

REMEMBERING THAT  
FIRST LIGHT BULB

DON'T MIND THOSE  
ALLIGATORS

WINDMILLER KEEPS  
WITS IN A PINCH

# Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

AUGUST 2024

## On the Road Again

A photographer  
piles on the miles to  
capture rural Texas

**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

# I'm thinking more today about how to protect the money I've earned.

I've learned a lot of things over the years, talking to all sorts of experts in all sorts of fields. But one of the most important lessons I learned was from two former Directors of the U.S. Mint, who taught me everything I needed to know about the importance of protecting my savings with physical gold and silver.

In 25 years of working dirty jobs, the thought of a diversified portfolio really didn't cross my mind—but the more I learn, the better I feel about buying gold and silver from U.S. Money Reserve.

Is gold right for you? That's not for me to say. You've got to do your own due diligence. All I know is that today, it's not enough to simply work hard—you also have to save smart. So, call the number below. The folks at U.S. Money Reserve are standing by to help.



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# August 2024



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Over five decades of crisscrossing Texas, a photographer learns to slow down to really see.

*Photo essay by Wyatt McSpadden*

## In the Beginning

Few recall when electric co-ops lit up the countryside; Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work.

*Story by Tom Widlowski  
Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun*

**ON THE COVER**

On the way north to Amarillo, just after crossing the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River.  
*Photo by Wyatt McSpadden*

**ABOVE**

Katie Phillips enjoys quilting—and air conditioning, ample lighting and watching TV.  
*Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun*

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**RECOMMENDED READING**  
True or false: People used to believe you could dynamite rain out of the sky. They sure did, as we explained in *Rain, You Blasted Sky!* from August 2013.

**FINISH THIS SENTENCE**

**I can't wait to learn ...**

**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 June prompt: **The next book you should read is ...**

*The Time It Never Rained* by Elmer Kelton. You will laugh. You will also cry.

JANIS HAGAN  
NAVARRO COUNTY EC  
CORNICANA

*The Madstone* by Elizabeth Crook. An amazing historical novel based in Texas just after the Civil War.

SUSAN ERVIN  
PEDERNALES EC  
GEORGETOWN

*The Women* by Kristin Hannah. An eye-opening book about the women of Vietnam.

DANI MACNEIL  
BANDERA EC  
PIPE CREEK

Visit our website to see more responses.

# Rural Showcase

OVER THE NEXT YEAR, seven Texas cities will host a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition that examines the evolution of small towns as the American population moved into urban areas over the past 125 years.

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* debuts August 24 in San Augustine. After six weeks in deep East Texas, the exhibition will move on to weekslong stays in Clifton, Brenham, Rockport, Buffalo Gap and San Elizario. The tour through Texas will end in Bandera on August 2, 2025.

To learn more, visit [museumonmainstreet.org](http://museumonmainstreet.org).



*August 20*  
**World Mosquito Day**

Don't forget to celebrate **World Mosquito Day**. Wait, maybe not. Scratch that.

JUNE 2024 We Brake for Steak

“Chet Garner needs to go back to the Leona General Store on Thursday nights, when it’s just some of the best catfish anywhere.”

DARRELL HUTTO  
 NAVASOTA VALLEY EC  
 JEWETT



COURTESY CHET GARNER

**Traveling South, Traveling East**

I loved the idea of emotional healing by traveling to every state park [Trailblazer, June 2024]. I was a little disappointed that no South Texas parks were mentioned.

My favorite story in the issue was *Renewal in Blue*. I traveled to East Texas with the young girl and loved the ending with the bluebonnets.

Penny Brown  
 Magic Valley EC  
 Rio Hondo

**Multiplying at the Sixes**

As an avid fan of the *Yellowstone* TV series, it was captivating to learn about the Burnett family and how the Four Sixes Ranch began and grew into one of the 10 largest ranches in the state [Sixes on the Small Screen, May 2024].

Sarah Brown  
 Bluebonnet EC  
 Cedar Creek



B.J. HINKLE

**Avenging Uncle**

James Franklin Norfleet was my great-uncle [Payback Time, May 2024]. I remember when we would visit the Norfleets at their home in Hale County in the 1950s, and Aunt Eliza would regale us with stories of earlier days.

Uncle Frank awed us kids as he would always strap on his pistol belt before going outside. For kids growing up listening to *The Lone Ranger*, we were quite impressed.

Jim K. Hudgins  
 San Bernard EC  
 Bellville

**Roadside Attractions**

It seems to me that Michael Ford has discovered and perfected a new art form on the Texas landscape [Overpass Easels, May 2024]. His work is extremely expressive of Texas and unique in each example.

Mary E. Specia  
 GVEC  
 McQueeney

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 letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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 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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# Open Roads, Open Eyes

Over five decades  
of crisscrossing Texas,  
a photographer learns  
to slow down to really see





PHOTO ESSAY BY WYATT MCSPADDEN

**W**hen I was younger and living in Amarillo, it always seemed important to get where I was going and back as soon as possible.

For a few years after a divorce, my two boys and their mom lived in San Marcos. And so a couple of times a month, I'd make that 500-plus mile drive as fast as I could.

When I abandoned the Panhandle and moved to Austin, my freelance photography business kicked into a higher gear. The jobs were in every direction, in and around my new city.

I never griped about the mileage, but as I matured, I did start listening to my eyes. I made it a rule that if I saw something that caught my attention at 70 mph and I couldn't get it out of my mind after a couple miles, I'd go back to get a picture—or at least to visit and decide if what I saw was worth a return trip at a particular time of day.

The drives are much more mellow these days after 50 years as a professional photographer, and I navigate using a spiral-bound detail map of Texas counties. Driving seems to be the second-most important skill in my line of work.

Of course, skill No. 1 is making a good picture upon reaching my destination. Most often the job involves capturing a portrait of someone who has accomplished something a magazine editor thinks is worthy of a story. But sometimes it's capturing the feel, the presence of a place.

I'm pretty sure I've driven a million miles in Texas, but now I do it a mile at a time. That's how the pictures in these pages were made, driving slow(ish), with eyes wide open. ■

I know my way around the Amarillo area, having lived there until I was 40. I was joyriding and admiring the late-day clouds when the lonely little tree appeared on the horizon.



Early morning on the road between Earth and Dimmit, in the Panhandle, familiar territory from my early years making a living shooting for seed and cattle operations. I hadn't seen such a tall silage mound, and the man with his pitchfork caught my eye.







I was passing through Hico on my way to the Metroplex when I spotted this little house. It took some coaxing for the woman to pose.





ABOVE I have a collection of barbed wire, plastic and wind pictures. Artsy pictures of trash.

LEFT A blue Dodge seems to have a permanent parking spot between Sandy Fork and Luling.

OPPOSITE A classic farmhouse, newly plowed field and epic sky near Granger, in Williamson County. Irresistible.



# In the Beginning

**Few recall when electric cooperatives lit up the countryside;  
Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work**

**K**atie Phillips is old enough to remember the dark ages—when nightfall at her family's farm outside Coleman meant navigating by the shadowy illumination offered by carbide and coal-oil lamps and lanterns. When much of the work on her dad's dairy farm—milking, separating and bottling—happened before sunrise and without the benefit of electricity.

"It's a hard life," says Katie, who turns 97 next month. For her and her brother and two sisters growing up in the 1930s, there wasn't much free time for fun, and before electricity, there was no reading or playing games at night.

Milking started every day at 3 a.m., and a few hours later, Katie's dad, Charlie Pitts, was making the first of his twice-

daily deliveries of Oak Grove Dairy Farm milk to homes, stores and cafés around Coleman, south of Abilene, on the western Central Texas plains.

It never escaped Pitts' notice that just 4½ miles east, in town, folks had the luxury of electricity.

Back then in rural America, those 4½ miles might as well have been a million. Electricity stopped where the profits did, and in 1936, fewer than 3% of Texas farms had electricity.

But before long, farmers, ranchers and their neighbors

Katie Phillips' dad helped create Coleman County Electric Cooperative. She saw the co-op's first light bulb flicker on in 1937.

## **Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home.**

pooled their money and worked together to build the electric cooperatives that lit up the countryside and brought a better quality of life.

Katie Phillips is among few living Americans who witnessed that important history. She had a front-row seat.

Katie turned 9 in 1936, the year her dad became a local leader in the cooperative movement that was in its early stages.

In those days, the town of Coleman had not only electricity but phone service too, and Pitts realized he needed that to keep up with milk orders. To get it, he paid to have a line strung from Coleman, across a creek, to the farm. Katie remembers their party line phone number: 4-0-0.

“I always wanted something better,” Pitts told the family.

Getting electricity to the farm was another matter.

Pitts traveled to Washington, D.C., to learn about the Rural Electrification Administration, which provided loans for the creation of cooperatives. He then visited neighboring farms, asking folks to contribute \$5 to help start a co-op.

Finally, in April 1937, the first Coleman County Electric Cooperative light bulb flickered on in the Pitts farmhouse—an honor befitting the co-op’s first board president.

“It was a great day for everybody because it was a completion of a long journey for Daddy,” Katie says. The Pitts kids had better lighting for their schoolwork, and Dad had a perfect place to read the Fort Worth newspaper he always had in the house.

Soon lines brought power to the dairy barn, where milking machines freed up farmhands.

Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home. “I just know that it was one of the most wonderful feelings there was when we could go to that refrigerator and open both doors and look in there and see what was in it,” Katie says.

Decades later, Katie spends a lot of her days knitting under a lamp in a corner of her living room in a 100-year-old farmhouse 6 miles east of Coleman. Electricity is too commonplace to warrant much thought. It powers her iPhone, tablet, two TVs and brand-new Singer sewing machine.

She’s known around Coleman County EC for being there at the dawn of the co-op. When the co-op held its 85th annual meeting in July 2023, she was there, and it was her 85th annual meeting too. She has attended every last one.

“The first light bulb was the beginning of an amazing future for all of us,” says Synda Smith, the co-op’s CEO and

general manager. “There are few businesses that have a past connection like this. It feels so good to know that Katie still feels like we are doing what our earlier leaders wanted us to do by continuing to uphold the co-op business model.”

Katie has farmed most of her life around Coleman, except for two years in high school at Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio. She dated Harold Phillips for a little less than a year—sometimes on horseback—and they married in 1948 when she was 21.

Together they farmed for 66 years, until he died in 2014. Harold was one of the first farmers in the area to grow sunflowers and to use parallel terracing. They had five children, four of whom are still living—all within five miles of Katie. Two of the sons are farmers.

By her 50th wedding anniversary, Katie figured she was ready to give up farming, and she broke that news to Harold.

“I told him, ‘I think I’ve done enough now,’ ” Katie says. “And he said, ‘What would encourage you to do a little more?’

“I said, ‘You buy me an air-conditioned, four-wheel-drive tractor.’ ”

And that’s how she ended up the proud owner of a John Deere tractor that’s still in the family.

Katie, who says she needed no prescriptions until she turned 90, has other family heirlooms that she holds dear: A six-leaf table brought by covered wagon from Louisiana by Katie’s great-grandparents in the mid-1800s graces her dining room, and there’s a couple of glider-style chairs that her mother bought in New York and the chair her dad used to rock her to sleep.

But the greatest treasure might be Charlie Pitts’ old desk chair, the very one where he worked out the wrinkles and legal details of creating the electric utility that gave his kids—and his community—a brighter future.

And Katie still has a direct connection to the co-op office in town. One of her six grandchildren, Kathreyn Portis, is a member services representative at Coleman County EC, where she has worked almost four years.

“My family’s legacy in this county is a big one, so to get to be able to continue that means a lot to me,” Portis says. “Family isn’t just blood relatives. It’s these people,” she says of her three dozen colleagues at the co-op.

They all follow in the footsteps of a dairy farmer who wanted to leave the dark ages behind.

As Katie knits or quilts or watches her beloved Dallas Cowboys, she joins nearly 5,000 fellow co-op members in her community living a better life because of co-op power.

But she alone remembers that day in 1937 when her dad helped that first light bulb come on.

“It was magical,” Katie says. “It’s just the greatest thing in the world. When he found out that you could get electricity, he said, ‘We’re going to do it.’ ” ■



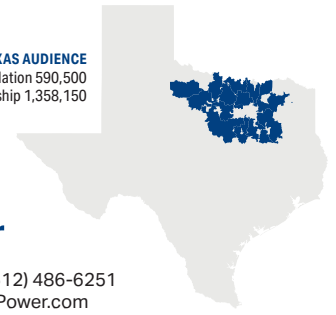
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It's not often you happen upon a bladesmith who has gem cutting skills. But finding needles in haystacks is what we do best, so when we saw this master craftsman's handiwork, we made certain to procure some of these Southwestern masterpieces to complete our collection.

The stainless steel blade, bolster and pommel are exquisitely etched and would have looked great with a less ambitious handle. But the results of overachieving are stunning here. The turquoise-blue colored handle is ablaze with assorted stones like jasper, marble, sunstone, and coral that have been hand cut and inlaid in a Southwestern motif.

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Since 1939, the employees of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative have promised to provide safe, reliable electricity to members and made an unwavering commitment to their communities. The faces change, but the values remain the same.

# that was **THEN**



**Above:** Rodney Fritsche, a survey technician in the 1970s, helps determine the location of future power poles and lines.

**Above right:** Francita Beyer at work at Bluebonnet's headquarters, then in Giddings, in 1958.

**Right:** In 1984, the telephone was the technology that employees such as Bud Watson used to dispatch crews to restore power.



**Left:** Herbert Mueller and Harry Namken are surrounded by transformers in a 1946 photo. Transformers performed the same function then as they do today: changing the voltage of electricity flowing through power lines.



**F**or 85 years, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative has provided power to members and communities in Central Texas. Bluebonnet originally served 1,468 members through 646 miles of power line. Today, the cooperative powers more than 133,000 meters with nearly 13,000 miles of line.

In those early years, Bluebonnet's dedicated men and women were passionate about making members' lives better. That work ethic and commitment to the cooperative's communities has never wavered.

Time has brought remarkable changes to Bluebonnet's region. Populations have boomed and economies diversified. Many members carry on the tradition of farming and ranching, some following in the footsteps of previous generations, others for the first time. Communities once anchored by agriculture, or the oil and gas industry, now are home to a diverse mix of retail, commercial and industrial businesses.



**Left:** A Bluebonnet field crew sets a utility pole in 1965. At that time, wooden poles, usually 35 to 45 feet tall, were typically installed manually. The introduction of digger trucks began to ease the process.



# this is NOW

Bluebonnet  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

85<sup>th</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY

A Bluebonnet timeline, **Pages 18-19**

Bluebonnet

Today, Bluebonnet is stronger, faster, more efficient and more reliable than ever. It has kept pace with growth using new technology and tools to improve and expand its electric system and service.

Members can pay bills and monitor their electric use through the cooperative's website or mobile app at any time. Technology allows Bluebonnet's control center operators and lineworkers to identify outages and restore power quickly and safely. Member service representatives can rapidly answer questions and resolve concerns, in person or by phone.

Safe, reliable, affordable electricity and excellent service are as important to Bluebonnet employees today as they were in August 1939. Members can trust that the cooperative will continue to uphold those commitments. It is the best way Bluebonnet can honor the legacy of its members, its workers and the communities it serves.

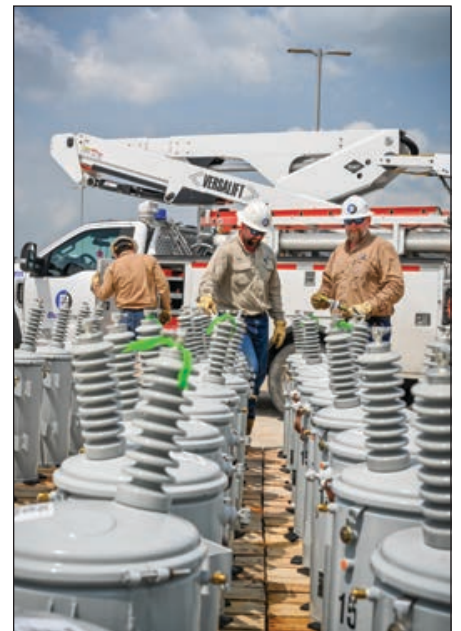


**Above left:** Today, 82% of member payments are self-service. Member service representatives like Bianca Maciel are still available at Bluebonnet's five service centers, including the Lockhart location.

**Above:** The 2024 equivalent of a 'survey technician' is a line-design technician such as Amy Beal. She talks with Jason Franks, a Lockhart-area member, about installing poles and lines on his property.

**Left:** Drew Gaeke is a control center operator in the Bastrop facility, where computer systems can locate outages and help dispatch crews within minutes.

**Right:** Employees Eric Sommerfield and Blake Davis look over new transformers destined for a construction site near Brenham earlier this year.



**Right:** Improved vehicles and tools have made the job of digging holes and placing power poles faster, more efficient and safer. One essential element that has remained unchanged are people.



# A BLUEBONNET TIMELINE



**May 11, 1935**

President **Franklin Roosevelt** signs executive order creating Rural Electrification Administration that backs low-cost loans for electric cooperatives, sparking a revolution in agriculture and rural communities

**March 4, 1940**

LCRA acquires power lines from Texas Power and Light Co. and sells them to **rural electric cooperatives** Lower Colorado River and Pedernales



**Sept. 6, 1940**

LCREC builds **646 miles of line**, connects 1,468 members who each pay a \$5 membership fee

*"My kitchen is modern... is yours?"*



**Oct. 1, 1956**

**'Live Better Electrically'**

appliance sales promotion campaign kicked off by LCREC and other rural electric utilities in Central Texas



**Aug. 2, 1939**

**Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative** (LCREC, later Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative) receives state charter to provide electricity to residents east of Austin in Washington, Fayette, Burleson, Austin, Colorado, Lee, Milam, Bastrop, Travis, Williamson, Caldwell, Hays, Guadalupe and Gonzales counties



**November 1940**

**New headquarters** building for LCREC opens in downtown Giddings

**Oct. 24, 1939**

Congressman **Lyndon B. Johnson** attends LCREC Board meeting at temporary headquarters in Giddings



**January 1946**

After near standstill in new power line construction during World War II, REA approves \$250,000 loan to LCREC to construct 300 miles of rural lines



**June 1958**

Teenagers from the LCREC area travel to Washington, D.C. for the first **Government-in-Action Youth Tour** and meet with U.S. Senate leader Lyndon B. Johnson

In 2024, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative celebrates 85 years of providing safe, reliable and affordable electric service to its fast-growing membership.



**Jan. 1, 1965**

LCREC name changed to **Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative**; the co-op reports 16,337 members in 14 counties



**2014**

Bluebonnet celebrates its **75th year** of providing electricity in Central Texas; the co-op has more than 86,000 meters



**2019**

Cooperative celebrates 80th year, reaches **100,000-meter milestone**

**1977**

Bluebonnet adds the first **underground residential power lines** to its system at Mesa Verde Estates in Cedar Creek



**2005**

Bluebonnet opens its **call center**, where member service representatives answer questions about bills, outages and connecting service



**2007**

Bluebonnet opens new **headquarters** in Bastrop County



**2016**

Bluebonnet hosts its first **renewable energy event** to inform members about connecting solar power to their homes or businesses

**2021**

Bluebonnet celebrates **100th graduate** from its lineworker apprentice on-the-job training program



**June 2024**

Now in its 85th year, the co-op has nearly **133,000 meters**, which marks an increase of more than 50% in just a decade

**1989**

Bluebonnet celebrates its **50th anniversary**; the co-op has 45,000 meters

# SPEND A DAY IN Manor

## From a ghost town to golf, venture off the highway to enjoy growing town's top stops

By Melissa Segrest

**ALONG BUSY U.S. 290**, 12 miles northeast of Austin, the ever-multiplying home and apartment rooftops of Manor may give the impression this town is a new commuter community. But Manor — pronounced “MAY-ner” — has a rich 152-year history. It was named for James B. Manor, who settled on Gilleland Creek west of today's downtown in the mid-1830s. In 1871, he deeded 200 acres to the Houston and Texas Central Railway line, making Manor a train stop on the way to Texas' capital.

The town's population grew from the mid-1880s through the 1920s, but the Great Depression slowed growth. Today, Manor is booming again: Thousands of houses have been built in the last two decades — most more affordable than those in pricier Austin — making Manor one of the nation's fastest-growing suburbs. In 2000, the city had 1,204 residents; by 2020, including two large nearby subdivisions, that number had grown to 25,625.

Manor is expanding and adding community events to provide more family-friendly activities. New to the schedule are free spring and summer movie nights in Timmermann Park, 12616 Skimmer Run. The last scheduled movie this year is on Aug. 9. The annual Holidays in the Park will be Dec. 7. Also noteworthy: an annual Easter Egg Helicopter Drop, the ManorPalooza citywide celebration every May and a Fourth of July event with fireworks.

Designated a Film Friendly Community in Texas, Manor has been the setting for numerous movies and TV series, including the hit '90s movie “What's Eating Gilbert Grape,” with young actors Johnny Depp and Leonardo DiCaprio. The city's iconic 1935 water tower stands in the background of some scenes.

## WHAT TO DO

**Crowe's Nest Farm**, 10300 Taylor Lane, is a popular educational working farm and wildlife rescue sanctuary that's been operating for 41 years. Every year about 40,000 children, most part of school groups, visit the farm, but families and individuals are welcome, too. Tours feature exhibits, demonstrations (including cow-milking), a hayride to visit a bison herd, and self-guided exploration to see farm animals and Texas wildlife. Open 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, from October to mid-December and again March through July (weather permitting). Crowe's Nest hosts a **Spring Festival** in April and a **Fall Festival** every Saturday-Sunday in October with additional events, including vendors and live music. Regular admission is \$8 for students, \$9 for adults and \$8 for seniors. Group tours (reservations required) and memberships are

Continued on next page



Manor's water tower, although no longer used, remains a landmark in the downtown district. It was featured in the 1993 movie 'What's Eating Gilbert Grape,' starring Johnny Depp and Leonardo DiCaprio. *Sarah Beal photo*



The eerie charm of J. Lorraine Ghost Town features 28 Old West-style buildings that evoke a sense of the abandoned past. The indoor/outdoor venue includes a giant wooden-fence maze, a towering two-story outdoor movie screen, and a bar and grill. *Sarah Beal photo*



The Good Luck Grill's catfish platter is a favorite with customers. The restaurant is listed by [tripadvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com) as among Manor's most popular. *Sarah Beal photo*



ShadowGlen Golf Club has an 18-hole course that is open to the public daily, except Christmas Day. *Photo courtesy ShadowGlen Golf Club*

Continued from previous page

available; private events can be booked for a fee. Get more information at [crowsestfarm.org](http://crowsestfarm.org), its Facebook page or 512-272-4418.

Halloween is just around the corner, and so is the **J. Lorraine Ghost Town**, 14219 Littig Road. It's a spooky 5-acre destination of 28 abandoned-looking, Old West-style buildings. Features at the indoor/outdoor venue include a giant wooden-fence maze, two-story outdoor movie screen and a bar and grill. Children are welcome but must be supervised. The town is reserved every October for **Scare for a Cure**, a giant interactive haunt for ages 13 and older that raises funds for the Breast Cancer Resource Center and other area charities. Get information at [scareforacure.org](http://scareforacure.org). The ghost town is open 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday year-round (unless booked for a private event). Check its Facebook page, call 512-922-2683 or go to [ghosttownaustin.com](http://ghosttownaustin.com) before visiting.

**ShadowGlen Golf Club**, 12801 Lexington St., is an 18-hole course that is open to the public as well as club members. Golfers can take lessons; use putting and chipping greens plus a driving range; and visit the clubhouse with a pro shop, bar and grill overlooking the ninth hole. There's also a golf cart drive-through mini bar at the ninth-hole green. The course is open daily, sunrise to sunset, except for Christmas. It costs \$99 to play the course on a weekend. Prices drop to \$55 for twilight rounds (play after 1 p.m.), seniors and military veterans Monday-Thursday. Individuals 17 and younger pay less to play, also. Get information at [shadowglengolf.com](http://shadowglengolf.com) or call 512-278-1304.

## GRAB A BITE

Dining options ranked among Tripadvisor's top restaurants include:

**Café 290**, 11011 U.S. 290 E., a fixture in Manor since 1947, is partially housed in a World War II-era Army barracks. It offers a large selection of American and regional foods, including numerous breakfast options. 7 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 7 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday; [cafe290.com](http://cafe290.com), 512-278-8780.

**The Good Luck Grill**, 14605 FM 973 N., offers casual dining with an extensive menu of all-American and Texas favorites. Customer favorites include the catfish, fried chicken sandwich and three-layer chocolate Jackpot Pie. There's indoor and outdoor seating on a covered patio, and kids have plenty of room to play outdoors. 11 a.m.-8:30 p.m. daily; [goodluckgrill.com](http://goodluckgrill.com), 512-272-8777.

**Casa Garcia's**, 12700 Lexington St., Suite 100; has traditional Tex-Mex and familiar Mexican dishes including taco plates, enchiladas, fajitas and a large breakfast menu. 7 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 7 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday; [casagarcias.com](http://casagarcias.com), 737-600-8171.

## TIPS FROM LOCALS

Parks worth visiting include **Timmermann Park**, 12616 Skimmer Run, according to the city's tourism manager, Yalonda Valderrama Santana. It has a playscape, eight picnic tables under a covered pavilion, a winding walking path, and a fishing dock and pond. For a bigger park space, several Manor residents recommend Travis County's 273-acre **East Metropolitan Park**, 18706 Blake Manor Road. It has a disc golf course, basketball court, fishing ponds, multiuse fields, a pool in summer and more; info at [parks.traviscountytexas.gov/parks/east-metro](http://parks.traviscountytexas.gov/parks/east-metro).

Sources: Yalonda Valderrama Santana, Manor heritage and tourism manager; [cityofmanor.org](http://cityofmanor.org); Texas State Handbook Online; Historical Marker Database; Manor Chamber of Commerce website; Manor Historical Society Facebook page; Austin's Eastern Frontier series, KUT.org; [tripadvisor.com](http://tripadvisor.com); Kirk Lohmann, ShadowGlen Golf Club general manager; David Williams, Crowe's Nest Farm executive director; Melanie Boston of J. Lorraine Ghost Town. ■



**Atlantic storm season runs from June 1-Nov. 30. Take steps now to be prepared for storms and outages.**

## 5 TIPS TO STAY SAFE DURING STORMS

Severe weather in the Bluebonnet region can include thunderstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes and flash floods. Know the risks and actions to take to better protect your family and property.

1. Identify in advance safe travel routes and official shelters.
2. Fill your vehicle's gas tank and keep it as full as possible.
3. Fill bathtub and other large containers with water for sanitary purposes such as flushing toilets.
4. Adjust refrigerator and freezer to coldest temperature.
5. Beware of downed power lines — they may be energized. Report downed lines to Bluebonnet or 911.

**FIND MORE STORM AND OUTAGE RESOURCES AT [bluebonnet.coop/hurricanes](http://bluebonnet.coop/hurricanes)**

# Bluebonnet, LCRA provide grants for community centers, museum

## BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC

Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently provided three grants to community nonprofit organizations and projects within the cooperative's service territory as part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and partners with LCRA to support its members and communities.

Applications will be accepted in January 2025 for the next round of grants. For more information about this program and the application, visit [lcra.org/cdpp](http://lcra.org/cdpp).

**TOP PHOTO:** A \$41,278 grant will help the Paige Community Club make upgrades to its community center's interior and exterior. This grant, along with \$10,320 in matching funds from the nonprofit group, will allow the club to repair and replace the Paige Community Center's roof and upgrade the kitchen area with energy-efficient lighting. Pictured, from left, are Rick Arnic, LCRA regional affairs representative; Sarah Deerkop, club secretary; Gary Light and Bettye Light, club members; Debbie Barrington, club president; Kathy Beeman, club treasurer; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; Margaret Boyd, club director; Stan Gerdes, District 17 State Representative; Gregory Klaus, Bastrop County judge; and Josh Coy, Bluebonnet's Bastrop-area community representative.

**MIDDLE PHOTO:** A \$14,112 grant will help the Rosanky Community Center Association make improvements to its grounds. This grant, along with \$22,050 in matching funds raised by the nonprofit, will be used to install a new shade canopy over playground equipment at the community center. The group also will add solar lighting, a French drain system and xeriscaping. Pictured seated in front, from left, are Sawyer Badders, Kutter Badders and Steelee Badders, junior association members. In the back row, from left, are Josh Coy, Bluebonnet's Bastrop-area community representative; Rick Arnic, LCRA regional affairs representative; Fay Meuth-Scoggins, association vice president; Dawn Thompson, association treasurer; Marc Haynes, association president; Galynn Fogle, association secretary; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; and Gregory Klaus, Bastrop County judge.



**ABOVE:** A \$15,868 grant will help the Dime Box Heritage Museum make improvements to its building. The grant, along with \$4,592 in matching funds from the nonprofit Dime Box Heritage Society, will pay for a new roof and an energy-efficient heating, air-conditioning and ventilation system. Pictured, in the front row, from left, are Sharon Phears, society president; Jean Blaha-Davis, society vice president; Bonnie Langham, society treasurer; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; Monica Kallus-Spacek, society director; Russell Jurk, Bluebonnet Board member; and Kate Ramzinski, LCRA regional affairs representative. In the middle row, from left, are Waymond Davis, society member; Sherry Murphy, Bluebonnet's Giddings-area community representative; Stan Gerdes, District 17 State Representative; Cynthia Bayer-Krenek, society secretary; Frances Koudelka-Whitsel, society member; and Donald Whitsel, society director. On the back row is Keely Mikolajchak, Bluebonnet intern.

# Meet Willie Wiredhand



Hey, kids! Willie is the happy mascot for rural electric cooperatives, and he's helping Bluebonnet celebrate its 85th birthday this month!

Join the fun: Cut out this page, color it and send it to us. You might win a drawing for a Bluebonnet gift basket full of coloring supplies and extra surprises.

### 3 WAYS TO ENTER

1. Email a photo or copy of your colorful Willie page to [socialmedia@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:socialmedia@bluebonnet.coop).
2. Mail your completed page to Willie Coloring Page, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 729, Bastrop, TX 78602.
3. Ask a friend or family member to bring your completed page to any of our five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor.

Open to children 12 and younger.  
Deadline for entries is 5 p.m. Sept. 1, 2024.  
Get details/rules at [bluebonnet.coop/williecoloring](https://bluebonnet.coop/williecoloring).  
Keep an eye on Bluebonnet's social media pages for your entry, too.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian email \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian phone \_\_\_\_\_

# SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our *Sedona Turquoise Collection*. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you



C.

could secure 26 carats of genuine Arizona turquoise for just \$99.

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The supply of Arizona turquoise is limited, don't miss your chance to own the Southwest's brilliant blue treasure. Call today!

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| <b>Complete Set**</b>                        | <del>\$747</del> * | <b>\$249</b> | +s&p | <b>Save \$498</b> |

\*\*Complete set includes pendant, chain and earrings.

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# Sense and Humor

LBJ's unique penchant for storytelling helped him navigate politics

BY W. F. STRONG

**WHEN MOST PEOPLE** think of Lyndon B. Johnson, they don't necessarily envision a man with a great sense of humor. After all, he was president during turbulent times.

"When the burdens of the presidency seem unusually heavy," he once joked, "I always remind myself it could be worse. I could be a mayor."

Though he didn't have the public eloquence of Kennedy or King, he was charismatic. He was a wonderful storyteller.

Writer and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin worked closely with the president for seven years, and because of her professional relationship with him, I would argue that her biography—out of all the biographies about the 36th presi-

dent—is the most humanizing.

No writer knew him better.

Goodwin told me she never tired of listening to him, though eventually she came to realize that his stories were not all completely true. Some were apocryphal, she said, and like Abraham Lincoln, LBJ used stories to animate his points, skewer his adversaries, and amuse and entertain.

He learned his storytelling, Goodwin said, from his father and grandfather, growing up in the Hill Country. Johnson would listen at night as they talked politics on the porch with local power brokers.

My own father, a great admirer of the president, shared a couple of LBJ stories with me long ago.

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



When Barry Goldwater and Nelson Rockefeller were campaigning to win their party's nomination for president in 1964, LBJ heard that both men were "cutting way back on their visits to California." Johnson said, "Reminds me of a case in Texas where a man wanted to run for sheriff against an unpopular incumbent named Uncle Johnny.

"Man asked his friend Dave if he thought he had a chance. Dave said, 'Well, I guess it depends on who meets the most people.' 'Yeah, that's what I was thinking,' said the man. Dave explained further, 'If he meets the most people, you'll win, and if you meet the most people, he'll win.'"

LBJ also told of a "boy in Texas who was very poor and tired of seeing his mama struggling so much to feed her family. So he sent a letter to God asking for \$100 for his mama. The letter got forwarded eventually to the postmaster general in Washington, D.C.

"He took pity on the boy and put \$20 in an envelope and mailed it to him. Two weeks later, the postmaster got a letter back from the boy that said, 'Dear God, thank you for sending the money, but next time don't send it through Washington cuz they took 80% of it.'"

Goodwin said she was happy to see that LBJ is getting long-deserved credit for the laws and policies he passed in his time, like the Voting Rights Act, as well as the institutions he helped found, like NASA and the Public Broadcasting Service.

If only he could have known how much progress his work would bring. He certainly would have smiled—and had a story ready. ■

# Party Drinks

Find fruity refreshments—and a guide for mocktail options

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Spending every summer in Mexico growing up, nothing made me happier than sipping on a tall glass of *agua de sandía* (watermelon water) sold by local street vendors. It's a bright and refreshing drink made from watermelon, water, lime juice and sugar. August is peak watermelon season in Texas, so I'm excited to share this beloved drink from my childhood.



## Agua de Sandía

**8 cups diced watermelon**

**4 cups cold water**

**¼ cup sugar**

**Juice of 1 lime**

**Tajín, for the rim**

**Lime wedge, for the rim**

1. Blend watermelon and water until smooth. Depending on the size of your blender, you may need to divide this into batches, blending half the watermelon and half the water at a time.
2. Strain into a pitcher. Stir in sugar and lime juice.
3. Spread Tajín on a plate. Run lime wedge around the rim of each glass and dip into Tajín. Serve over ice in Tajín-rimmed glasses.

**SERVES 8**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at [sweetlifelife.com](https://www.sweetlifelife.com), where she features a recipe for Hibiscus Mint Tequila Punch.



## Lemon Pucker Martini

DEBI OROZCO  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

I love a lightly sweet but bold-flavored cocktail, and that's exactly what this Lemon Pucker Martini recipe offers. It's a perfect balance between tart and sweet and proves incredibly refreshing.

- 2 tablespoons sugar, for the rim**
- 1 lemon wedge, for the rim**
- 2 ounces vodka**
- 1 ounce fresh lemon juice**
- ½ ounce limoncello**
- ½ ounce orange-flavored liqueur**
- 1 teaspoon agave**
- Lemon slice, for garnish**

1. Spread sugar on a plate. Run lemon wedge around the rim of a cocktail glass and dip into sugar. Place glass in the freezer until ready to serve.
2. Add vodka, lemon juice, limoncello, orange-flavored liqueur and agave to a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously.
3. Strain into chilled, sugar-rimmed cocktail glass. Garnish with lemon slice.

SERVES 1

MORE RECIPES >



\$500 WINNER

## Summer Beer

CINDY JARROTT  
BLUEBONNET EC



Pour, stir, serve and sip!  
A beer-based cocktail fit for a crowd, this simple summer beer is a fresh and smooth beverage that's designed for batching in bulk.

SERVES 6

- 1 can frozen pink lemonade (12 ounces)**
- 12 ounces vodka**
- 4 cans light beer (12 ounces each)**
- Frozen mixed berries, for garnish**

1. Add frozen lemonade and vodka to a pitcher. (You can use the lemonade can to measure 12 ounces of vodka.) Stir until lemonade is dissolved.
2. Add beer and stir to combine.
3. Pour into ice-filled glasses and top with frozen berries.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**HEARTY SOUPS** DUE AUGUST 10

When it's cold outside, we want nothing more than to cozy up inside with a piping hot bowl of soup. Send us your favorite comforting soup, and you could win \$500. Enter by August 10.





## Texas Bluebonnet

CAROL BRADY  
NUECES EC

It's time to pop open the bubbly and celebrate the waning days of summer. The addition of sparkling wine to this cocktail makes it feel a bit elegant, which is always a plus, but this festive drink can easily be whipped up for four or doubled for a crowd.

½ cup blue Curaçao liqueur  
1½ cups lemonade  
2 cups sparkling wine  
Juice of 1 lemon  
Orange slices, for garnish  
Lemon slices, for garnish  
Maraschino cherries, for garnish

1. Fill a pitcher with ice. Add blue Curaçao liqueur, lemonade, sparkling wine and lemon juice. Stir.
2. Serve over ice, garnished with fruit on skewers.

SERVES 4

**TCP** Vianney Rodriguez features many more cocktail recipes on [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com) and in *Latin Twist: Traditional and Modern Cocktails*, the book she co-authored with Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack.

## From Cocktail to Mocktail

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Nonalcoholic cocktails don't have to be bland. Here are a few tips and tricks to keep your party hopping:

Replace sparkling wine with soda water for a guilt-free bubbly effect.

A mix of cranberry and grape juice produces a delicious sangrialike option.

Ginger beer punches up the flavor and adds a warm kick to a mocktail.

Nonalcoholic spirits are becoming more common in stores. From vodka to mezcal and nonalcoholic beer and wine, options are hitting shelves, ready to help you shake up a mocktail.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## A Jaw-Dropping Journey

Brazos Bend State Park has acres and acres of alligators

BY CHET GARNER

**I LIKE ZOOS.** The cages and fences offer comfort when staring into the eyes of an apex predator. But there’s something exhilarating about stepping into a natural habitat and encountering a wild creature in its element.

And that’s the draw of Brazos Bend State Park, which comprises nearly 5,000 acres of wetland marsh and coastal prairie in Fort Bend County. Visit on a sunny day and you’re almost guaranteed to have an encounter with its most famous residents—American alligators.

Driving into the park felt like visiting a movie set, amid oak trees dripping with Spanish moss that create a canopy over the road. It’s hard to believe that I was only 40 miles from downtown Houston. I stopped into the visitor center and asked where to find the gators. They simply pointed me toward the park’s 37 miles of trails and said, “That way.”

It turns out hundreds of alligators inhabit the park, and it’s not uncommon to see 40–50 on a good day, in addition to the park’s other reptiles, amphibians and 300-plus species of birds.

I set off on the trail surrounding 40-Acre Lake, and it wasn’t long before I came face-to-face with a living, breathing dinosaur. It was at least 7 feet long and sunning on the edge of the trail. I cautiously passed by, giving it a Texas nod on my way. Twenty feet down the trail was another and then another.

A ranger assured me that in the park’s 40 years, no one has been injured, much less killed, by an alligator. They’re fairly docile creatures and prefer flight over fight when it comes to humans. Even so, I didn’t want to tempt fate and was more than happy enjoying them all from a very safe distance. ■

ABOVE Chet keeps a safe distance from one of the hundreds of gators that roam freely.

**TCP** From the safety of your screen, join Chet as he wanders among the gators. 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.

## AUGUST

8

**McKinney Thomas Craig**, (214) 769-0645, [thecomedyarena.com](http://thecomedyarena.com)

9

**Alpine [9–10] Big Bend Ranch Rodeo**, (432) 294-1640, [bigbendranchrdeode.com](http://bigbendranchrdeode.com)

10

**Chappell Hill Wine and Cheese Stroll**, (979) 337-9910, [chappellhilltx.com](http://chappellhilltx.com)

14

**Brady [14–17] Heart of Texas Honky Tonk Festival**, (325) 597-1895, [heartoftexascountry.com](http://heartoftexascountry.com)

**Corsicana [14–17] Red**, (903) 872-5421, [thewlac.com](http://thewlac.com)

17

**Brenham Peter, Paul and Mary Alive**; (979) 337-7240; [thebarnhillcenter.com](http://thebarnhillcenter.com)

**Santo Southwest Open Chili Championship**, (940) 733-6086, [casichilli.net](http://casichilli.net)

22

**Fredericksburg [22–25] Gillespie County Fair**, (830) 997-2359, [gillespiefair.com](http://gillespiefair.com)

23

**Decatur [23–24] Wise County Guild Quilt Show**, (817) 991-3407, [wisecountyquiltguild.org](http://wisecountyquiltguild.org)

24

**Lubbock Book Festival**, (806) 775-3634, [lubbockbookfest.com](http://lubbockbookfest.com)

**Castroville [24–25]**  
**St. Louis Day Celebration,**  
(830) 931-2826,  
saintlouisday.com

27

**Stonewall Commemoration  
of Lyndon Johnson's  
Birthday,** (830) 868-7128,  
nps.gov/lyjo

29

**Uvalde [29–Sept. 1]**  
**Palomino Fest & Pro Rodeo,**  
palominofest.com

30

**Fredericksburg [30–31]**  
**Vereins Quilt Show,**  
vereinsquiltguild.org

**Marfa [30–Sept. 1] Lights  
Festival,** (432) 217-6777,  
marfachamberofcommerce.org

**Granbury [30–Sept. 2]**  
**Labor Day Weekend  
Festival,** (682) 936-4550,  
granburysquare.com

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**Sunrise Beach Village  
Sip & Stroll,** (713) 299-1728,  
sunrisebeachtx.gov

## SEPTEMBER

7

**Luling Luling Foundation  
Youth Grill-Off,** (830) 875-  
2438, lulingfoundation.org

**McKinney Jurassic Night  
Out at the Heard,** (972) 562-  
5566, heardmuseum.org

**New Braunfels Donny  
Edwards: Tribute to the King,**  
(830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

### **TCP** *Submit Your Event*

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



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[TexasCoopPower.com/events](https://www.texascooppower.com/events)

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# Textures

The rough bark of a tree, the smooth surface of a pond in early morning, a display of soft bird feathers—the surfaces in our world offer a variety of visual and physical textures. From childhood we are told to look and not touch; but these offerings make us wish we could do both.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 KELTON CARVER  
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"This is my show steer for 4-H and FFA activities. His hair is velvety smooth! His wrinkles depict his inquisitive personality."

2 CYRIL FERNANDES  
PEDERNALES EC

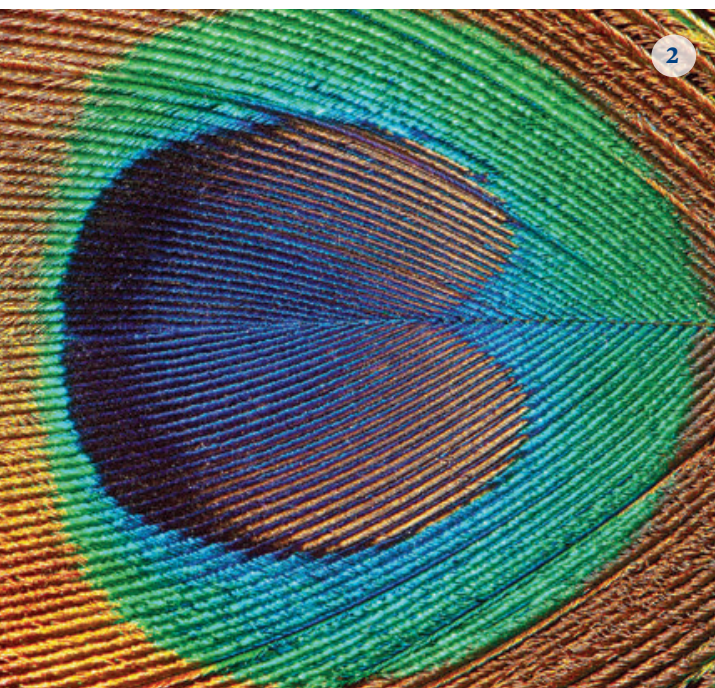
"Peacocks achieve their stunning plumage display through structural coloration called iridescence."

3 CARLY LATHAM  
HEART OF TEXAS EC

"I love looking at the skin of a Texas horse apple."

4 DORA CAFFEY  
TAYLOR EC

"A Rio Grande turkey shown in his finest ruffles."



## Upcoming Contests

DUE AUG 10 Young Photographers

DUE SEP 10 Parks

DUE OCT 10 I Love



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

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



## Friends in High Places

He was known for saving windmills, but one day he saved a whole lot more

BY SAM W. YOUNG  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
KEVIN HOWDESHELL

**DAD CAME HOME** from work one day with his left hand in a big bandage. He had driven himself to a hospital, where his fingers were repaired by a surgeon. One finger was almost severed but was put back together and ultimately saved.

When I was young, he worked for West Texas Lumber Co. in San Angelo, the local Aermotor Windmill dealer. Later he worked on his own. Ranch owners for miles around knew he was the man to call if a windmill needed repairs or replacement from the 1930s into the '80s. The cattle and sheep had to have water.

My brother and I are firmly convinced that no one man installed more windmills than our father. He was still climbing the contraptions after his 80th birthday and after he sold his business.

Working on these machines was dan-

gerous, even for a professional. Windmillers free-climbed and stood with a helper on a platform—untethered—as they made their repairs.

Aermotor windmills pivot on a vertical mast, with all the weight sitting on a washer inside a small cavity just under the motor. The motor has to be lifted a few inches to replace that washer.

To lift the windmill, with all the weight of the mill and the sucker rods, a chain is tied to the push rod and the tower and then a helper has to turn the wheel by hand and hold it.

Dad always had to have a helper, of course, and I was usually his helper in the summertime and over Christmas breaks.

There were days when we would load the pickup in San Angelo with the parts of a new windmill, the rods and pipe, sand, gravel, cement—everything needed for installation. I remember once when we drove to a new well on King Mountain, south of Odessa, assembled the tower and mill, raised it up with the pickup, dug the anchors by hand, and had it pumping water before sundown.

But I wasn't Dad's helper that fateful day south of San Angelo.

On that day, the chain must have slipped, allowing the weight of the rotor assembly to smash his fingers. He didn't say so, but what else could it have been?

There was something else he didn't mention until a few days later.

His helper had reacted to the sight of the blood and started to pass out. Dad reached out and grabbed the man with his right hand to keep him from falling off the windmill platform.

I don't know just how the issue was resolved from that point, but I do know this: While Dad's left hand was trapped, he saved a man's life that day with his right hand—the day he came home with the big bandage. ■

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— J. Fitzgerald, VA



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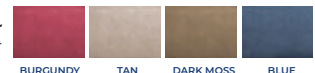
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