & Light as power lines were monitored and crews dispatched where needed.

Joe M.T. was 21 and working in the kitchen of the H-E-B Center at Cedar Park, an arena for sports, concerts and shows about 20 miles north of Austin, when he got the call. Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, based in McGregor, wanted him in for an interview. He immediately told his supervisor, "Man, I've got to go. My dream job just called."

He accepted the job the day after his interview.

Joe M.T. started linework at Heart of Texas in 2013, then spent four years with Nueces Electric Cooperative near the Texas Gulf Coast. After that, he worked for private power-line contracting companies until 2021, when he joined Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's apprentice lineworker program.

He completed training and received his journeyman lineworker certification from the Department of Labor in 2022.

On good days, Joe M.T. repairs streetlights and installs new meters and transformers. He connects new service and repairs electric equipment on Bluebonnet's system. On bad days — when the weather is raging, wind is blowing and outages are occurring — he and other lineworkers brave harsh conditions to inspect lines and equipment, identifying and addressing issues to restore power to the cooperative's members.

The work is more than just a family legacy. It's about community, and one story in



Joe M.T. Lockhart is proud of his lineworker heritage, sporting a tattoo on his right forearm that reads 'Lineman 4th Gen.'

particular illustrates that.

He was working at Nueces Electric Cooperative, based in Robstown east of Corpus Christi, when Hurricane Harvey hit Texas in August 2017. It is one of many major storms Joe M.T. has worked over the years.

At the end of one 16-hour shift, he and co-worker Robert Vasquez had just finished restoring power to about 100 people on a county road in Orange Grove, 36 miles west of Corpus Christi. "As we were coming down this county road, all the cars had stopped and there were about 40 people on the road, blocking our way out," Joe M.T. recalled.

The two men were worried that they were about to confront a mob of people angry because they had been without electricity for four days. "We slowly get out of the truck, thinking, 'What's about to happen to us?'" But to Lockhart's and Vasquez's surprise, they were met with water, brisket sandwiches,



Joe M. Lockhart, in 1994 when he worked for Texas Power & Light, based in Irving. Family photos

The Lockhart lineage

Great-great-grandfather: Foster Boone 'Tom' Womack 1878-1938

Grandfather: Joe P. Lockhart 1940-1999

Father: Joe M. Lockhart (1946-)

Son: Joe M.T. Lockhart (1992-)

chips and smiles.

"They gave us their last food and water because we had just gotten their lights back on, and they didn't let us leave until we finished," Joe M.T. said. "It made me feel very special. These people just wanted to thank us. That was a big deal."

Joe M.T. carried that connection to community with him when he joined Bluebonnet. He lives in San Marcos with his 10-year-old daughter, Faith. His parents, Cissy and Joe M. Lockhart, stay with Faith when her father is at work. Joe M.T. Lockhart's parents understand the demands of the job, because his father worked at electric utilities for 39 years.

The third generation: Joe M. Lockhart

Cissy Lockhart, 64, remembers meeting Joe M. Lockhart in Bedford, 24 miles west of Dallas, in 1985. Joe M. was working for an electrical contractor. "He fell madly in love with me," she said. Joe M. wanted to marry Cissy right away, but she told him he was crazy and needed to give it a year. So he did.

The couple married in 1986.

At the time, Joe M. was early in his lineworker training, and "line work was all he talked about," even talking about it in his sleep, she said.

"His father talked about it when they got together," she said. "It's just part of their DNA."

Joe M. became a lineworker in 1985 at Texas Power & Light — now a part of Oncor, an investor-owned electric provider based in Irving. Over time he became a dispatcher, then supervisor of the West Distribution Operations Center. Eventually, he became a district manager for Johnson City-based Pedernales Electric Cooperative, the largest electric cooperative in the United States. He retired in 2022, at 58 years old. He and Cissy now live in Spring Branch, west of San Marcos.

In his time, Joe M. saw advancements in personal protective equipment, fire-retardant clothing, and the shift away from manual and corded tools. But it remained — and remains — tough work.

"You could just about bet by the time a lineman hit his mid-to-late 40s, his shoulders were going to be gone, his elbows were going to be gone and his knees were going to be

Story continued on next page

Story continued from previous page

gone,” he said.

Some aspects of linework remain timeless: stringing power lines, positioning poles and restoring power in the wake of outages. “You still have to plan,” Joe M. emphasized, stressing the unchanged importance of preparation and foresight in the trade.

He learned it from his dad, Joe P. Lockhart, the second generation to carry on the family legacy.

The second generation: Joe P. Lockhart

Joe P. Lockhart started as a lineworker in 1957 at Texas Power & Light and spent 35 years with the company. He was an assistant superintendent in Tyler from 1969 to 1971, superintendent in Hillsboro from 1971 to 1976, and then held jobs in Waxahachie and Euless from 1976 to 1985.

Before he retired in 1992, he was the fleet manager for Texas Power & Light’s eastern region in Tyler. He passed away in 1999, at 59, in Tyler.

Service came naturally to his household. While Joe P. did linework and volunteered in the community, his wife, Kathryn, was an occupational therapist helping mentally disabled adults.

The couple had three children, all of whom would find jobs centered on helping



Joe P. Lockhart, left, walks with a colleague in downtown Waco in the 1950s. *Family photo*

poles the hard way, digging spurs into the wood and climbing.

Joe M. recalls the moment, sometime around 1971, when his father, who by then



Joe P. Lockhart died in 1999 at age 59.

was overseeing all lineworkers at Texas Power & Light in Hillsboro, brought home a new piece of equipment — one of the company’s first bucket trucks.

“They set it up in the middle of the street. We got in the bucket, and I figured out real quick that that was pretty fun,” Joe M. said, likening it to a carnival ride.

Bucket trucks marked a turning point in linework, heralding a new era of efficiency and safety. And the one parked on Joe P. Lockhart’s street more than 50 years ago helped give rise to his son’s career, continuing the legacy started by his grandfather-in-law Foster Boone “Tom” Womack.

The first generation: Foster Boone ‘Tom’ Womack

In 1917, electric lines were just creeping into major Texas cities, often constructed by the military to power streetlights.

After serving in the Army during the

TIMELINE OF LINEWORKER EQUIPMENT

1875-1900

No lineworker safety standards had been developed, and much of the equipment was handmade.

EARLY HEADGEAR

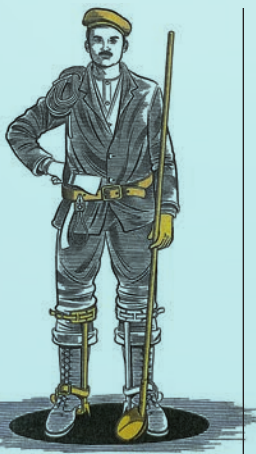
Lineworkers often wore hats made of felt or leather.

HOMEMADE BELTS

Lineworkers fashioned belts long enough to wrap around a pole — or they climbed freestyle.

CLIMBING SPIKES

Homemade gear had only upper and lower straps and lacked pads.



DIGGING TOOLS

Workers dug holes by hand with digging spoons, bars and shovels.

BARE HANDS

Lineworkers rarely wore gloves of any kind.

There were limited safety rules and training. Lineworkers de-energized lines to restore power, but as demand grew, working on electrified lines became more common.

HOMEMADE HOT STICKS

Lineworkers made their own of heavily varnished wood to keep out moisture. The sticks allowed them to extend their reach.

STANDARDIZATION

Belts and safety straps became common.

LEATHER TOOL BAGS

Introduced to carry climbing and work tools.



RUBBER GLOVES

They were introduced around 1915, along with other rubberized equipment.

1901-1925

The electric industry developed more formalized safety rules and procedures. In the late 1930s, apprentice programs with stricter safety standards also began.

HOT STICKS

The first extendable sticks came into use, allowing workers to perform more tasks without climbing.

HATS

The transition to hardhats came late in this time period. Before that, most linemen wore soft, Stetson-style hats.



HYDRAULICS

A-frame digger trucks evolved into hydraulic derrick trucks with augers, making work safer, more efficient.

1926-1950

Spanish-American War, Foster Boone “Tom” Womack got a job building power lines at Camp MacArthur in Waco, a military training facility created for World War I. The sprawling camp closed down after the war in March 1919, but the power lines Womack built laid the groundwork for Waco’s electric system.

Womack’s daughter, Mary Billon Womack White, told later generations some details of her father’s work. Tom Womack went on to become an engineer, helping design a power plant in Robstown, according to family records.

In the mid-1930s, the Rural Electrification Act unleashed millions of dollars in federal loan guarantees, and power lines began stretching into the rural reaches of Texas. Within a decade, cooperatives, including Bluebonnet, were formed to get power to communities where private utilities saw little chance for profits.

Back then, a house was typically wired for a few appliances, and one overhead light and outlet per room.

Womack passed away in 1938 in Waco. At some point in his career, he started electrical contracting work, wiring Waco homes for electricity for the first time. “My grandmother said these people used to think the house was on fire because of all the light,” Joe M. said. “They weren’t used to that.”

Mary also remembered some unique



Joe M.T. Lockhart joined Bluebonnet’s journeyman ranks in 2022 after completing the co-op’s apprentice lineworker program.

memorabilia, including the metal hooks her father attached to his shoes to climb poles. Little did she know that the next iteration of these tools would resurface in the hands of her son-in-law, Joe P. Lockhart, bridging the gap between past and present as key to the family tradition of line work.

The evolution and allure of line work

Work on power lines demands a unique blend of physical prowess and technical expertise, and constant attention to life-threatening hazards. Over the years that the Lockharts have been tending the lines, some traditional tools, like Klein Tools’ lineman’s pliers and Super 33+ electrical tape are still in use.

Lineworkers have come to rely on specialized equipment to ensure their safety. This includes fire-retardant clothing, fiberglass tools designed for electric work and battery-powered drills that replaced manual and corded drills.

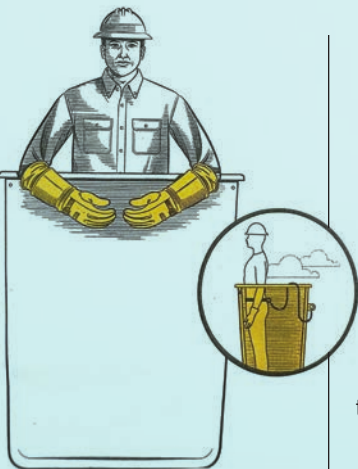
Hydraulic machines have replaced spears for drilling holes for power poles, further enhancing efficiency while keeping workers safe.

Training and equipment have improved, but lineworkers still must prioritize safety and focus on details to keep them and their coworkers safe.

“It’s a dangerous job and it’s not for everyone,” said Joe M. Lockhart, whose father always told him to “be careful.” That simple, gentle reminder of the challenges of line work is one that has been repeated hundreds – perhaps thousands – of times in the Lockhart family, from generation to generation. ■

1951-1970

Fiberglass sticks and improved rubber gloves accompanied more formal rules and training. This period also brought the bucket truck, underground lines and improved communication devices.



BUCKET TRUCKS

Insulated buckets on trucks included fall-protection safety equipment.

SAFER GLOVES

Lineworkers used two pairs of gloves – leather on top of rubber – for more protection.

TWO-WAY RADIOS

New applications of radio technology improved communication during emergencies and power restoration after storms.

1971-1990

President Richard Nixon signed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration law. Installation of underground lines became widespread. Bucket trucks and hydraulic and mechanical compression tools improved working conditions.



RUBBER SLEEVE IMPROVEMENTS

Sleeves extended to the shoulder for more protection.

HARD HATS
Head protection made from thermoplastics became common.

IMPROVED HOT STICKS

Workers could stay on the ground, using extendable fiberglass sticks to open or close switches or remove vegetation.

1991-present

OSHA began requiring utilities to provide lineworkers with clothing to protect from electrical arc-flashes and the use of fall-protection devices like body harnesses and fall-arrest lanyards.



INSULATED HARD HATS

Hard hats include polyethylene to protect against blows to the head.

SAFER GEAR, CLOTHING

Harnesses, lanyards and clothes that protect workers from electric arcing improve safety.

TABLETS

Mobile devices help lineworkers navigate and troubleshoot problems.

Illustrations, information courtesy of National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

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Submit your proxy: Make your voice heard and have a chance to win great prizes

SUBMITTING YOUR PROXY or attending Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting ensures your voice is heard and is one of the advantages of being a member of an electric cooperative. Whether you attend the Annual Meeting on Tuesday, May 14, or submit a proxy form, you'll also have a chance to win a prize.

The biggest prize is a 2011 Ford F-150 extended cab four-wheel-drive truck that is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. The truck has about 144,000 miles.

Proxy forms were mailed to members in March. If you will not be able to attend in person, complete and sign your proxy form and mail it back using the self-addressed, postage-prepaid envelope or hand it to a representative at any of our five member service centers.

Any member who completes a proxy form by mail, postmarked by May 7, 2024, or who submits it in person at a member service center before 5 p.m. May 7, will be entered in a drawing for the truck and other prizes, including a Yeti Tundra 45 cooler, a Vizio 50-inch TV or a Bissell cordless vacuum.

The names of prize winners will be drawn at random on days leading up to the Annual Meeting.



Members who submit a proxy form will be entered into a drawing to win this 2011 Ford F-150 4x4 pickup truck being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet, in addition to other prizes. *Sarah Beal photo*

Any member attending the Annual Meeting on May 14 will be entered in drawings for the truck and multiple door prizes.

If you cannot find your proxy form, you can pick up a new form at a member service

center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Get more information about proxy forms and Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting on this magazine's cover wrap or online at bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting.

Bluebonnet shines blue to raise awareness of Child Abuse Prevention Month

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative's five member service centers will shine blue at night throughout April to raise awareness of Child Abuse Prevention Month and the region's organizations that support families affected by abuse and neglect. Keep an eye on the cooperative's social media pages this month for information on resources, ways to get involved and community events.

In the Bluebonnet area, three Court Appointed Special Advocates, or CASA, programs, cover 11 counties and work to help children in the state's welfare systems.

The Children's Advocacy Center, which serves Bastrop, Lee and Fayette counties, offers care, support and services to children who have been abused. The SAFE Alliance nonprofit, which operates in eastern Travis County, supports children, adults and families who have experienced abuse.

These local organizations welcome both adult volunteers and donations.

At CASA, volunteers undergo a rigorous screening process, which includes a pre-screening interview and background check, and a comprehensive 30-hour training program to assist children in the foster-care system. CASA volunteers also gain experience through



Bluebonnet's member service centers will be lit in blue throughout the month of April to raise awareness of Child Abuse Prevention Month. *Sarah Beal photo*

courtroom observation.

Once approved, volunteers may be appointed by judges to work on specific cases, advocating for one child or a set of siblings at a time. Get more information at texascasa.org.

The Children's Advocacy Center team, along with SAFE Alliance volunteers, are devoted to providing comprehensive services to eradicate violence.

To report suspected child abuse, call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 800-252-5400, or submit a report online at txabusehotline.org. In case of immediate danger to a child, call 911 to contact local law enforcement.

Find out more about the region's abuse assistance agencies online at <https://bluebonnet.coop/child-abuse-prevention>.

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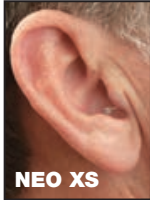
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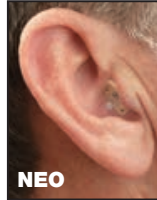
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Republic's End

'Many a manly cheek was wet with tears' when the Texian flag was lowered for the last time

BY W.F. STRONG

IN ABOUT A YEAR and a half—December 29, 2025—we'll mark the 180th year of Texas statehood. That's the day the proudest of Texans would say the U.S. was allowed to join Texas.

The vast majority of Texans—95%—voted for statehood, a level of agreement we haven't enjoyed since. President James Polk signed the joint resolution making Texas a state December 29, 1845, but there was some confusion as to the official moment that the Republic of Texas passed into history and statehood status began.

Anson Jones, president of the republic at that time, said that February 19, 1846, was the actual day that the republic

ceased to exist. That day, Anson presided over a ceremony in Austin where the flag of the young but venerable republic was lowered for the last time and the U.S. flag was raised in its place.

You see, Texas couldn't just let President Polk's signing of a document 1,300 miles away be all there was to the moment. They couldn't allow the republic that so many had died for to pass into history without properly memorializing the occasion.

So Jones arranged a ceremony in front of the Texas Capitol, really just a wooden house at that time, to mourn the passing of the republic and to celebrate Texas as the newest (and by far the largest) state in the union.

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



What was needed here was what linguists call a speech act, a moment in time where something is made real by virtue of pronouncement.

Jones began with "I, as president of the Republic ... am now present to surrender into the hands of those whom the people have chosen, the power and the authority which we have some time held."

Noah Smithwick, a blacksmith in attendance, recorded the moment the Texas flag came down. Here is what transpired in that brief ceremony.

"Many a head was bowed, many a broad chest heaved, and many a manly cheek was wet with tears when that broad field of blue in the center of which, like a signal light, glowed the lone star, emblem of the sovereignty of Texas, was furled and laid away among the relics of the dead republic."

The U.S. flag was raised, and the mood changed dramatically.

"We were most of us natives of the United States, and when the stars and stripes, the flag of our fathers, was run up and catching the breeze unrolled its heaven born colors to the light, cheer after cheer rent the air," Smithwick recalled.

He tended toward that creature still common in Texas—the exceptionally proud Texan. Smithwick thought the star in the lower left corner of the U.S. flag should have been especially dedicated to Texas.

The exchanging of the flags made one statement. Jones made another: "The Republic of Texas is no more." He made it politically true but never absolute because the republic lives on in the minds of Texans who still think of it as their country and their nation. ■

Perfect Potluck

Dishes so good you'll be tempted to eat them en route

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Iliana de la Vega, esteemed owner of the Austin restaurant El Naranjo, shares her ultimate potluck dish: "*Rajas poblanas* (poblano strips) is a vegetarian dish that goes beautifully with grilled meats or fish but also with rice and pasta. You can make tacos with it or even use the rajas as a filling for quesadillas and omelets."



Rajas Poblanas

6 poblano chiles, seeds and veins removed

1 tablespoon canola oil

1 white onion, julienned

1 cup crema Mexicana

Salt, to taste

Corn tortillas

COOK'S TIP If crema Mexicana is unavailable where you shop, making your own is simple. Combine 1 cup heavy cream, 1 cup sour cream, 1 teaspoon salt and 1 tablespoon lime juice, and stir until smooth.

1. Preheat broiler. Place poblanos on a baking sheet. Roast under broiler, carefully flipping with tongs until charred on all sides, about 5 minutes. Place charred poblanos in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap until cooled enough to handle, about 15 minutes.

2. Remove skin from chiles. Slice them lengthwise into strips ½ inch thick.

3. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté the onion just until soft; do not brown.

4. Add the chile strips (rajas) and the crema Mexicana. Cook the chile mixture until heated through, about 5 minutes. Season with salt.

5. Serve immediately with warm corn tortillas.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mexican Corn Salad.



Perfect Potato Salad

CHERYL LEE
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Lee's potato salad is hearty and tangy, with a hint of freshness from the dill. It was so tasty and good that I'd eat plates of it by itself—no need for any of the bris-ket, sausage or hot dogs being served.

- 10 small russet potatoes, unpeeled, rinsed and cubed**
- 1 cup mayonnaise**
- 4 tablespoons mustard**
- 1 large onion, finely diced**
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic**
- 1 tablespoon ground oregano**
- 1 teaspoon onion salt**
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt**
- 8 hard-boiled eggs, cubed**
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill for serving**

- 1.** Place potatoes in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until potatoes are fork tender, about 10 minutes. Drain and allow to cool.
- 2.** In a large bowl, stir together mayonnaise, mustard, onion, garlic, oregano, onion salt and garlic salt. Gently stir in potatoes and eggs.
- 3.** Chill until ready to serve.
- 4.** Sprinkle with dill before serving.

SERVES 20

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Easy Chicken Spaghetti Casserole

DONNA KENNEDY
WOOD COUNTY EC



I love this casserole because it's so simple to make. Leftovers heat up great on day two, plus it freezes like a dream! (If there are leftovers of course.) This is serious comfort food.

SERVES 8

- 2 chicken breasts**
- 3 chicken thighs**
- 1 box spaghetti (16 ounces)**
- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter**
- ½ bell pepper, stem and seeds removed, diced**
- 1 medium onion, diced**
- 1 can cream of chicken soup (10.5 ounces)**
- 1 can cream of celery soup (10.5 ounces)**
- 1 can chicken broth (14.5 ounces)**
- 2 cups shredded mild cheddar cheese**

- 1.** Place chicken in a large saucepan, cover with water and simmer until fork tender.
- 2.** Prepare spaghetti according to package directions.
- 3.** In a skillet over medium-high heat, melt butter. Sauté bell pepper and onion until the onion is light and translucent.
- 4.** Shred chicken and mix all ingredients except cheese together in a large bowl.
- 5.** Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Spoon mixture into a 10-by-14-inch baking pan. Bake 15 minutes.
- 6.** Sprinkle cheese on top and bake 10 more minutes or until bubbly.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

FOOTBALL FAVORITES DUE APRIL 10
What do the fans of your cooking crave on game day? Send us your recipe by April 10 and you could score big: \$500.





Cold Broccoli Salad

ALEXANDRA DIBRELL
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

This is one of the best broccoli salads I've ever had. Why? It's crisp and fresh, with a pop of heat—exactly what I want broccoli salad to be. It's also seriously addictive, thanks to the sweet and tangy combination of fresh lemon juice and rice vinegar.

- 1 pound fresh broccoli**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar**
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard**
- 2 cloves garlic, minced**
- ⅛ teaspoon salt**
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes**

- 1.** Cut broccoli into bite-size pieces. Steam until tender. Allow to cool, then place in fridge.
- 2.** In a large bowl, stir together olive oil, lemon juice, rice vinegar, mustard, garlic, salt, pepper and red pepper flakes. Place in fridge to chill.
- 3.** When ready to serve, remove bowl from fridge and add broccoli, stir to coat and serve chilled.

SERVES 4

TCP Potluck options abound on our website. After trying all these here, see what else has come out of Co-op Country kitchens. Simply search for a dish or key ingredient.

Don't Leave It All to Luck

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Consider whether your contribution will add to high demand for an oven or increase crowding in the kitchen.

If you're not hosting, bring food that travels easily.

Bring the appropriate utensils for your dish: a serving spoon, pair of tongs or ladle. This way dishes won't be double-dipped, and you won't have guests grabbing food with their hands.

Consider the advantages of disposable pans: less mess, no lost casserole dishes and easier cleanup.

Consider the dietary restrictions of other guests.

Remember that beverages will be needed, and this can be your contribution.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Carried Treasure

Canton has hosted the World’s Largest Flea Market since the 1850s

BY CHET GARNER

THIS DEFINITELY wasn’t the shopping trip I expected, I thought, as I loaded an 8-foot-tall Bigfoot sculpture into the back of my truck. I had just finished securing my new (to me) cowhide, vintage street signs and antique chair. I should have brought more tow straps.

This is the experience of visiting the World’s Largest Flea Market, which happens every month in the town of Canton, midway between Dallas and Tyler. My legs, wallet and stomach were not prepared.

The tradition goes back to the 1850s when the circuit judge would make his monthly trip to town and the locals would congregate around the courthouse. They started bringing items to swap and sell: a gun for a dog or a cantaloupe for a dozen eggs. Soon a tradition was born that now attracts upwards of 150,000 visitors to First Monday Trade Days (which actually happens the weekend before the first Monday of each month).

As soon as I stepped onto the grounds, I realized that this wasn’t a normal swap meet. The official area boasts more than 5,000 vendors across 400 acres. That doesn’t even include the dozens (if not hundreds) of merchants who fill the streets and buildings of the town.

I walked from booth to booth, chatting with junkers and thrifters who had brought their special wares in search of the perfect buyer. While there was more than enough vintage “junk,” I was surprised at the unique artisans selling incredible handcrafted goods—furniture, décor and even metal tools.

Very soon I had worked up an appetite and stuffed my face with some of the best fair food in Texas, including corny dogs and “upside-down” lemonade. Hey, with all the walking I did, I figured I had earned it. And so I ordered an extra piece of peach pie. ■

ABOVE The finds for sale at First Monday Trade Days in Canton stretch across 400 acres.

TCP Join Chet as he wades through acres of stuff. Watch 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, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

APRIL

8

Kerrville Totality at the Ridge, (830) 896-0420, shopsattheridge.com

McKinney Total Eclipse of the Heard, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

12

Poteet [12–14] Strawberry Festival, 1-888-742-8144, strawberryfestival.com

13

Sealy Spring Fest, (832) 492-4244, sealyhistoricalsociety.org

Waxahachie Cowboy Gathering, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecowboy.com

Chappell Hill [13–14] Bluebonnet Festival, (979) 836-6033, chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com

Temple [13–14] Texas State Button Society Spring Show and Sale, texasstatebuttonssociety.com

19

Granbury [19–20] North Texas Gourd Festival, (903) 258-7410, texasgourdsociety.org

Lakeway [19–21] Art Walk, (512) 261-1010, lakewayartsdistrict.com

20

Burton Cotton Gin Festival, (979) 289-3378, texascottonginmuseum.org

Channing Panhandle Children’s Foundation Hogs at the Point, (806) 935-5598, talonpoint.org

26

Gun Barrel City [26-27] Quilt Show, (903) 391-3241, gunbarrelquiltersguild.org

Hallettsville [26-28] Texas State Championship Fiddlers Frolics, (361) 798-2311, fiddlersfrolics.com

Ingram [26-27, May 2, 4-5, 10-12] The Explorers' Club, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

27

Castroville Alsatian Festival of Texas, castrovilletx.gov

Corsicana Derrick Days, (903) 654-4850, derrickdays.com

Huntsville Gen. Sam Houston Day, (936) 294-1832, samhoustonmemorialmuseum.com

Lewisville ColorPalooza, (972) 219-3401, visitlewisville.com

Wimberley Pie Social, info@wimwic.org, wimwic.org

28

Bellville Fruehling Saengerfest, (713) 582-2461, bellvilleions.org

MAY

2

New Braunfels Soul Sessions' Tribute to Tina Turner, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

4

Brenham [4-5] Maifest, (979) 337-7580, brenhammaifest.com

TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your July event by May 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

Thanks a Million

The Nature Conservancy is proud to have protected **one million acres of land in Texas**. This milestone could not have been achieved without the collaborative efforts of landowners, partners and supporters across the Lone Star State. Yet, the urgency to protect and preserve Texas' treasured landscapes, rivers, wildlife and way of life is greater now than ever. Together, we can find a way to achieve even more.



nature.org/millionacremilestone



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Pollinators

All aflutter, we are humming with anticipation. Photos flew in from every corner of the state, and we managed to alight on a few critters that have crawled their way to the top. No sting of disappointment here, just a swarm of entries that leave us buzzing with excitement.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 MARK BONAME
JACKSON EC

"It is a rare sight to see hummingbirds feeding on sunflowers, but the drought this year in Texas made these little guys feed on whatever they could find."

2 CINDY VIGIL
GVEC

"Gulf fritillary butterflies love this pride of Barbados."

3 SUSAN KNAPP GIBBONS
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

A feeding butterfly.

4 GAIL EINKAUF
SAN BERNARD EC

"Taken at Sweet Berry Farm in Marble Falls."



Upcoming Contests

- DUE APR 10 Textures
- DUE MAY 10 Parenthood
- DUE JUN 10 Climbing High



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Seedy Behavior

Gardening scavengers stoop low to help native species

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS
ILLUSTRATION BY
CHANELLE NIBBELINK

COME MID-MAY, I turn into a street walker. Not *that* kind, mind you. Instead, I ply my trade with a green plastic cup and sharp eyes.

“Oh, there you are,” hollers James, my husband, who’s strolling along Greenlawn Parkway. “I figured I’d find you over here!”

My gaze is fastened on clumps of lazy daisies growing along the street. Among the white-petaled blooms with orange centers, I scan for dried seed heads. Now and then, I spot one. Happily, I lean down, pinch it off, then drop the itsy-bitsy treasure into my cup.

We walk while I scope out wildflowers that grow along a ditch. Patiently, I’m watching for Texas prairie parsleys, wine-cups and beeblossoms going to seed. I’ll collect some seeds—but not all. I want to admire them again next spring.

I also want to establish them in our yard. Since 2008, we’ve nurtured Texas native plant gardens at our Blanco home and adjoining meadow, a former vacant lot. Since then, I’ve expanded into rescuing, preserving and protecting overlooked native species that grow in our neighborhood. I collect seeds whenever I can.

Sometimes I dig up and relocate plants, too. For instance, a next-door neighbor several years ago gave me permission to transplant a yellow passionflower, Texas lespedeza and hoary false goldenaster that grew on her side of the fence, where they were often mowed down. Now the trio grows, unrestrained and lush, in our backyard.

I’ve also relocated Indian mallow, Texas snoutbean, scarlet pea, narrowleaf blue-eyed grass and Texas frogfruit to our gardens. Roemer’s mimosa, too. I love to show kids how their tiny leaves fold up when touched. Magic!

Two regular walkers once rang our doorbell. “What’s this?” asked Yalene, while daughter Arden held up a slender branch with yellow flowers. I eyeballed the specimen. Lindheimer’s senna? James and I beelined to the easement where they’d found the plant. It was twoleaf senna, a new-to-me species. A few weeks later, I collected seeds from the site, which has since been cleared. Hopefully the seeds will germinate in our meadow, and the twoleaf senna will live on.

Why go to all that trouble? Because I deeply care about these plants. Because they were here long before us. Because they’re resilient and adapted to our soils and climate. Because they, unlike most ornamental plants, sustain the pollinators and other wildlife that inhabit this place we call home.

From blunt-leaf rabbit-tobacco to zizotes milkweed, we’ve welcomed neighborhood natives into our gardens, where I hope they’ll be appreciated and perpetuated for years to come. So call me a renegade. Or call me a tree hugger. I’ll answer to either one and make no excuses.

I’m a street walker on a mission in a green-light district. ■



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