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# Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

MAY 2024

## Behind the Scenes

The real working ranch  
of TV's 'Yellowstone'

**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16



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# May 2024



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### Overpass Easels

Michael Ford's larger-than-life art merges traffic and culture along Texas highways.

*Story by Sheryl Smith-Rodgers  
Photos courtesy Michael Ford*

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### Sixes on the Small Screen

The people of the storied Four Sixes Ranch—as seen on 'Yellowstone'—work to preserve its legacy.

*Story by Margaret Buranen  
Photos by R.J. Hinkle*

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Some of the 700–800 quarter horses at the Four Sixes Ranch.  
*Photo by R.J. Hinkle*

#### ABOVE

Michael Ford with his sculpted panel that celebrates Wichita Falls' Hotter'N Hell Hundred cycling event.  
*Photo courtesy Michael Ford*





*May 16*  
**National Love  
 a Tree Day**

One of Texas' largest and oldest—Big Tree, a live oak at Goose Island State Park near Rockport—is estimated to be up to 1,100 years old.

---

**FINISH THIS  
 SENTENCE**  
 Summer means ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our March prompt: **Music makes me ...**

Forget my troubles for a little while.  
 RENEE TWEED  
 VIA FACEBOOK

Release those wonderful endorphins that make me grab a broom and give a concert for my plants and fish.  
 JAMES D. WILLIAMS  
 VIA FACEBOOK

Reminisce about the time in my life that the song came out.  
 HARRY MACK  
 UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES  
 GRAFORD

Think of the many times I danced with my dad.  
 PATTI FISHER  
 BOWIE-CASS EC  
 TEXARKANA

Connect to yesterday, hope for the future and dance today.  
 MICHELLE WINN  
 PEDERNALES EC  
 KYLE

Visit our website to see more responses.

# Wakeboard Wizardry

**FUN TIMES** for a 6-year-old wakeboarding on Coletto Creek Reservoir outside Victoria turned into a teenager's passion. And for 14 years, Blake Daniel, pictured above, practiced and competed, even as he became a distribution engineer at South Texas Electric Cooperative.

Finally, in September 2023, Daniel reached the pinnacle—capturing a wakeboarding world title in his age group in an international competition in Portugal.

"It was crazy. I can't explain it," he said. "It's something that I feel like we've been working for forever. Finally, to win is an unreal feeling."

Many family members, wearing shirts that read, "I throw Texas-sized tantrums," shared Daniel's joy. In wakeboarding lingo, tantrums are good things—blackflips on a board.

## Contests and More

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**RECOMMENDED READING**  
 On National Paranormal Day, May 3, consider the mysterious musical presence that sometimes intrudes upon a Houston library's stillness. Read *Shh!* from December 2020.



DANIEL: COURTESY BLAKE DANIEL; BABY: JOSE MANUEL GELPI DIAZ | DREAMSTIME.COM



**MARCH 2024** The Retirement of a Legend

“Danny Williams and his son, Gordon, used to come to Concho Valley Electric Cooperative for safety meetings. If you didn’t learn something from Danny, you weren’t listening.”

TOMMY EARNEST  
CONCHO VALLEY EC  
SAN ANGELO



DAVE SHAFER

**Pier Placement**

*Buoyed by Vice* [March 2024] stated that the Balinese Room “sat atop a pier that jutted into the bay.” I thought it was on the seawall, jutting out over the Gulf of Mexico.

John Eaves  
Pedernales EC  
Leander

**EDITOR’S NOTE** You’re correct. We have fixed the story online.

**Katy’s Spunk**

Gordon Jennings was my husband’s great-great-grandfather [*A Revere of Our Own*, March 2024]. I am writing the story of our family history for our eight grandchildren, and one of them is named Katy. I believe she has as much spunk as the first Katy Jennings!

Judy Jennings  
Wise EC  
Paradise

**Vintage Puzzles**

My grandfather made quite a few wooden puzzles in the 1920s and ’30s and apparently sold them, as some have labels from Vincil Novelty Co. [*Puzzling Times*, February 2024]. My brothers, all my cousins and I still have many of them.

Dorothee Johnson  
Grayson-Collin EC  
Whitesboro

**Adorable Donkeys**

As a former longtime breeder, trainer and exhibitor of donkeys, it warms my heart whenever something positive is written about these wonderful animals [*Touched by an Angel*, January 2024].

The story of Angel riding on a float during a Christmas parade was priceless.

Sandra Osborne Neeley  
United Cooperative Services  
Grandview



KATE GLEYZER

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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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# Sixes ON THE Small Screen

The people of the  
storied Four Sixes  
Ranch—as seen  
on 'Yellowstone'—  
work to preserve  
its legacy





**I**F you watched *Yellowstone* spinoff *1883*, you probably saw Joe Leathers. But you likely didn't know it.

He was on screen for about three seconds, driving cattle on horseback.

"It was a long-distance shot, so you couldn't tell it was me," he says.

It was a bit part, but Leathers is the leading man at the ranch that has become a centerpiece for the *Yellowstone* TV series. He has managed West Texas' Four Sixes Ranch since 2008.

The show and its characters are make-believe, but Leathers' work is quite real. He spends "as many days as possible" working cattle with his colleagues at the ranch, though his job keeps him out of the saddle more than he would like.

*Yellowstone*, created and written by actor Taylor Sheridan, tells the story of a fictional Montana ranch owned by the Dutton family. Four Sixes makes its on-screen debut in the fourth season, when ranch hand Jimmy Hurdstrom is sent away to improve his attitude and cowboy skills. But instead of hating it, Jimmy loves the ranch and wants to stay there.

The real-life Four Sixes covers more than a quarter-million acres, making it one of the 10 largest ranches in Texas.

The main ranch, near Guthrie, east of Lubbock, comprises 142,372 acres and gets its electricity from South Plains Electric Cooperative. In the Panhandle, the Dixon Creek Ranch division in Carson and Hutchison counties spans another 114,455 acres. A third portion, the Frisco Creek Ranch division, covers 9,428 acres in Sherman County and is served by Rita Blanca Electric Cooperative.

There are plenty of outdoor sights to film at the ranch, including sprawling fields and swift, beautiful horses herding cattle. Wildlife includes quail, deer, Barbary sheep, turkeys, wild hogs, coyotes, bobcats, migrating ducks and geese, songbirds, rattlesnakes, and even some antelope. Every year the main ranch house is surrounded by migrating butterflies for two or three days around Halloween. "It's the most beautiful sight," Leathers says.

The Burnett family established Four Sixes more than 150 years ago and passed it down for four generations.



In 1870, Samuel "Burk" Burnett bought some cattle already branded 6666 (contrary to a legend about the ranch being named for a winning poker hand). He kept on buying more land and more cattle, and the four sixes stuck.

Burnett left the ranch to his only surviving grandchild, Anne Valliant Burnett Hall (later Tandy), in trust for her unborn child. Upon the death of "Miss Anne," as she was known, in 1980, her only child, Anne Burnett Windfohr Marion, inherited her grandfather's and great-grandfather's estates, including Four Sixes.

Nowadays, Four Sixes is a whole lot more than a part-time TV set. It's still a working ranch with large herds of high-quality beef cattle and the quarter horses it breeds.

The ranch raised longhorns, shorthorns and Herefords in its earlier years, but for the past 25 years, the cattle herd has been entirely Black Angus. Leathers says this breed has provided the most consistent quality.

One thing that hasn't changed: The cattle have always been cared for the same way—on horseback. Each of the 16–18 cowboys working the ranch has several quarter horses for their work. Vaquero (Spanish for cow herder) is Leathers' favorite horse. He says the sorrel gelding "has a big motor. He's tough, very athletic and has a lot of cow sense. He's a pretty exceptional horse."

The ranch's use of quarter horses is no wonder given that Marion and Four Sixes have a deep connection with the breed. Marion's mother, Miss Anne, co-founded the American Quarter Horse Association in 1940, and Marion displayed a devotion to her animals.

"Anne [Marion] was a strong woman, a very good businessperson. She knew cattle and horses," Leathers says. "Anne was very giving and very demanding. She didn't set you up for failure. She set you up for success."

OPPOSITE The mare pasture at Four Sixes Ranch in West Texas. ABOVE Joe Leathers has managed Four Sixes, which covers more than a quarter-million acres, since 2008.



During one crisis, the drought of 2010–11, the ranch went to great lengths to keep its herd and its acres healthy.

“There was no water between Guthrie and Nebraska,” Leathers says. “We ended up taking our cattle to nine ranches in five states, leasing land to make sure we didn’t hurt our land. Our herd was not completely back home until 2015.”

After Marion assumed control of Four Sixes in 1980, she hired Dr. Glenn “Doc” Blodgett as the ranch’s resident veterinarian and horse division manager. Together they established a first-class quarter horse breeding program. Adding artificial insemination services for Four Sixes’ stallions allowed mares across the U.S. to be bred to them.

Today, Dr. Nathan Canaday fills Blodgett’s role. He and two associate veterinarians care for the ranch’s herd of 700–800 quarter horses.

Canaday first came to the ranch in 2006 as a college intern at the veterinary hospital. He returned the next summer. The experience “convinced me to become a veterinarian,” he says. “I thought if I could become a veterinarian at a large ranch like Four Sixes, I would have my dream job.” Canaday became a full-time vet at Four Sixes in 2011 and assumed his current role in 2022, after Blodgett died.

The veterinary team works out of a clinic with state-of-the-art imaging and other equipment. The hospital also serves

## ‘It’s a LOVE AFFAIR with the land of WEST TEXAS.’

other residents in the area, including several big ranches. Canaday says he and his team are the only vets within 60 miles. They treat the region’s horses for colic and lameness, do dentistry work, and even provide breeding services.

“We keep the history and culture of ranching, but we operate on the cutting edge of veterinary medicine,” Canaday says.

When Sheridan decided to add the Texas storyline to *Yellowstone*, he secured Marion’s permission to film at Four Sixes. Though shooting the show means bringing a small army of hundreds of cast and crew members to the ranch, it “really doesn’t interfere with ranch work,” Leathers says. “There’s a lot of people, equipment and vehicles, but they get it done and then they’re gone.”

Pandemic restrictions delayed the filming of Season 4 until August 2020, and it began to air in late 2021. Sadly, Marion didn’t live to see her beloved ranch on TV. She died in February 2020 at the age of 81. Her will stipulated that all her ranch holdings be sold.





OPPOSITE Boots O'Neal has been a working cowboy for more than 75 years, including 30-plus years at Four Sixes. LEFT Two of the thousands of Black Angus cattle that make up the ranch's herd.

## As Seen on TV

Before it was a backdrop for *Yellowstone*, Four Sixes was a setting for several Marlboro cigarette commercials during the 1960s. *Yellowstone's* final six episodes are set to premiere in November.

That meant Four Sixes would not be Burnett family-owned for the first time since its founding. Fortunately, a new owner who shared the family's values was interested. Sheridan, who was raised in Fort Worth, put together a group of investors and became the majority owner in 2022.

Sheridan also has a ranch down the road, in Weatherford, and another in Wyoming. But this one is special for him.

"It's a love affair with the land of West Texas," Sheridan told *Fort Worth Magazine* in 2022. "There's a tremendous amount of discipline that it takes to build a ranch like this. It takes strength, excellence, integrity and faith, and that's the main mission statement of the ranch. We're going to live up to that."

Leathers says that having all of Four Sixes under one owner helped the ranch exist for 150 years. Now that the ranch is in Sheridan's hands, "he's determined for it to be here for another 150 years," Leathers says.

"You have to make money for the ranch to be successful,

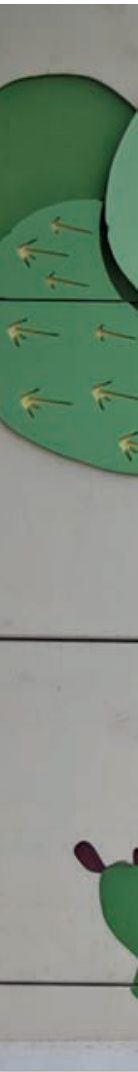
but you can still hold on to the traditions. Taylor has a passion for the cowboy life. Four Sixes will continue it on. We'll continue to be a leader in breeding and ranching."

Protecting that legacy means protecting the animals and the land of Four Sixes through conservation. The ranch works with an environmental firm and employs a variety of best practices.

To prevent soil erosion and save precious water, workers have built dams to create small lakes and ponds. They've cleared 100,000 acres of invasive mesquite and cedar. Composted manure from the barns is the only fertilizer used.

Leathers is proud of how they're caring for the land that has served generations of Texans.

"The cattle and the wildlife are not just coexisting," he says. "They're both thriving." ■



# - O - V - E - R - P - A - S - S - - E -

**Munday Mayor** Robert Bowen still remembers when he showed up at City Hall nearly two decades ago to have his picture taken. More than 350 other residents of the small Knox County town between Abilene and Wichita Falls were also there. Everyone had agreed to pose to help with the creation of a bridge mural—part of a highway project to widen and reroute U.S. 277, which now runs through the east part of town.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Munday residents are depicted in the silhouettes that detail an American flag mural in town. Michael Ford, in front of a cactus wall in San Antonio, with his signature gecko just to his right. Pelicans in Corpus Christi and cotton bolls in Lubbock.

Carvings of the residents' silhouettes now form the textured red stripes of a huge depiction of an American flag that unfurls across an overpass retaining wall where U.S. 277 crosses Texas 222. There's a boy bouncing a basketball, a wife kissing her firefighter husband, two girls holding watermelon slices, a cowboy toting his saddle. Bowen—who's still mayor—stands with two neighbors.

"Like any small town, we were worried when the highway went around us," he recalls. "But we've done OK, and we've enjoyed our mural. It's unique."

Munday's road art is among more than 50 pieces across Texas that Michael Ford designed over the course of about 14 years of working for the Texas Department of Transportation. "I've been retired 10 years, and I still get to talk





# A-S-E-L-S

about my public art,” quips Ford, who lives near Wimberley and is a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member. “I like to say my hobby became my job.”

Artistic since childhood, he served as a medical illustrator while in the Army and later worked 10 years for a civil engineering firm. In 1994, TxDOT’s bridge division in Austin hired Ford as a draftsman. Soon he was helping engineers create graphics for their presentations. In the meantime, his wife, Betsy, signed him up for a stone-carving class.

“During lunch at work, I’d pull out my limestone block and chisel on it,” Ford recalls. “When my boss saw my gargoyle sculpture, he said, ‘Somehow, someday, we’re going to put one on a bridge.’”

## Michael Ford’s larger-than-life art merges traffic and culture along Texas highways

A few months later, Ford had his chance. When TxDOT’s Lubbock division wanted a whimsical logo to dress up a new east-west freeway, he offered to do the work himself. The project became his. He also acquired a new job title—graphics artist. That was in 1998.

Using his own furrowed brow as a model, Ford sculpted Windy Man as a symbol of Lubbock’s infamous gusts and dust. With flowing hair and puffy cheeks, the 3D concrete face blows a dust cloud through pursed lips. However, after the first of a planned 20 went up in 2004—after years of highway design and construction—opponents demanded that the “pagan” Windy Man be removed.

Eventually, TxDOT tried again and installed one Windy Man at the intersection of the Marsha Sharp Freeway and

Avenue L in 2011. He blows dust high above an arts district bridge mural, also designed by Ford. Lubbock overpasses also display red yuccas and a Buddy Holly tribute, courtesy of Ford.

“They all have stories,” Ford says. “Their main purpose has always been to give residents something that’s unique to their community.”

**Town by town,** Ford worked with mayors and residents to design what they desired. About five years before *Windy Man*, Childress debuted Ford’s talents. Just west of the town, on the edge of the Panhandle near the Oklahoma border, a gigantic stagecoach, windmill and wheat heads—set into overpass retaining walls on U.S. 287 at County Road 9—symbolize the town’s strong ties to agriculture.

Similarly, Goree in Knox County and Robstown in Nueces County chose cotton bolls to grace their highway walls.

And, like Munday, Goree showcases an American flag and Texas flag in addition to cotton. Sinton, just north of Corpus Christi, features a cattle drive on all four overpass ramps as U.S. 181 comes into town from the east.

In Wichita Falls, concrete bicyclists in helmets race across retaining walls in celebration of the city’s annual *Hotter’N Hell Hundred* cycling event. Comanche residents chose rolling hills, live oaks and Native Americans on

horseback to honor their natural heritage.

Kemp’s ridley sea turtles adorn concrete pillars of an overhead sign on the John F. Kennedy Memorial Causeway in Corpus Christi. White-tailed bucks and does pose among prickly pear cactuses in Laredo.

During an Interstate 35 expansion project, TxDOT offered cities the chance to have their own bridge art along frontage roads. Jump off the freeway at Salado to see a stagecoach driven by three cowboys and six horses. At Troy, a bird flits from fence post to post in a series of four windmill murals.

Farther north in West, three murals depict twirling Czech dancers and a polka band, reflecting the city’s cultural roots. In Abbott, silhouettes of a farmer on a tractor and a windmill behind a derelict barn stretch across retaining walls.

“I always designed on a dime,” says Ford, who used pencil sketches and computer software to construct his images that, when enlarged, measure up to 100 feet wide and 50 feet high. Instead of expensive rubber, he carved sheets of extruded foam to form molds that precast concrete companies used to make 5-by-10-foot concrete panels. At work sites, construction crews pieced the panels into place like a puzzle.

And like any good puzzle, some of Ford’s artworks contain a secret.





CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE A stagecoach seems to be charging through Salado. Ford with bas-relief troops just east of Copperas Cove on Fort Cavazos. Ford sculpts Windy Man in extruded foam. Czech dancers in West.



“If the design allowed, I’d hide a tiny gecko, like in the oak leaves of a state seal and Windy Man’s hair,” he says. “That became my maker’s mark and the brand name that I continue to use as an artist—Art Gecko.”

Nowadays Ford pours his creativity into crafting sculptures from gourds. Since his retirement from TxDOT, he’s transformed the hard-shelled fruits—kin to pumpkins and melons—into award-winning pieces, such as fairy houses, abstract sculptures, a fanged monster mask and a retro spaceship on the moon.

As Ford and his wife make their way to gourd festivals, they sometimes pass his bridge art. His reaction is what he hopes other travelers have.

“They always bring a smile,” he says. “And I love it when I get messages and photos from people who have spotted one of my walls. Life doesn’t get much better than that.” ■

**TCP** Find this story on our website for a map of Ford’s highway art and direct links to each of the pieces mentioned.



## Ford’s Favorite Five

**U.S. flag wall, Munday** Etched into the U.S. 277 overpass at Texas 222.

**Czech dancers, West** Along the Interstate 35 frontage road, where it crosses West Oak Street/T M W Parkway.

**Windmill, wheat and a covered wagon, Childress** Cast into the north side of Highway 287, where it crosses Farm to Market Road 164/County Road 9.

**Stagecoach walls, Salado** Along the Interstate 35 frontage road near Williams Road/Salado Plaza Road.

**Pilot walls, Kingsville** Where East Caesar Avenue runs under U.S. 77.



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Join us for

# BLUEBONNET'S 2024 ANNUAL MEETING



The Silos on 77,  
1031 County Road 223, Giddings

**MAY 14, 2024**

Registration at 1:30 p.m.  
Meeting starts at 2:30 p.m.

## ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

### Dear Member:

Pursuant to its Bylaws, the Annual Membership Meeting of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, Inc. will be held on May 14, 2024, at The Silos on 77, 1031 County Road 223, Giddings, Texas. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. The meeting will start at 2:30 p.m. Business coming before the meeting will be conducted via members in attendance in person or by proxy.

Two director seats, District 2 and District 3, are up for election. The incumbent directors — Shana Whiteley, District 2, representing Travis County; and Bryan Bracewell, District 3, representing Bastrop County — filed their nominations by filing fees before the deadline, qualified and were not opposed. The incumbent directors will be elected by general consent in accordance with Article II, Section 6 of the cooperative's Bylaws. Other business that may come before the meeting will also be addressed.

Sincerely yours,

**Robert Mikeska**  
Secretary/Treasurer  
Bluebonnet Board of Directors

## 2024 Annual Meeting Agenda

**1:30-2:30 p.m.** — Registration and voting

**2:30 p.m.** — Welcome and introductions

**Call to Order** — Ben Flencher, Board Chairman

**Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance** — Roderick Emanuel, Board Vice Chairman

**Chairman/President's Report** — Ben Flencher, Board Chairman

**Secretary-Treasurer's Report** — Robert Mikeska, Board Secretary/Treasurer

**General Manager's Report** — Matt Bentke, General Manager/CEO

**Door Prize Drawings**

**Report of Directors Elected by General Consent** — Sarah Newman-Altamirano, General Counsel

**Adjourn**

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

# WIN THIS TRUCK

that is being retired from  
Bluebonnet's fleet



Members have two ways to enter drawings for door prizes and the truck.

They can submit a proxy form, either by mail, postmarked by May 7, 2024 or by delivering it in person to a member service center before 5 p.m., May 7, or they can register at the Annual Meeting on May 14.

**This 2011 Ford F-150 4x4 pickup truck, which has about 145,000 miles, is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet.**

The drawing for the truck will be  
Wednesday, May 15, 2024.



# that was **THEN**

The cooperative that became Bluebonnet held its first Annual Meeting in Austin in 1940. After that, the co-op had the meetings at various locations in Giddings, including the co-op's then-headquarters. After 1968, the meetings were every second Tuesday in May at the Sons of Hermann Hall, just off U.S. 77 in Giddings. Members would catch up with friends, hear state-of-the-cooperative updates, participate in business votes and win prizes, including TVs, radios and other appliances.



# this is **NOW**

The Annual Meeting location is the same, but the facility is now The Silos on 77. Growth has brought many new members to the event, and co-op updates include videos and PowerPoint presentations. Employees provide information and answer questions, and technology lets members take care of their co-op business.



Today's prize winners might take home a flat-screen color TV, an ice maker or a riding lawn mower, among other prizes.

**Top:** After an Annual Meeting in the early 1980s, Glenn Markwardt, then a Bluebonnet business manager, carries a 13-inch RCA color TV to the vehicle of Emma Canik, a co-op member from Giddings.

**Above:** Bluebonnet member Elvera Drews of Brenham won a riding mower at the 2023 Annual Meeting. Drews says she has attended 21 Annual Meetings and this was the first time she won a prize.

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.



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## CAPITAL CREDITS

# It pays to be a cooperative member



Look for capital credits on the Bluebonnet bill you receive in May.

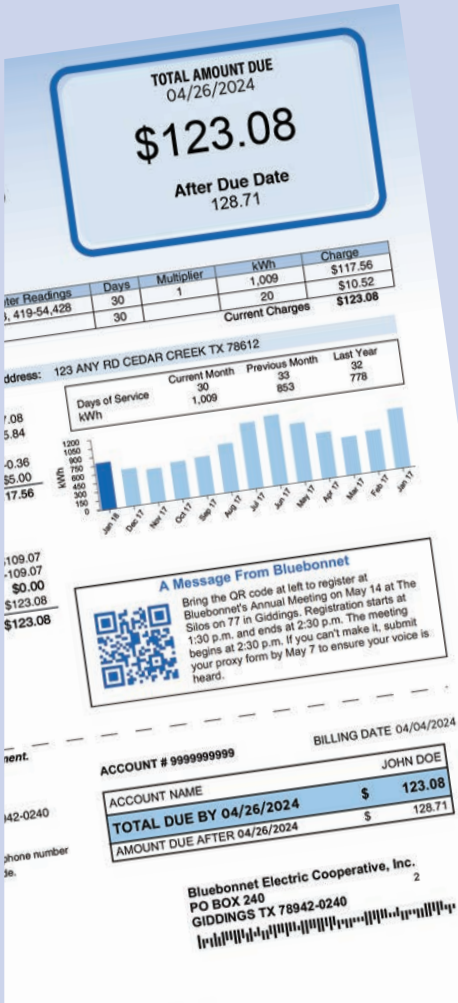
### BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC

Cooperative members can expect a credit on their May bill, a return of money known as "capital credits." This is just one of the benefits of being part of an electric cooperative. When you're a member, you're not just a customer — you're also an owner. Over the last 20 years, Bluebonnet has returned \$88.6 million in capital credits to its members.

Here's how it works: Bluebonnet returns

money it collects beyond what is needed to keep the business running smoothly. The amount each account holder receives is determined by how much electricity they have used in previous years and how long they have been a member.

Questions about capital credits or your bill? Contact a member service representative at [memberservices@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:memberservices@bluebonnet.coop) or by calling 800-842-7708 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.



### OFFICE CLOSINGS



Bluebonnet offices will be closed May 27 for Memorial Day. If you have a power outage, you can report it online at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop), via our MyBluebonnet mobile app

or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay bills anytime online, on our mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (select Option 2 when prompted).





Students chosen to represent Bluebonnet on the 2024 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., are, from left, alternate Alexis Macik of Caldwell, winner Lydia Huebner from Industry and winner Chasidy Nowicki of Brenham.

# Youth tour participants chosen to represent Bluebonnet this summer

**LYDIA HUEBNER** and Chasidy Nowicki are set to represent Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative when they join hundreds of other high school juniors and seniors in Washington, D.C., this summer for an immersive week of connection, education and once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.

Huebner, a Bellville High School junior who lives in Industry, and Nowicki, a Brenham High School senior, were selected to represent Bluebonnet on the annual Government-in-Action Youth Tour. Alexis Macik, a senior at Snook High School, is the alternate representative and will join the tour if one of the winners is unable to attend.

Along with a weeklong all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., Huebner and Nowicki will each receive a \$1,000 scholarship toward their higher education. The recipients were selected in March from among 15 applicants.

The tour, planned for June 16-24, will include visits to historic sites and the U.S. Capitol. Participants will meet members of Congress and attend events hosted by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and Texas Electric Cooperatives, the youth tour's sponsors, organizers and hosts.

Huebner, who turns 17 this month, has been Bellville High School's band drum major for two years and plays the French horn. She is also active with the local FFA chapter. She does volunteer work with her area's Blessing Box project, helping cancer patients by sewing pockets on shirts and making pillows for use during post-treatment recovery. She also has her own

business creating floral arrangements.

Huebner says her drum-major experience and holding officer positions in FFA have given her leadership experience, as has serving on the student advisory board for the Bellville ISD superintendent. "I feel like leadership is something that you show to other people," she said. "Good leaders are ready to work and be a role model."

Huebner plans to attend a four-year university after graduating in 2025. She is unsure where she will focus her studies, but wants a career about which she is passionate.

Nowicki, 18, of Brenham, is a cheerleader, FFA officer, member of the National Honor Society and a volunteer with children at the Cowboy Church of Brenham's Sunday school. Her favorite volunteer experience is the Bucket Calf Program at the Washington County Fair, which teaches 4- to 8-year-old children the responsibilities of raising and caring for livestock.

She has years of volunteer and leadership experience as reporter for her local FFA chapter and as her high school's spirit coordinator. These opportunities have helped her connect with others. "I am outgoing, welcoming to new people and open to hearing others' stories. It will really help when we are meeting new people from across the nation on the youth tour," she said.

Nowicki plans to attend Texas A&M University in the fall to study agriculture communication. She wants a career in agriculture marketing, working as a brand ambassador to talk about the benefits of products at livestock shows across the state.

Macik, 18, of Caldwell, graduates from Snook High School at the end of this

month. She participated in volleyball, basketball, track and field, and softball and was a high school cheerleader. She participated in 4-H, FFA, National Honor Society and the student council, and was the Burleson County Fair queen for 2022-2023. This fall, she plans to attend Texas A&M University to study marketing, and hopes to work for the Houston Astros.

"I am sure there were a lot of great applicants. It is special to be chosen as one of the winners," Nowicki said. Huebner echoed that statement: "The opportunity and experience is a once-in-a-lifetime chance."

Applicants were asked to list their academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities and community service work, and to submit a video answering the question, "If you had the opportunity to change one thing about your school or community, what would it be and why?"

Huebner had many compliments for her school in her video, but said she hopes more of her classmates would participate in extracurricular activities. That would lead to more engagement in the classroom and the community, she said.

In her video, Nowicki said she believes that schools should prioritize agricultural education. "In my ag classes, I am learning to be a good steward of the land and furthering my education about the livestock industry. More people should know about the importance of it," she said.

This is the 58th year of the Government-in-Action Youth Tour program. It has more than 50,000 alumni, including CEOs, state and national elected officials, and countless business and community leaders.



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# The Fabric of Life

Quilt camps offer crafters time and space to tell stories and hone skills through textiles

BY EILEEN MATTEI  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

BY 6 A.M., my roommate at quilt camp sits at her sewing machine, stitching some of the 1,272 tiny pieces of fabric that will become a twin-size quilt. Obsessive, yes, but our five days away from daily chores of cooking, cleaning and dog-walking free us—members of the Frontera Quilt Guild—to concentrate on quilt making. We have to make the best of this time.

This obsession, neither fattening nor illegal, brings the joy of creating useful, eye-catching quilts and results in gifts for family and friends, veterans, and children in foster care.

The John Newcombe Tennis Ranch in New Braunfels has hosted annual Frontera Quilt Guild retreats for 20 years, nearly since our guild was founded in Harlingen in 2000. In fact, the resort hosts 25–30 quilting and stitching groups like ours every year, providing the essentials—breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, ironing boards and large worktables.

The constant whirl, hiss and “zzzzzt” of sewing machines provide the



playlist. Creativity is limited only by our own imaginations and skills and driven by limitless fabric, design variations and advice from fellow quilters. I remind myself of a favorite saying: “There are no quilt police.”

Our 40-member guild, one of hundreds in Texas, includes a robotics engineer, a nurse, a grandmother and her grandchildren, retired educators, and Winter Texans. About half began quilting after being inspired by family members.

“My great-grandmother made quilts,” says Deb Carlile, a member of Magic Valley Electric Cooperative. “I always knew I wanted to make quilts.” Carlile taught herself to quilt from books, throwing away her first attempts. Now she fashions contemporary wall hangings and traditional quilts, drawing inspiration from TV shows like *Yellowstone* and instructional online videos.

But family tradition isn’t the only gateway. Dentist Nyla Gordon wandered into a quilt store 10 years ago and met the owner—“a woman with the most beatific smile,” she says. “I wanted to know what made her so happy.” Gordon signed up for a beginner quilting class.

At quilt camp, she hones her skills. “This is a vacation from a demanding job,” she says, flashing her own beatific smile as she pins yellow binding on a double wedding ring quilt.

While many quilters are retiring baby boomers who find they have time to immerse themselves in the time-consuming hobby, the craft attracts all ages. A.J. Simpson, 17 and wearing noise-canceling headphones, is at camp working on her first quilt. “Everybody’s helpful and supportive and not judgmental,” she says. Generosity identifies quilters as much as their clothing flecked with thread snippets.

Linda Villarreal says getting advice, seeing what other people create and fabric shopping are the camp’s big draws, along with “making quilts to give to people I love.”

Do you cherish memories of grandmothers and aunts gathered around a quilting frame? That’s sweet, but if our grandmothers had long-arm quilting machines, they would have used them.

The long-arm is one of the inventions that, beginning in the 1970s, modernized quilting, making the craft less tedious and more accessible. The rotary cutter (like a razor-sharp pizza cutter and better than scissors), the cutting mat and the long-arm—when combined with a boom in cotton fabrics, easier-to-use patterns and pre-cut materials—

brought about a quilting renaissance.

Fabric and pattern designers and instructors became quilting’s rock star equivalents.

Those changes didn’t happen miraculously but came about because of determined women like Houston quilt shop owner Karey Bresenhan. She parlayed her store into what is now the International Quilt Festival in Houston—the nation’s largest quilt show—which will mark its 50th anniversary when it runs October 31–November 3 at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Count me among the show’s 41,252 visitors last year, standing mesmerized by the fabrics, long-arm machines and countless accessories in the 635 booths. I’m also among the nearly 3,000 who attended some of the show’s hundreds of formal classes and lectures.

I heard quilt-maker and teacher Charlotte Angotti, known for her comical lectures, confess to stitching buttons over quilt block intersections to hide mismatched seams. Fourth-generation quilter Jenny K. Lyon gave practical tips on good lighting and sewing posture.

In addition, the show provides countless free demonstrations, mini workshops and the thrill of talking with quilting celebrities.

“Quilts are really the fabric of life. They tie us to the land,” says Cinde Ebeling, a member of Swisher Electric Cooperative who grew up sewing in Dimmitt, in the Texas Panhandle. “It was what you did.”

In 2014, during her treatment for breast cancer, Ebeling, a member of the Ogallala Quilters’ Society, created a chemo connection quilt. “I want people to think about the shock of diagnosis, treatment, hair loss, the heartaches and remissions,” she says. Some pieces of the quilt are the actual plastic bags that once held her chemotherapy pills, bringing you face-to-face with the scary reality of cancer and its effect on the patient and everyone around them.

After the Houston show, the Texas Quilt Museum in La Grange, between Austin and Houston, showcases some of the show’s prizewinning quilts through May, allowing many more people to discover and appreciate quilts as art. The museum’s changing exhibits include collections of antique, traditional, portrait and themed quilts.

Fostering the next generation of quilters, the museum offers storybook quilt time and, of course, runs a children’s quilt camp. ■

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**Morgan Silver Dollar:** First struck 146 years ago in 1878, the Morgan has a historic legacy as the coin that helped build the American West. Minted until 1904, then again in 1921, this 90% silver coin with its iconic Lady Liberty design is the most collected vintage Silver Dollar in the world. Extremely Fine (XF) condition coin included in set.

**Peace Silver Dollar:** With a beautiful design memorializing peace following the end of World War I, the 90% silver Peace Dollar was intended as a one-year only release struck in 1921—but it proved so popular with the American people, it was struck until 1928, then again in 1934-35. Extremely Fine (XF) condition coin included in set.

**Eisenhower Dollar:** The last circulating U.S. dollar coin, the Eisenhower Dollar, aka the "Ike Dollar," was prized by Americans, with its design featuring war hero President Dwight D. Eisenhower, backed by an image symbolizing the Apollo II moon landing. First struck with silver 1971-1976, the Eisenhower Dollar in this set was struck in 40% silver for collectors, and you will receive a coin in Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition.

**Silver Eagle Type 1:** The first-ever U.S. Silver Dollar minted in 99.9% silver, these coins were first minted in 1986 following President Ronald Reagan's signing of the Liberty Coin Act into law on July 9, 1985, which authorized the U.S. Mint to strike America's new silver bullion coin. This gorgeous Silver Dollar features the original, revered Type 1 "Heraldic Eagle" reverse design by John Mercanti, 12th Chief Engraver of the U.S. Mint. Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition coin included in set.

**Silver Eagle Type 2:** In honor of the popular 99.9% silver coin's 35th anniversary in 2021, the Silver Eagle received a new, esteemed Type 2 "Eagle Landing" reverse design. This is the current issued coin by the U.S. Mint. Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition coin included in set.

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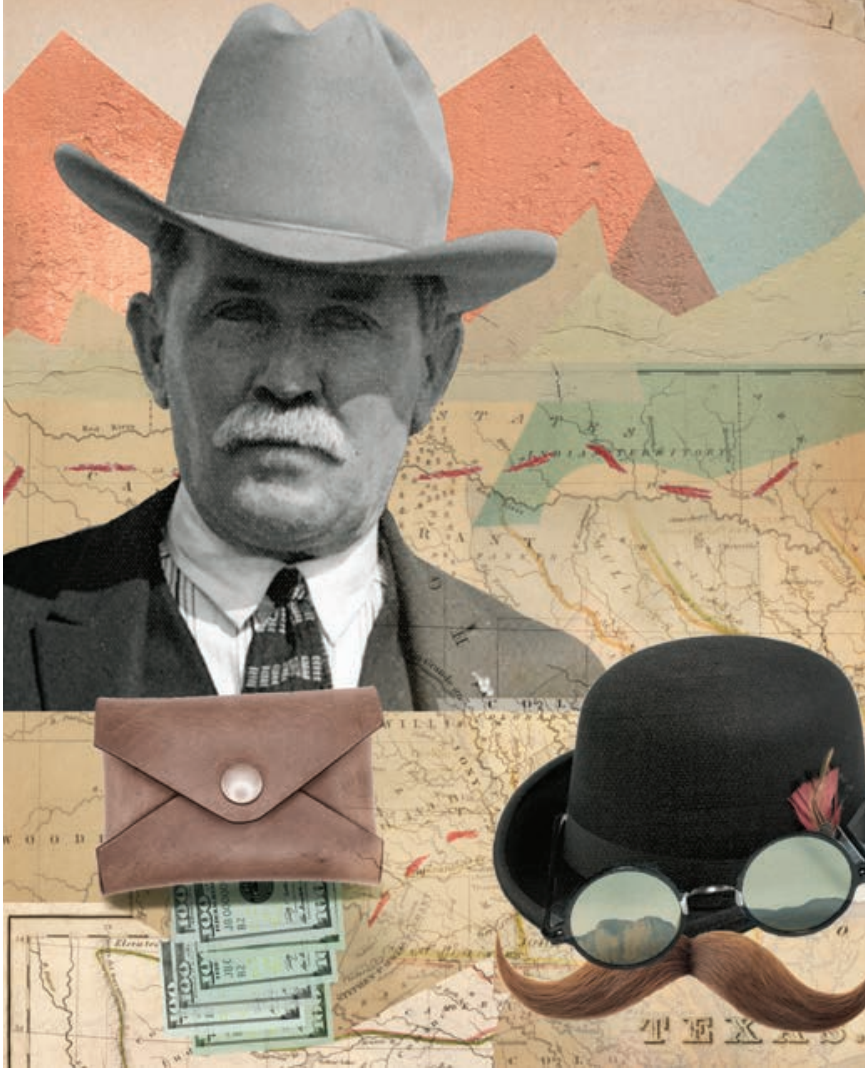
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# Payback Time

When a Texas rancher was conned,  
he spent years tracking down the swindlers

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY DANA SMITH

**THE YEAR WAS 1921.** J. Frank Norfleet, after two years and 30,000 miles of pursuit, finally slapped handcuffs on “Mr. Stetson” in Florida. Stetson—real name Joe Furey—had swindled Norfleet out of \$45,000 in North Texas.

“Well, you old trail hound, I never expected to see you out here,” Stetson said. “I thought we left you in Fort Worth, broke.”

Norfleet had no experience in law enforcement, city life or sophisticated cons. He was a rancher, a man who had always lived on the edge of the Texas frontier. So when he made up his mind to pursue the band of bunco men who conned him, he used the only tools he had: unfathomable patience, cutting for

sign, camouflage by way of disguises and weaponry. He out-conned the con men.

Norfleet grew up on the Texas plains. He was a trail herder in his early days and eventually managed to buy his own ranch, near Lubbock. By the age of 54, he had finally accumulated some real wealth.

So he went to Dallas with the intent of selling his ranch to buy a bigger one. It was there that con men ensnared him in their sophisticated plot. It went like this.

Norfleet got into a seemingly casual conversation about mules in the lobby of the St. George Hotel in Dallas with a man named Hamlin. Upon hearing Norfleet had a ranch to sell, Hamlin said he just happened to know someone who might

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



be interested in his land. That person, Spencer, magically appeared and said they would need to go to the Adolphus Hotel to see another man.

When they sat down in the lobby to wait, Spencer cleverly steered Norfleet so that he’d sit in just the right place to discover a man’s pocketbook “lost” in the crevice of the couch. Stetson was the name on an ID card inside. Spencer and Norfleet inquired at the front desk for a Mr. Stetson, got his room number and returned the pocketbook to him.

Stetson (Furey) offered them both \$100 rewards. When Norfleet refused, Stetson told him that he was a stockbroker with the Dallas exchange and said, “Would you mind me placing that money on the market and would you accept what money it might earn?”

Later that day, Stetson gave Norfleet \$800 as the amount his \$100 earned. And that’s how the hook was set. From there, Norfleet handed over his own money and eventually cash guarantees, hoping to grow his wealth in the fake exchange. When the con men cleared out on the last round, absconding with all of Norfleet’s money, he was left repeating to himself in a stunned haze: “\$45,000 gone, \$90,000 in debt, 54 years old.” They stole nearly \$750,000 in today’s money.

Norfleet tells the story of his cross-country pursuit of Furey—which took him all the way to Mexico, California, Canada and Florida—in his fast-moving autobiography, *Norfleet*, published in 1924. It’s a great adventure and demonstrates an old cowboy’s enormous creativity and grit. Or read a more modern version historically contextualized in Amy Reading’s *The Mark Inside*.

Whichever you choose, cinch up your saddles nice and snug. It’s a wild ride. ■

# Spring Cakes

Celebrate every occasion with fresh and fruity flavors of the season

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Spring is here! Bring on the light, fluffy and lemony desserts. My Strawberry Pecan Icebox Cake captures the season in every bite. There's nothing more satisfying than a simple yet elegant dessert you can easily whip up. The best part of this one: It requires no baking.

## Strawberry Pecan Icebox Cake

**8 ounces cream cheese, room temperature**

**1 cup powdered sugar**

**3 cups heavy cream**

**1 tablespoon vanilla extract**

**1 tablespoon lemon zest**

**1 tablespoon lemon juice**

**1 box graham crackers (14.4 ounces)**

**4 cups sliced strawberries**

**½ cup chopped pecans**

1. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese at medium speed until smooth. Gradually add powdered sugar and continue beating until smooth.
2. Add 1 cup heavy cream and beat at low speed until smooth. Add remaining 2 cups heavy cream and mix at medium speed until light and fluffy, increasing the speed as the mixture begins to thicken. Fold in the vanilla, lemon zest and lemon juice.
3. Coat the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray. Line the bottom of the pan with ⅓ of the graham crackers.
4. Spread ⅓ of the mixture over graham crackers followed by ⅓ of the strawberries and pecans. Repeat layers two times using remaining ingredients, ending with strawberries and pecans.
5. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 4 hours or up to overnight.

**SERVES 8-12**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Concha Icebox Cake.







## Poppy Seed Cake

PATTI CROW  
FANNIN EC

Once I bit into Crow's Poppy Seed Cake, I knew why my *abuelita* (grandma) enjoyed these tiny gems. This light, moist cake boasts a sweet nutty flavor. I love snacking on it with my afternoon tea.

- 1 package yellow cake mix (15.25 ounces)**
- 1 package lemon pudding mix (3.4 ounces)**
- ½ cup orange juice**
- ½ cup vegetable oil**
- ½ cup water**
- 2 tablespoons poppy seeds**
- 4 eggs**
- ½ cup lemon juice**
- 2 cups powdered sugar**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a Bundt pan with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, beat the cake mix, pudding mix, orange juice, vegetable oil, water, poppy seeds and eggs at medium speed 5 minutes. Pour into prepared pan.
3. Bake 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.
4. In a small saucepan, bring lemon juice and powdered sugar to a boil.
5. Remove cake from pan and poke holes throughout top with a fork. Pour hot glaze over cake. Allow to cool before serving.

SERVES 10-12

MORE RECIPES >

\$500 WINNER

## Mandarin Crush Cake

DEBRA GIFFORD  
PEDERNALES EC



Hello spring ... hello yum!  
This cake is pure happiness. A touch of citrus with a pop of pineapple make Gifford's layered cake simply delightful.

SERVES 10



CAKE

- 1 can mandarin oranges (15 ounces), undrained**
- 1 package yellow cake mix (15.25 ounces)**
- ¾ cup vegetable oil**
- 4 eggs**
- 1 teaspoon orange extract**

FROSTING

- 1 package vanilla pudding mix (3.4 ounces)**
- 2 cans crushed pineapple (8 ounces each), undrained**
- 1 container whipped topping (8 ounces)**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**

1. **CAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat two 8-inch round baking pans with cooking spray.
2. Reserve a few mandarin segments to decorate cake. In a large bowl, beat remaining mandarin oranges and their liquid, cake mix, oil, eggs, and orange extract at medium speed about 3 minutes.
3. Pour batter evenly into cake pans. Bake 20-25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.
4. **FROSTING** In another bowl, mix pudding mix, pineapple and its liquid, whipped topping, and vanilla until smooth. Place in fridge to chill at least 1 hour.
5. Once cakes are cooled, place 1 cake layer on a serving plate and spread half the frosting on top. Place the remaining cake layer on top and spread remaining frosting over top and sides of cake, then place reserved mandarin slices on top to decorate.
6. Chill until ready to serve.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**PUMPKIN AND SPICE** DUE MAY 10  
We're looking for something special for our October recipes. Send us your best by May 10 for a chance to win \$500.





## Mary Smith's Coconut Cake

MB WATSON  
FANNIN EC

This cake is a sweet tribute to Watson's friend Mary, who was a world-class hostess. No one turned down an invitation to her home or for any of her baked desserts. This cross between a cake and a macaroon is soft and chewy on the inside, crisp and golden on the outside. It's also the ultimate coconut lover's dream.

**2 cups flour**  
**1½ cups shredded coconut**  
**3 cups sugar, divided use**  
**1 cup solid vegetable shortening**  
**6 eggs**  
**3 teaspoons orange extract, divided use**  
**½ cup water**

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
2. In a medium bowl, combine flour with coconut and set aside.
3. In a large bowl, cream 2 cups sugar and shortening together at medium speed until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Reduce speed to low and alternate adding eggs, one at a time, and flour until all eggs and flour are mixed. Add 1 teaspoon orange extract, beating until well mixed.
4. Spoon batter into prepared pan. Bake 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Remove pan from oven and set aside.

5. In a saucepan over medium-high heat, bring water, remaining 1 cup sugar and remaining 2 teaspoons orange extract to a boil. Continue boiling for 1 minute. Carefully pour over cake.

6. Allow cake to cool completely before serving.

SERVES 16

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Breaking News

Take a sledgehammer to a printer in Kyle's 'rage room'

BY CHET GARNER

IF YOU WERE to envision a day trip to the Pie Capital of Texas, you might picture homey cafés, cozy cups of coffee and buttery crusts filled with sugary happiness. And you can certainly find those things in Kyle, south of Austin. But you can also smash pie plates into tiny bits and shatter coffee cups into smithereens—legally (and safely)—at Uncharted Adventures, a unique indoor entertainment center.

I stepped into what looked like an inconspicuous warehouse on the outskirts of town and met owner Damon Fogley. He started a junk removal business after serving in the Army and soon learned about a phenomenon called rage rooms, where folks can pay to break stuff.

Fogley had more than enough junk for the job, and the concept was born in Kyle. But to create a full-on destination, he added two escape rooms, a zombie shooting range, splatter-paint lounge and plenty of Instagram-worthy backdrops. It's unconventional family fun at its finest.

Before letting out my inner Hulk on inanimate objects, I tried the zombie shooting range. Armed with a gun that shot tiny gel balls, I took aim at zombie robots jumping out from an apocalyptic set. I don't think I killed any of them (they are undead, after all), but it felt great.

Finally, it was time to rage. And so, donning full-body coveralls and a face shield, I stepped into a room full of bottles, vases, TVs and printers. I picked up a sledgehammer and, with a Neanderthal's scream, I swung it straight into a coffee maker. It flew across the room, hit the wall and broke into pieces.

It was awesome. I'm not angry by nature, but this was a strange kind of therapy that I think everyone could use. ■

ABOVE Chet poses in an Instagram-worthy setting. (No, that is not videotape of *The Daytripper* show.)

**TCP** Readers know Chet is a smashing success. See for yourself with the video on our website. Find 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.

MAY

07

**Lewisville** The Elton Johns with the She, (972) 219-3401, cityoflewisville.com

09

**Corsicana** 50 Years of Rock and Roll, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

10

**Alamo** [10–11] Watermelon Festival & BBQ Cook-Off, (956) 787-0006, alamotexas.org

**New Braunfels** [10–11] Ballet Texas Presents *Peter Pan*, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

15

**Lakeway** Lakeway Photography Club Meeting, (512) 263-2885, lakewayphotographyclub.com

16

**Luling** Field Day, (830) 875-2438, lulingfoundation.org

**Giddings** [16–18] Lee County Fair, leecountyfairtx.com

17

**Columbus** [17–18] Magnolia Days Festival, (979) 732-8385, magnoliadays.org

18

**La Grange Bluff** Schuetzen-Fest, friendsofkbmh.org

23

**Kerrville** [23–June 9] Kerrville Folk Festival, (830) 257-3600, kerrvillefolkfestival.org

24

**Fredericksburg** [24–26] Crawfish Festival, fbgcrawfishfestival.com



25

**Brenham Elvis!** by Vince King and the Vegas Mafia Band, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

**Chappell Hill Art Walk**, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

26

**Lewisville Fiesta Charra**, (972) 219-3401, visitlewisville.com

**New Braunfels Antique Barn Sale and Makers Market**, (830) 629-2943, newbraunfelsconservation.org

31

**Kerrville [31-June 1] The Comedy of Errors**, (830) 896-9393, caillouxperformingarts.com

JUNE

01

**Graham Food Truck Championship of Texas**, (940) 549-0401, foodtruckchampionshiptexas.com

**Leander Old Town Street Festival**, (512) 259-1907, oldtownstreetfestival.com

**Waxahachie [1-2] Gingerbread Trail Tour of Homes**, (972) 937-0681, elliscountymuseum.org

07

**Fredericksburg [7-8] Craft Beer Festival**, fbcraftbeerfestival.com

**Blanco [7-9] Lavender Festival**, (830) 833-5101, blancolavenderfest.com

**Ingram [7-8, 13-15, 20-22] Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat**, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

### Submit Your Event

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

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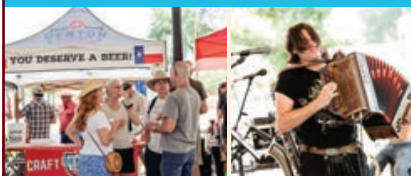
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**2 LINDSAY HUMPHREYS**  
SOUTH PLAINS EC

"My son, Brazos, and his grandfather, Bobo, run the barrels at the Dickens County 4-H playday."

**3 TONY KRUP**  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

"A lone motocross rider finishing a ride at sunset in the Dallas-Fort Worth area."

**4 MARK MCCLENDON**  
BANDERA EC

The Poteet Strawberry Festival.



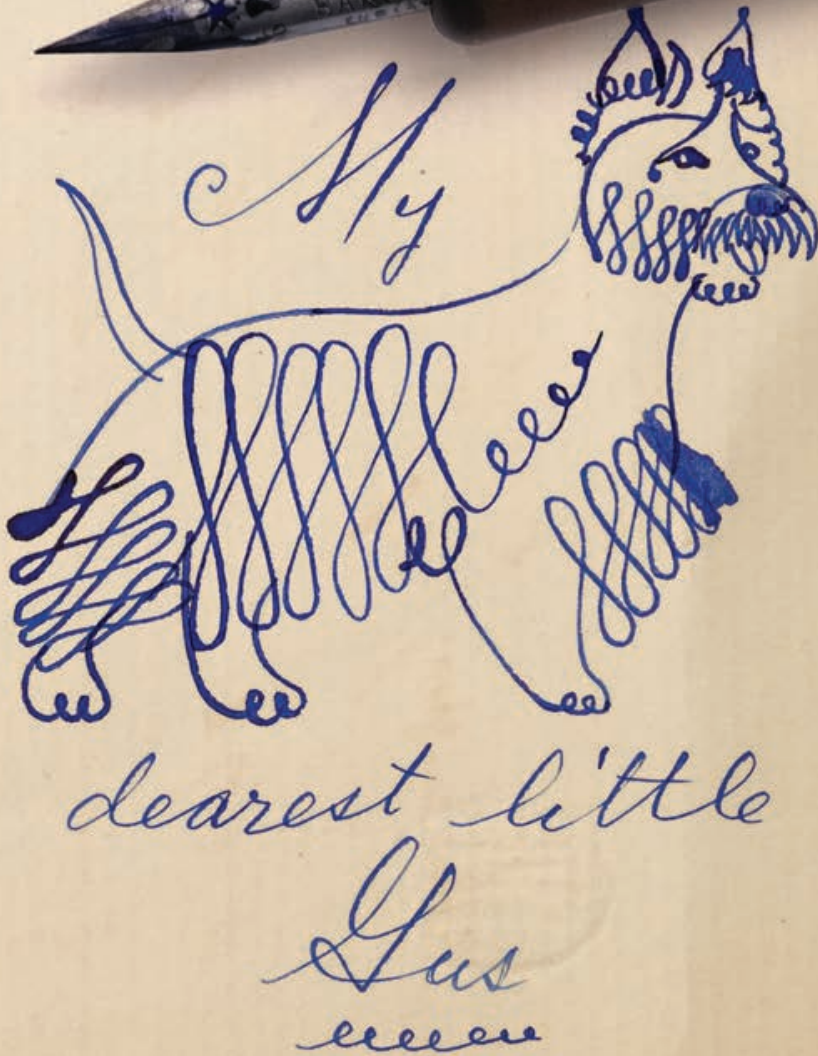
## Upcoming Contests

- DUE MAY 10** Parenthood
- DUE JUN 10** Climbing High
- DUE JUL 10** Mascots



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Rides photos from readers.



## Grandma's Best Friend

Life is better when people and dogs can age together

BY MARTHA DEERINGER  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
ELVIS SWIFT

WHEN MY MOTHER finally made the difficult decision to move in with my family in her early 80s, she harbored plenty of misgivings, deciding on the move only when her rheumatoid arthritis and congestive heart failure made it unsafe for her to live alone. Mother brought along her aging West Highland white terrier, Gus, a bone cancer survivor who hopped gamely through the house on his three remaining legs.

Mother left behind a sprawling brick home in town where she had lived for 30 years and took up residence with us in the country in an addition designed to accommodate her needs. Suddenly she was 20 miles from the nearest hub of civilization.

There were plenty of people to take care of her here. Still, she missed her

independence and the opportunity to go out to lunch with friends or run errands on a moment's notice.

Our grandchildren doted on their great-grandma. They drank her Ensure, did somersaults on her couch, fed Gus their cookies and badgered her to read stories. Since her addition was attached to the main house, she had to install a latch on the inside of her door in order to catch uninterrupted naps.

Gus was also unsettled by the move, his lush St. Augustine lawn replaced by spiky Bermuda grass with cows across the fence. He viewed these large animals with deep suspicion and barked ferociously when they approached his empire, a small separate yard he accessed through a doggie door.

Most of Gus' time was spent curled beside the swivel rocker where Mother read biographies and watched our pair of free-ranging peacocks, who chose the porch rail outside her window to preen themselves and admire their reflections in the glass.

For a couple of years after she came to live with us, Mother was able to drive to town for haircuts, church and social occasions, but as her health slipped, she stayed home more. Her friends, also in their 80s, came to visit less often.

But she had Gus, and scientists have known for decades that older adults who own pets reap vast benefits.

In good weather Mother strolled our long driveway with Gus' lead slipped over the handle of her walker. She could talk to Gus about anything. Unlike her great-grandchildren, he never interrupted.

Gus seemed to know the help he provided, and he was always there beside her, sporting a whiskery grin and waving tail.

She celebrated five Mother's Days with us before she died, giving three generations of our family the chance to benefit from her wisdom and to learn to honor and appreciate the life lessons older folks can teach us all.

Gus passed away peacefully a few weeks after she did. ■



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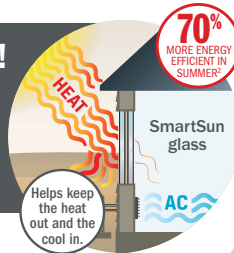
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