

LOSING HIS SIGHT  
AND FINDING HIS WAY

HOLIDAY BITES  
THAT CAN'T MISS

CHET FINDS HIS  
OWN DEN OF SNAKES

# Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

NOVEMBER 2024

## See No Evil

A snake expert who  
serves Texans and  
the reptiles he loves

**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16





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# November 2024



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ON THE COVER

Nathan Hawkins with a rattler recovered from a crawl space outside San Angelo.

*Photo by Russell A. Graves*

ABOVE

Mike Harrell lost his sight at 28 and then found his way around a dominoes table.

*Photo by Eric W. Pohl*

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Small Spaces

**RECOMMENDED READING**

Snakes also slithered across these pages in April 2020. Read *A Snake to Love* to become even more s-s-savvy about rattlesnakes.

# Making a Splash

**FOR THE FIRST** time in nearly 30 years, Texas has a new major lake. Bois d'Arc Lake near Bonham, northeast of Dallas, opened for recreation in April after decades of planning and construction.

The reservoir has a surface area of about 26 square miles and offers boating, hunting, picnicking and fishing. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department stocked it with largemouth bass and catfish.

The lake's main purpose is to supply water to a burgeoning North Texas population. To the same end, Lake Ralph Hall is under construction just to the south and is expected to deliver water in 2026.



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

**Snakes are ...**

**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 September prompt: **My first job was ...**

Learning not to be afraid to gather the eggs by running my hand under the sitting hen. I was 4 years old, and my grandmother was teaching me.

PAM HICKS  
SOUTH PLAINS EC  
LUBBOCK

Setting pins by hand in a bowling alley in 1945 at age 14.

HAROLD CLARK  
NUECES EC  
KINGSVILLE

Cashier at my father's drugstore. I used to refer to it as the drudge store.

CATHY BLAY  
SAM HOUSTON EC  
POINT BLANK

Tearing out the beaver dam every evening so the water wouldn't flood our field.

BENNY CALVIT  
BOWIE-CASS EC  
DE KALB

Visit our website to see more responses.

## Are You a Pepper?

Texas doesn't have an official soft drink. But if it did, we all know what it would be.

Now the rest of the country is catching on. Dr Pepper has edged out Pepsi to become the No. 2 soda in America, behind Coke, which has 19.2% of the market. The pride of Waco now has 8.3%.



SEPTEMBER 2024 Calling an Audible

“I was fascinated with your story about Texas School for the Deaf football and the inspiring coaches who work to support the sport.”

MARY HELEN THOMAS DAVENPORT  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC  
BUCHANAN DAM



SCOTT VAN OSDOL

**Great School Spirit**

I worked at TSD in the 1990s, when Andy Bonheyo became the coach. There is a great school spirit there, and I loved reading about the state championship in 2020. I'm not surprised that TSD would respond to a pandemic by being creative and then win state in six-man football.

Dianne Wheeler  
Pedernales EC  
Wimberley

**Long-Serving Tractor**

Like John Terry Wende, I purchased 16 acres 37 years ago, in 1987, near the town of Blue Ridge [The Farmer's Regret, September 2024]. A year later I bought a used 1954 Ferguson 30 tractor and rotary cutter for \$1,000.

With lots of TLC and new tires, it still serves me well. I can usually get spare parts at Tractor Supply Co. or from the New Parts for Old Tractors catalog.

Glenn Snyder  
Fannin EC  
Blue Ridge



DAVID MOORE

**Breathtaking Beauty**

Wyatt McSpadden's cover photo was truly breathtaking [Open Roads, Open Eyes; August 2024]. He captured the atmospheric phenomenon known as the Belt of Venus.

It's visible opposite the sun at sunrise or sunset. The belt is the pink band above the horizon at the end of the rusty red dirt road. The dark blue band below the belt and touching the horizon is actually Earth's shadow.

Ed LaBelle  
Pedernales EC  
Johnson City

**Elevating a Community**

When I finished reading Katie Phillips' retelling of her father's quest to start an electric co-op in 1937, I had tears in my eyes [In the Beginning, August 2024]. This is the story of an unsung hero who greatly advanced his community's standard of living. We are all still thankful for reliable co-op electricity.

Barbara Barnes  
Pedernales EC  
Junction

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

Texas Co-op Power

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**TEXAS CO-OP POWER** Volume 81, Number 5 (USPS 540-560). Texas Co-op Power is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 76 electric cooperatives. Texas Co-op Power's website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** Subscription price is \$4.44 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

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*A Good*



# Snake

**Before you hack that serpent to pieces,  
call someone who can safely take it far away**

BY TOM WIDLowski  
PHOTOS BY RUSSELL A. GRAVES

**S**nakes never stood much of a chance.

Even in the early pages of the Bible, the serpent was cursed above all other animals and dealt a troublesome fate: “You will crawl on your belly, and you will eat dust all the days of your life.”

If that lowly lot wasn’t bad enough, from then on they have found themselves on the wrong end of gardening tools and weaponry.

And still they thrive, especially in Texas—home to more than 100 species and subspecies of snakes, including 15 that are venomous.

Their greatest allies, it turns out, are men like Nathan Hawkins and Brett Parker, who themselves crawl on their bellies to remove and safely relocate snakes that encroach on humans’ domain, particularly from crawl spaces under homes.

“There are a lot of rattlesnakes here,” Hawkins says. “A lot more than people realize are here.”

Hawkins and Parker own snake removal businesses, both with an ethos of keeping the snakes, usually rattlers, alive and relocating them to remote habitats. They believe keeping the ecosystem intact and educating people about

Nathan Hawkins, owner of Big Country Snake Removal, with one of the six rattlesnakes he and a co-worker pulled out from under an abandoned house outside San Angelo. He releases most in a remote pasture, but he also has a collection of some 200, including mambas, king cobras, bushmasters and almost every venomous species in North America.

snakes’ role in nature are best for all involved.

The education part can be a challenge.

“A good snake is a dead snake.” Hawkins and Parker hear that almost every day.

“Completely false,” says Hawkins, who owns Big Country Snake Removal outside Abilene. “They’re very important to a healthy ecosystem. And they all deserve life.”

Hawkins, a member of Taylor Electric Cooperative, knows that isn’t what folks want to hear. Most people hate snakes and want them as far away as possible. But Hawkins’ method serves snakes well, helps put food on the table for his wife and young son, and has kept him in business for eight years.

He removed 45 rattlesnakes from under a house in 2019. A story about that ran in *The Washington Post* and elsewhere, and his video from that job went viral, making him somewhat famous. His biggest job to date is 127 rattlers, collected under a house in Seymour, southwest of Wichita Falls.

He removed 80-plus copperheads from a property between Cisco and Cross Plains in 2023. That was a nighttime job, when the snakes became, for Hawkins, easy pickings as they feasted on cicadas emerging from the ground.

Hawkins is a self-taught herpetologist whose love of snakes started when he was a kid in the Abilene area. He loved finding and collecting them, and that passion never waned. Today his collection has grown to include about 200 snakes—90% of them venomous.

He spends much of his free time looking for snakes. For vacation, he travels the Southwest in search of varieties of rattlesnakes (there are 23 subspecies in North America). His hobby is not without hazards. He has been bitten by venomous snakes seven times—twice by copperheads, once by a southwestern speckled rattlesnake in Arizona and the rest by western diamondbacks.





## *For some people, Texas' snake population feels like it's of biblical proportions.*

"If you're a carpenter, you're going to hit your thumb with a hammer at some point, and when you mess with snakes as often as I do, it's bound to happen sooner or later," says Hawkins, who is quick to point out he has never been bitten on the job.

He conducts workplace training for folks in the oil and energy industries who spend a lot of time in rugged terrain. He meets annually with Texas Department of Transportation employees to teach them about handling run-ins with snakes. He trains dogs to help them avoid snake encounters.



He'll also visit schools, youth camps and birthday parties.

Winter is the busiest time for Hawkins and Parker, who owns Hill Country Snake Removal outside Austin. That's when snakes become sluggish and enter a state of brumation,

similar to hibernation. They gather into dens, including crawl spaces under homes, where they are protected from the weather and where the stagnant air keeps their body temperature regulated.

Though their businesses are about 240 miles apart, Hawkins and Parker sometimes team up for jobs. That was the case in January, when Hawkins was hired to remove rattlesnakes from under an abandoned house outside San Angelo.

Hawkins, who played a season of football at McMurry University, stayed above ground, and the more slightly built Parker put on his headlamp, grabbed his snake tongs and wiggled into the darkness through a small hole in a closet floor.

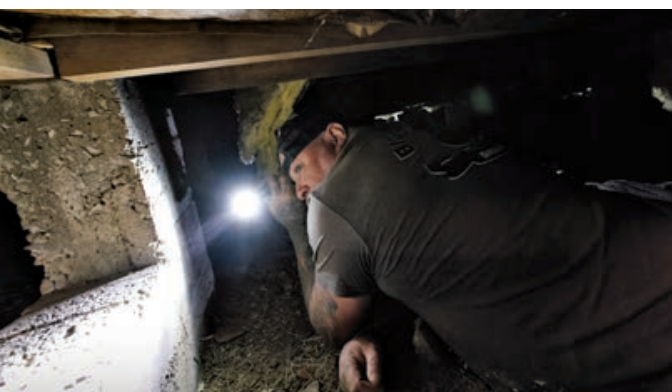
First came the offensive odor, likely from the raccoons and skunks also living underground. After a bit of cautiously crawling around, Parker found snakes—six of them—resting under a piece of plywood.

Using tongs, Parker handed them one by one up through the floor to Hawkins. They ended up in a covered 5-gallon bucket in the back of Hawkins' pickup.

After lunch, they headed up to Anson, just north of Abilene, for a job at the home of Kevin and Jolee Karle, members of Big Country Electric Cooperative.

The Karles knew they had snakes. Before hiring Hawkins, Kevin had killed 10 of them with a shotgun. With two horses





and a dog, dispatching snakes around his house was a guilt-free decision. “Oh, no,” Kevin says. “I wanted to protect the family.”

The snakes, one or two at a time, were placed into a sealable piece of 4-inch PVC pipe that Parker handed to Hawkins. “There’s still more in here,” came Parker’s muffled voice from deep in the void.

Eventually, the snakes were coming out three or four at a time. It was near dusk when Parker finally emerged, behind snake No. 29.

“We couldn’t believe there were that many under there,” Jolee says. “The way I look at it, I grew up in the country, so the fact that we’re going to have snakes in the country doesn’t bother me.”

But 29 rattlers? Just a foot or two below your bed? “That’s just a part of country life,” she says.

That part of country life doesn’t sit well with some people. Sarah McLen leads member services at Big Country EC. She lives about 25 miles southwest of Anson.

She and her husband keep a hoe or shovel at each of their exterior doors and by the door to a workshop. The McLens are not, she notes, big-time gardeners.

“We use the tools for their normal purposes,” McLen says. “We’ve killed multiple snakes in a variety of sizes in just about every area of our yard. We kill the rattlesnakes because they multiply, and we have dogs to protect.

“My husband picks on me because I whack them to pieces! But as far as I’m concerned, the more dead they are, the better!”

Because a good snake is a dead snake.

“It’s very, very common here,” Hawkins acknowledges. “Very common.

OPPOSITE Brett Parker, who helps Hawkins on occasion, owns Hill Country Snake Removal. He’s also a captain with Canyon Lake Fire and EMS. ABOVE In winter, when snakes enter a state of brumation, which is similar to hibernation, Hawkins gets called out to many jobs. “You just never know where a snake’s going to be,” he says. “You never do.”

“I have absolutely no right to tell somebody how to protect their house, how to protect their pets. If you feel that’s the right thing to do, then go for it. And I’ll give you a high-five.”


Hawkins just wants people to be aware of the bigger picture, and that’s where his mission to educate kicks in. As part of a stable ecosystem, snakes keep rodent populations in check, and they also are a food source for raptors, large mammals and even other snakes. “At least be a little bit open-minded,” he says.

For some people, though, Texas’ snake population feels like it’s of biblical proportions.

“I feel like I probably walk the yard with my ‘weapon’ held high, like Moses did with his staff when he parted the Red Sea,” McLen says.

Meanwhile, Hawkins carries on with the staff of his choosing, snake tongs that he wields with a light touch.

“The only good snake is a live snake,” he says. ■

 Watch the video on our website and crawl around with our experts—and the snakes.



How Mike Harrell reenvisioned hope and happiness through the subtle touch of dominoes

# TRICKS FOR ENDURING

STORY BY MARK WANGRIN • PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL



**EDITOR'S NOTE** *This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).*

**MIKE HARRELL GREW** up like many in rural Texas in the 1960s, with a passion for sports and the outdoors but most of all hunting and the solace it provided. Particularly the solace.

As a boy, he'd ramble through the Central Texas flatlands north of Austin, stalking whatever was in season. Alone time. Just him, the quarry and his thoughts.

After Harrell graduated in 1974 from Florence High School, where he was a standout in track, baseball and football, he needed to find a vocation to match his avocation. His father, Milton, owned an electric shop, so he went to work for him.

Harrell didn't mind the work. "What I didn't like was dealing with people, especially service calls," he recalls five decades later. "It got to the point I told him I wasn't going on any more service calls."

So like any good electrician, Milton completed the circuit by removing the barrier. Harrell would only work on wiring new houses and rewiring uninhabited ones.

The hardest job was yet to come. By 28, Mike Harrell would be completely blind. Now he had to rewire himself.

**SOMETIMES PEOPLE MEET** the sturdy 68-year-old retiree—whether it's at a Texas 42 dominoes tournament or



**LEFT** Mike Harrell of Florence has been blind since he was 28. Soon after, he rediscovered his love of the dominoes game Texas 42. He's become an expert at reading the pips—indentations—on his pieces by touch. **RIGHT** Salado Creek Saloon is one of his regular stops for friendly games.

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representing Florence as a volunteer city council member or anyplace outdoors, really—and before long, they’ll drop words like “amazing” and “impressive.” But Harrell isn’t impressed.

“I’ve been told that before,” he says. “But I’m just like everybody else.”

Except Harrell lost the sight in his left eye in a hunting accident when he was 16. Walking in the darkness, a branch whacked his face. “It hurt,” he says, “but it really didn’t bother me a lot.”

Monday came and the pain was worse, and his sight was blurry. It kept worsening, and doctors couldn’t stop it. Pretty soon the eye stopped seeing, the result of inflammation of the optic nerve.

Harrell adapted. He could still excel as a one-eyed tight end and defensive end in football, and he stayed formidable in track, running the hurdles. He did it by studying his motions between steps, memorizing every nuance, until he ran them by rote.

He began working as a roughneck locally and then on an offshore rig reachable only by helicopter. He settled down, got married and started a family.

One day, while welding a broken trailer latch, he thought he’d gotten something in his right eye. He looked at it in the rearview mirror, and it was bloodshot.

An ophthalmologist prescribed corticosteroids to fight the inflammation. “All I could see is if you look at the sun and it looks like a damn light bulb,” Harrell says.

So he had his first operation. “I could tell what color hair people had or what color their clothes were,” he says. “I got excited.”

Neither the excitement nor rudimentary vision lasted. His retina wouldn’t attach correctly, not with a second or third operation. Then came the dreaded words: “There’s nothing else we can do.”

**“I WAS DEVASTATED,”** Harrell says. “I didn’t depend on nobody for nothing. I did everything myself. Now I can’t even drive. Can’t see my family. I can’t see my kids.

“It was pretty rough.”

Friends wanted him to go to the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center, a state facility in Austin that trains people with limited vision to have productive lives, but the only facility he was interested in served equal parts alcohol and self-pity.

For a year and a half, he drank and couldn’t find work. One night he took out a shotgun and sat on the bed, when he heard the voice of his toddler son.

“I didn’t know my son was in the bed,” Harrell recalls solemnly. “He grabbed me around the neck said, ‘Dad, don’t do it.’”

Harrell pauses in reflection.

“I didn’t know whether I would have pulled the trigger if he hadn’t been there,” says Harrell, who’s estranged from his first family. “I never told anybody about that and don’t know if he’s old enough to remember or not. I don’t know.”



THIS PAGE Harrell, a Florence City Council member, memorizes his pieces as he feels the pips. OPPOSITE Harrell and partner Keith Kyle with their second-place trophy won at the 2023 Texas State Championship Domino Tournament. “I think I’m a dagburn good player,” Harrell says.





**A BIT BEFORE** Harrell turned 30, he gave himself a present: self-awareness.

“That’s the time where I said, ‘You know, I’m gonna have to do something about this,’” he recalls. “I remembered sitting with my grandma, and she was telling me, ‘I know it’s a terrible thing you lost. But you know, if you just look around, there’s always somebody in worse condition than you are, and most of the time, you don’t have to look very far.’”

He found it at the CCRC. Harrell couldn’t master Braille because his fingertips were too calloused from oil field work, but he learned woodworking and other manual skills, though he could never figure out why he was required to wear safety goggles.

He patched up his relationship with his higher power, discovering hidden blessings in his experience. Ultimately, he also found a career. He decided on transmission building and repair, tactile but challenging, applying the same memory skills he learned while running hurdles in high school.

Gradually he learned to make money from it, started his own shop, got remarried, started a second family, got divorced again and finally retired five years ago. At 4:30 a.m. every weekday he hitches a ride to the local gym to work out.

“Some people with disabilities feel stuck,” says Jessica Kovarna, one of his two daughters from his second marriage. “He’s the opposite. It’s like he doesn’t have one, just a minor inconvenience.”

Former Mayor Mary Condon, who remembers meeting Harrell when she first moved to Florence in 1978, says he has evolved into a man steeped in faith and self-acceptance.

“Because he’s blind, people tend to tiptoe around him,”

she says. “Mike just replies by making fun of himself.”

One day at church, a well-intentioned guy offered to help him find his way. “No, I don’t need help,” Harrell said brusquely.

The pastor overhead Harrell and cornered him. “If you won’t let that person help you,” the pastor said, “you are taking a blessing from someone.”

Harrell accepted that help.

**WHEN HARRELL WAS** a child, he watched his mom and her siblings play Texas 42. He studied the game, joined in when he was in high school and kept playing until he lost his sight.

At CCRC, he discovered a set of dominoes. Excited at something familiar in his hands, he resumed playing and even bought a set with the dots raised instead of indented.

Decades later, his dominoes schedule is full. A typical week has Sunday games at his aunt’s house, Monday at Salado Creek Saloon, Tuesday in Liberty Hill, Wednesday at his church, Friday warmup for a Saturday tournament and tournament play on Saturday at spots around Texas.

“I like competition,” Harrell says. “One reason I chose automatic transmissions to rebuild was because of the challenge doing that and being blind. That’s the same reason I play dominoes. The competition and the challenge.”

Harrell gets a couple of accommodations for 42. He’s allowed to feel the dominoes to identify the numbers they carry. And he can also ask what tiles have been played. “He keeps what’s been played in his head,” frequent partner Keith Kyle marvels. “His memory is amazing.”

In 2023, he and Kyle took second place at the state 42 dominoes tournament in Hallettsville, winning \$115, matching trophies and some admiration. They expect to try again for the state title next spring.

**YOU MIGHT NOT** think a city of 1,170 people requires a city council meeting lasting almost three hours, but the folks entrusted to shepherd the interests of Florence are nothing if not thorough.

During the July meeting, Harrell sits in the overstuffed chair at the dais and mutters a whole lot of “seconds” and “yesses” and not much else.

“And you thought I talked a lot,” he says to the only public spectator who stayed for the duration.

Condon finishes up a conversation with the current mayor and finds Harrell.

“You ready to go?” she asks.

Harrell puts his hand on her shoulder, and they set out for her pickup truck. “I was ready 2½ hours ago,” he cracks.

Just people. People helping people. ■

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# The PAST behind the PLAQUES

On the Bluebonnet region's roadsides and buildings, historical markers tell the stories that shaped our past.

Stories by David Pasztor • Photos by Sarah Beal

**Y**ou see them standing sentinel on roadsides, gracing courthouse lawns or hanging on aging buildings. Across the state, thousands of historical markers tell small pieces of the story of Texas. Some were erected by national or local historical organizations. Many more are the work of a program run by the Texas Historical Commission.

They are whispers on the landscape, capturing pieces of the past — poignant, mundane or monumental — and tracing the evolution of a land, its towns and people. The plaques are reminders of the founders, fighters, builders and worshipers who passed through not so very long ago. They remind us that it is important to stop sometimes in our busy days and learn more about the treasures of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region's past.

Texas started placing historical pins in its map not long after it was formed. In 1856, gravesites at the San Jacinto battleground near Houston were commemorated 20 years after the decisive fight that won Texas its independence from Mexico. By 1936, the Texas Centennial Commission erected more than 1,100 markers and monuments around the state. The Texas Historical Commission began its official program in 1962 and has since placed more than 17,000 cast aluminum markers statewide.

Each of the state's 254 counties has at least a few. Here is a sampling of the stories behind historical markers in counties and towns in the Bluebonnet region.

## WINCHESTER CEMETERY

Fayette County

About half a mile east of Winchester on FM 153, a wrought iron arch welcomes visitors to a cemetery with historical threads deeply woven into this small community northwest of La Grange. Col. Nathan Thomas, a former Republic of Texas congressman, donated the land for the burial grounds in 1871. It became the final resting place for many of the area's original settlers and is still in use today.

Winchester hit its peak in the early 1900s, shipping local cotton and other farm products while the town was a stop





Aged tombstones and new burial markers, a wrought iron arch and the Avenue of Oaks make up Winchester Cemetery, above. The burial grounds, northwest of La Grange, were donated in 1871.

along the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad. The town boasted 18 businesses in 1900, but the number dropped to a handful after 1950.

Winchester remains a picturesque small town, and many descendants of former residents are still being buried in the carefully maintained cemetery. In 1999, an "Avenue of Oaks" was planted along the main entrance, and in 2002, nine Victorian-style lamps were installed around the grounds to provide light and security.



A Texas Historical Commission marker on the Burton Farmer's Gin tells visitors about the facility's cutting-edge technology that was steam-powered until 1925.

## BURTON FARMERS GIN

### Washington County

When it was built around 1914, the Burton Farmers Gin was a marvel of cutting-edge technology, a steam-powered integrated system that could "process cotton from wagon to bale in a continuous operation," according to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. The gin, one of four in Burton, could turn out seven bales per hour.

It was the last gin in Burton by the time it stopped operating in 1974, as the importance of the area's cotton waned. But fans and preservationists have been able to keep its unique machinery and structure intact, and it's one of the few gins from that time that can still operate. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Burton, a small town on U.S. 290, 22 miles east of Giddings and 13 miles west of Brenham, continues to embrace its history. In addition to preserving the gin, the town is home to the Texas Cotton Gin Museum. The historical marker is attached to the old gin at 307 N. Main St. For more information, call 979-289-3378 or visit [texascottonginmuseum.org](http://texascottonginmuseum.org).



A photo on display at the Burton gin shows some of its 'founding farmers' in 1913. *Texas Cotton Gin Museum photo*

**Stories continued  
on Page 18**

# THE DR. EUGENE CLARK LIBRARY

## Caldwell County

One of the most storied buildings in downtown Lockhart is also the perfect place to sit down with a good book. Just off the town square, on South Main Street, the two-story Dr. Eugene Clark Library is an architectural showpiece of red brick and limestone that is the oldest continuously operating library in Texas.

Clark, a New Orleans native who practiced medicine in Lockhart for 13 years, died in 1897 at age 37. On his deathbed, he “dictated a will specifying that the citizens of Lockhart should have a library and lyceum,” according to the City of Lockhart’s website. “His will left \$10,000 to the people of Lockhart, of which \$6,000 was to be used for construction, \$1,000 to buy books and the remainder was to be put in a trust to maintain the building and



purchase new books.”

Dedicated in 1900, the library has endured as a social and cultural hub for Lockhart. The building alone is worth a

visit, but after expanding into an adjoining building, it also remains a fully functional, modern library, where people can go to fulfill their desire to learn.

## About Texas’ historical markers

Thousands of Texas Historical Commission markers are scattered across Texas, and as of mid-September, 2,169 of them could be found in the 14 counties where Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative provides electricity. To explore a complete list of these markers, visit the commission’s website at [bit.ly/4d58AG9](http://bit.ly/4d58AG9), which includes an interactive map and search features.

Each marker highlights significant people, events, structures or locations that have been a part of Texas’ story. The historical commission has other programs designed to protect and restore historic places, including 39 historic sites. One site is in the Bluebonnet service area: Washington-on-the-Brazos in Washington County.

Qualifying for a historical marker requires an application, documentation of historical significance, community involvement, a review period and a nonrefundable \$100 fee. Applications for Texas Historical Commission marker designations in 2025 will be available on Feb. 1, 2025, and will be accepted from March 1 through May 15. More information is at [bit.ly/3zviGSY](http://bit.ly/3zviGSY).

## WEBBERVILLE EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH

### Travis County

Where the Colorado River loops north on the eastern edge of Travis County, the community of Webberville is directly in the path of growth and development pushing out from Austin.

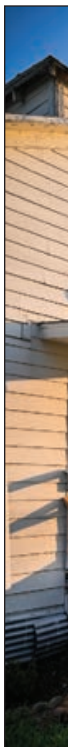
But in the early days of Texas, it was an isolated refuge where John F. Webber, a white man married to a Black woman, moved his family in 1839.

The town that grew here took Webber’s name. It was first called Webber’s Prairie, according to the Texas Historical Commission. But his family did not find the peace they sought, and in 1851 Webber sold his land and moved to Mexico.

After the Civil War, the community began to evolve. “In 1868, Matthew Duty donated one acre

of land here for the purpose of building a church for the area’s recently emancipated African Americans. That year, the Webberville Ebenezer Baptist Church was organized. Duty, a resident of Webberville, is commemorated on the marker, which is at 1314 Weber St. off FM 969, directly in front of the church. Surrounding the marker is an open pasture and an iron fence enclosing several stone markers, known as Duty’s Cemetery, where Matthew Duty and several of his family members were buried in the 1800s. The site is between Webberville Village to the north and a Dollar General to the east.

“Ebenezer Baptist remains active despite the relocation of many of Webberville’s families to nearby urban centers. Former members continue to gather here on special occasions and holidays,” reads the marker.





Lockhart's Dr. Eugene Clark Library is the oldest continuously operating library in Texas.



Ebenezer Baptist Church, still active today, is at 1314 Weber St. off FM 969.

# THE CHISHOLM TRAIL AND EL CAMINO REAL

## Burleson County

Two legendary paths through Texas history cut through Burleson County near Caldwell, and they are enshrined on historical markers a few miles apart on Texas 21.

After the Civil War, between 1867 and 1884, the Chisholm Trail became a major thoroughfare for longhorn and other breeds of cattle headed to Kansas for sale. The trail started as many smaller trails, with many names, in far South Texas. Named after the merchant Jesse Chisholm, who established it in 1865, it eventually stretched at least 800 miles. One of those branches ran through Burleson County, as well as six other counties now in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region. "The trail became a significant commercial road. Vital to the development of Burleson County's cattle industry, it declined in use after rail lines reached the area in the late 1870s," according to the marker on the north side of Texas 21 about 8 miles west of Caldwell.

Many stretches of Texas 21 also follow the path of another storied trail: the original El Camino Real de los Tejas — the "royal road of the Tejas," or Caddo Native Americans. Paths that had been formed over hundreds of years by the passage of indigenous peoples and bison became the primary



The Chisholm Trail, established in 1865, was used to drive cattle from across South Texas to railheads in Kansas.

trade routes for Spanish colonization from 1690 to 1821. The historic trail stretched 2,580 miles in the United States, starting in colonial Mexico City, crossing Texas and ending in Louisiana. Three branches of El Camino Real in Texas crossed large segments of today's Bluebonnet service area. The National Park Service, which named it a historic trail in 2004, said El Camino Real was "instrumental in the settlement, development and history of Texas. Its path, parts of which are now paved by major highways, including Interstate 35, was key to the growth of several cities, including San Antonio, Austin, San Marcos and Bastrop. The Burleson County historical plaque is on the south side of Texas 21, near the turnoff to Dime Box.

## El Camino Real in the Bluebonnet region



Branches of El Camino Real, stretches of which are now highways, crisscross the Bluebonnet region. The original path stretched from Mexico City into Louisiana. The National Park Service says El Camino Real, the 'royal road of the Tejas,' was a key to the growth of the region.

# DIME BOX

## Lee County

The story of Dime Box actually started about 3 miles from where the town now sits on Texas 21, 18 miles northeast of Giddings. Originally, Dime Box was built in the 1860s and early 1870s when Joseph S. Brown built a sawmill. It got its name because residents would leave dimes, letters and orders for small items in a large wooden box for a mail carrier on horseback to take to nearby Giddings. The mail carrier would return with residents' mail and items, which were dropped in the box.

In 1913, the Southern Pacific Railroad built a line about 3 miles south of the original Dime Box, so most residents and businesses moved nearer to the railroad. The new site claimed the name Dime Box. The original location along Texas 21, now known as Old Dime Box, is still home to some residents. The wooden box was probably used for only a few years, but Dime Box's 207 residents continue to honor its story of origin. The town received national attention in 1946, when a CBS radio



Above, the 'Dime Box,' an oversized replica of a dime encased in a large transparent box, is near the Dime Box Heritage Museum. At left, a CBS radio broadcast in 1946 put the town in the national spotlight to kick off the national March of Dimes campaign to find a cure for polio. *Lee County Historical Commission photo*

broadcast kicked off the March of Dimes fundraising drive from Dime Box, according to the Texas State Historical Association.

A historical marker on FM 141 near Stayton Avenue partly captures the town's past, but a little farther down the road is an

actual "Dime Box," a 2-foot replica of a dime encased in a large transparent box. Nearby is the Dime Box Heritage Museum, which holds crafts and quilts from the area's German and Czech settlers.

# EDUCATION IN INDUSTRY

## Austin County

In the 1830s, German immigrants began settling in Austin County about 14 miles southwest of Brenham. They founded the town of Industry, believed to be the oldest German settlement in the state, and brought the idea of free public education from their home country.

By 1880, the county had established a system of public schools, including five in Industry. Local education advocates also tried to establish a college in the town, although the plans never came to fruition. Blinn College, the closest institution of higher education, is 14 miles away.

Over time, Industry's fortunes ebbed with the decline of cotton farming. The local school district was eventually absorbed by the nearby Bellville Independent School District. But education remains a cornerstone of the farming community: The West End



Elementary School in town still serves 168 local students, and the historical marker capturing the town's history stands in front of the school on FM 109, about half a mile south of downtown.

Founders of the German settlement of Industry placed a high value on free public education. A historical marker at West End Elementary tells of their efforts.

# BARON DE BASTROP

## Bastrop County

Two markers in Bastrop memorialize the city and county's namesake — Felipe Enrique Neri, Baron de Bastrop, a major figure in the colonization of Texas.

The markers describe him as an empresario and land commissioner. The largest marker, hewn of granite and metal in 1936, is on the northwest corner of the Bastrop County Courthouse grounds, near the intersection of Pine and Water streets. It reads, in part: "Let this name bring to mind the friend and advocate of the pioneer in a foreign land." The second marker is on the grounds of Bastrop State Park, about half a mile east of Loop 150 on Park Road 1-A.

The markers tactfully omit the self-styled baron's backstory, a tale of how the ambitious and desperate once looked to the fledgling Texas territory as a place to reinvent themselves.

Born Philip Hendrik Nering Bögel in 1759 in Dutch Guiana — now Suriname in South America — he moved to Holland with his parents as a child. He left about 30 years later, fleeing a bounty for his arrest after charges of embezzlement of tax money, according to the state historical association's Handbook of Texas.

Bögel changed his name to Neri, added a



The Baron de Bastrop, commemorated, above, at the Bastrop courthouse and in a 1939 etching, left, titled 'Moses Austin and Baron de Bastrop meeting in San Antonio.' The Baron de Bastrop is on the left. *Bastrop County Museum & Visitor Center etching*

flourish with the title of baron and headed to the United States. He passed through several states before arriving in Texas, where he became instrumental in helping clear the way for colonists.

"Although his pretensions to nobility were not universally accepted at face value even in his own lifetime, he earned respect as a diplomat and legislator," the handbook notes. He died on Feb. 23, 1827. Friends and fellow legislators paid the cost of his burial in Saltillo, Mexico, which was then the capital of a vast region that included Texas.

# CEMENTERIO DEL RIO

## Hays County

Here's the trick to finding this well-hidden but precious historical gem: Take Texas 80 east out of San Marcos and turn right onto FM 110, also called Old Bastrop Road. (There's a light at the intersection.) After crossing the San Marcos River, immediately look to the left for a small, hard-to-spot gravel ranch road. Follow that path to its end.

There you'll find the Cementerio Del Rio, a burial ground that hasn't been used for at least 80 years but still speaks volumes about the multicultural history of San Marcos and Central Texas.

The three-acre cemetery on the south bank of the San Marcos River sits close to the old location of the Spanish settlement of San Marcos de Neve, which was authorized by the Spanish in a bid to stop Anglo expansion in the area. Hit by

floods and conflict with Native American tribes, the settlement lasted only from 1808 to 1812.

In 1893, the site was deeded to Hays County "for the purposes of a church, school and Mexican-American burials," according to the historical marker on the cemetery grounds. It's hard to say how many people are buried there. Many tombstones are faded beyond readability or toppled and decayed from decades of exposure to the elements.

Grave markers that can be made out are mostly in Spanish, with burial dates ranging from 1906 to 1941. "A majority of the surviving stones which are mainly from 1910-1920 reflect the influx of Mexican immigrants around the time of the Mexican Revolution, thereby exhibiting the growth of a unique culture in San Marcos," the historical plaque notes. ■



The three-acre cemetery near San Marcos dates to the early 20th century.

# Salute to our veterans

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative will honor Veterans Day on Nov. 11 with a heartfelt tribute to those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. This year, the cooperative proudly recognizes 22 employees who served in the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines. These veterans answered the call of duty in the U.S. and abroad, and still serve by delivering safe, reliable electricity to more than 133,000 Bluebonnet members across 14 Central Texas counties. Here are Bluebonnet employees who served in the U.S. Armed Forces.



**SARA ABREGO**  
U.S. Marines,  
Sergeant



**MICHAEL BLAND**  
U.S. Army, Specialist;  
Army National Guard,  
Command Sergeant  
Major



**JEFFREY BOLDING**  
U.S. Marines,  
Lance Corporal



**ERIC COBB**  
U.S. Army,  
Sergeant



**THOMAS ELLIS**  
U.S. Air Force,  
Airman 1st Class



**IZAAC ESTRADA**  
U.S. Army Reserve,  
Private 1st Class



**MICHAEL GUAJARDO**  
U.S. Army Reserve,  
Staff Sergeant



**BRANDON JOHNSON**  
U.S. Army, Specialist;  
Army National Guard,  
Sergeant



**LANCE KAY**  
U.S. Army,  
Sergeant



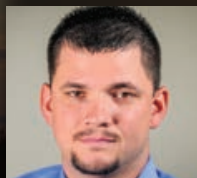
**KEITH KNOBLOCH**  
U.S. Army,  
Specialist



**STANLEY LILLIAN**  
U.S. Army,  
Sergeant



**MATT MCGARR**  
U.S. Navy,  
Petty Officer 2nd Class



**RAY MEYER JR.**  
U.S. Marines,  
Sergeant



**GEORGE MILLER**  
U.S. Navy,  
Petty Officer 1st Class



**KYLE MILLER**  
U.S. Marines,  
Corporal



**MATTHEW RODRIGUEZ**  
U.S. Army, Sergeant



**LARRY SALINAS**  
U.S. Air Force,  
Staff Sergeant



**HARVEY SCHNELL**  
U.S. Army,  
Specialist



**DIOR SMITH**  
U.S. Army,  
Specialist



**JORGE VARILLAS**  
U.S. Marines,  
Sergeant



**DARTANIAN WALLACE**  
U.S. Army, Sergeant



**JEFFREY WILLIAMS**  
U.S. Navy,  
Petty Officer 3rd Class

**Check out our  
social media this  
Veterans Day as  
we honor those  
who served.**

## OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Nov. 11 for Veterans Day and Nov. 28-29 for the Thanksgiving holiday. If you have a power outage, text OUT to 44141, report it at bluebonnet.coop or on

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



# that was **THEN**

The annual Government-in-Action Youth Tour, which sends students selected by electric cooperatives to visit Washington, D.C., became official in Texas in 1965.

The program's unofficial start, though, dates to 1958, when six Texas high school students visited the nation's capital at the invitation of then-U.S. Senate majority leader and future President Lyndon B. Johnson. The students were selected from only three Texas cooperatives:

Bluebonnet, Pedernales and Sam Houston. Over the decades, Bluebonnet has sent 116 high school students.



# this is **NOW**

Bluebonnet still participates in the Government-in-Action Youth Tour. Each year, two students from the cooperative's service area are selected to represent Bluebonnet and join hundreds of other high school juniors and seniors in Washington, D.C., for an immersive week of connection, education and unforgettable experiences. Applications for the all-expenses-paid 2025 youth tour next summer and a \$1,000 scholarship are available Nov. 1. The deadline to submit applications is Jan. 17, 2025. For more information and to find the application, visit [bluebonnet.coop/scholarships](http://bluebonnet.coop/scholarships).

**Top:** Texas teens and their chaperones board a Braniff Airways flight to Washington, D.C., for the first unofficial Government-in-Action Youth Tour in 1958. *Bill Malone Photography*

**Above:** Lydia Huebner of Industry, left, and Chasidy Nowicki of Brenham, Bluebonnet's student representatives, pose in front of the U.S. Capitol during the 2024 Government-in-Action Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., in June. *Photo courtesy of Lydia Huebner and Chasidy Nowicki*

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



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



shade for travelers and cattle. In fact, range cattle gathered beneath it so much that they created a large depression in the ground there. Thus, it was more properly known then as El Encino del Pozo, the oak in the hole. Encino became a stage-coach stop, but sadly, the namesake tree died long ago.

Palacios, the enchanting town on the Gulf of Mexico, means palaces. There are some lovely homes there but no palaces. The town's original name was Trespalacios, for the first governor of the Mexican state of Texas, José Félix Trespalacios.

Refugio means refuge in Spanish, and the name indeed tells of the town's historical—and even present—significance. Well over 200 years ago, it was a refuge for travelers, a safe haven for those traveling across the frontier to San Antonio or Austin's colonies or south to Corpus or Matamoros.

Today it still functions as a refuge as the halfway point between the Rio Grande Valley and Houston. For its size, it has an unexpectedly large number of restaurants, gas stations and hotels, all teeming with travelers.

The Nueces River, meaning the river of nuts, was so named because of the plentiful pecan trees that grew along its banks.

Agua Dulce of South Texas has a sister city in West Texas—Sweetwater. Both were named for what was a highly prized type of water: Sweet water, as distinguished from brackish or salty water, was, naturally, greatly preferred. It was the sort of attribute chambers of commerce could use to market a town, or name it.

Here's some homework for you. See if you can figure out what Pecos means. It's a hard translation to pin down, with more twists and turns than the river itself has. *Buena suerte, amigos.* ■

# Found in Translation

Spanish influence can be traced across Texas as you follow a map

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY NICK LU

**FOR THOSE WHO** have at least a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish, traveling Texas becomes quite interesting because the Spanish names of places reveal, or hint at, their histories.

For instance, Alamo means cottonwood, as in cottonwood trees. The mission was named after the hometown of the Mexican soldiers who served there in the early 1800s—Alamo de Parras.

San Antonio is named for St. Anthony. The Spanish explorers who came upon the river and springs there in 1691 arrived on the Feast of St. Anthony, June 13, and used the occasion to honor him.

Corpus Christi has a similar naming story. Latin for body of Christ, the city was named for the Feast of Corpus Christi, which is 60 days after Easter. Legend has

it that's the day that explorer Alonso Álvarez de Pineda first laid eyes on the sparkling tropical bay.

San Jacinto, in English, would be St. Hyacinth. The battle of that name was fought near the San Jacinto River, which was named either for the hyacinths that grew there so bountifully and bloomed so beautifully, or for St. Hyacinth, the patron saint of those in danger of drowning. Perhaps it was named for both.

Many merely wide places along the trail became small towns and were named for the original attractions that put them on the map.

Encino, 46 miles north of Edinburg, is such a case. *Encino* means oak. In the 1800s it had an ancient, sprawling oak tree that provided much-appreciated

# Holiday Bites

Share these flavorful snacks with friends—and be prepared to share the recipes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

I don't think I've ever made a more tried-and-true appetizer than these cranberry meatballs. All the flavors of Thanksgiving in a bite-size appetizer without spending hours in the kitchen. They are always a part of my holiday spread and definitely hold their own alongside other festive bites.

## Cranberry Turkey Meatballs

### MEATBALLS

- 1 pound ground turkey
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup finely diced onion
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 egg, slightly beaten
- ½ cup breadcrumbs

### CRANBERRY SAUCE

- 3 cups fresh or frozen cranberries
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- ¾ cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- 1 teaspoon crushed dried rosemary
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper

**1. MEATBALLS** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

**2.** In a large bowl, combine meatball ingredients and mix until well combined. With damp hands, shape into 1-inch meatballs and place on prepared baking sheet. Bake 20 minutes.

**3. CRANBERRY SAUCE** In a large skillet over medium-high heat, combine sauce ingredients. Cook 8–10 minutes, stirring occasionally until sugar has dissolved, cranberries have burst and sauce has slightly thickened.

**4.** Serve meatballs warm with cranberry sauce.

SERVES 14

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





## Olive Cheese Balls

BETSY STRIEGLER  
BLUEBONNET EC

Cheese-wrapped olives, baked to perfection, are a wonderful pick-up appetizer. Striegler learned this recipe in a college food and nutrition class where the students prepared thousands for the dean's reception. It's a family favorite to this day.

**2 cups grated sharp cheddar cheese**  
**½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened**  
**1¼ cups sifted flour**  
**½ teaspoon salt**  
**½ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper**  
**48 pimiento-stuffed green olives, drained**

**COOK'S TIP** Once the prepared olives have been frozen one hour, they can be placed in a zip-close bag and stored. When you're ready, simply place olives on a baking sheet and bake according to directions.

1. In a food processor, blend cheese with butter until smooth. Add flour, salt and cayenne and process into cheese mixture until well blended.
2. Pat dry the olives with a paper towel.
3. Wrap 1 teaspoon dough around each olive. Place each olive approximately 1 inch apart on a baking sheet. Freeze at least 1 hour.
4. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Remove olives from freezer and bake 15 minutes.

MAKES 48

MORE RECIPES >



\$500 WINNER

## Feta and Dill Stuffed Shrimp

ANN CYCHOSZ  
WISE EC



Meet your new favorite appetizer! Go beyond the typical shrimp cocktail with this creamy, delicious snack. The feta dill filling comes together in minutes, and you can assemble these succulent bites the night before. I love the contrasting tastes and textures of these delightful shrimp, which add a festive touch to your holiday parties.

**4 ounces cream cheese, softened**  
**4 ounces crumbled feta cheese**  
**2 tablespoons lemon juice**

**2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh dill or 2 teaspoons dried dill**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**½ teaspoon cayenne pepper**  
**½ teaspoon ground black pepper**  
**1½ pounds large raw shrimp**  
**Fresh dill sprigs, for garnish (optional)**  
**Cocktail sauce (optional)**

1. In a bowl, mix cream cheese and feta cheese until well blended. Stir in the lemon juice, dill, salt, cayenne and black pepper. Chill mixture 1 hour.
2. Remove shrimp shells, leaving the tails on. Cut a slit down the length of the outside curve of each shrimp and devein.
3. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add shrimp and cook 90 seconds or until they turn pink and are fully cooked inside. Drain shrimp, rinse under cold water and pat dry.
4. Transfer the cheese mixture to a pastry bag or a plastic sandwich bag with a corner of the bag snipped off. Pipe the cream cheese and feta cheese mixture into the slit of each shrimp.
5. Arrange on a platter and chill 1 hour. Garnish with fresh dill and serve with cocktail sauce, if desired.

SERVES 6

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**EGGS** DUE NOVEMBER 10

Scrambled, poached, deviled, fried or boiled, we'll eat eggs for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Tell us how you like your eggs, and your recipe could win you egg-zactly \$500. Enter by November 10.

**UPCOMING: THE WHOLE ENCHILADA** DUE DECEMBER 10



## Pork and Cream Cheese Stuffed Mushrooms

SUSAN RODGERS  
PEDERNALES EC

The savory richness of ground pork, tanginess of cream cheese and earthy depth of mushrooms come together in this bite-sized delight.

- 1 pound cremini mushrooms**
- 12 slices bacon**
- 1 pound pork breakfast sausage**
- ½ cup chopped onion**
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic**
- 2 teaspoons steak seasoning**
- 1 package cream cheese (8 ounces), softened**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Coat a baking sheet with cooking spray. Remove stems from mushrooms and discard. With a paper towel, gently wipe off the caps and place on baking sheet with the cavity side up.



3. In a skillet over medium heat, cook bacon a few slices at a time until crispy and drain on a paper towel.
4. Reserve 2 tablespoons of bacon grease in skillet and add pork sausage and onion. Cook, breaking up sausage with a spoon until well done. Stir in garlic and steak seasoning. Reduce heat to low and cook 2 minutes, then remove skillet from heat.
5. Dice bacon, reserving 2 slices, and add to a bowl along with cream cheese and sausage mixture. Mix until well combined.
6. Fill each mushroom cap with filling and

## App-ropos Tips

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Here are a few ideas to make serving appetizers more fun:

**Lettuce leaves** have a natural cup shape and can be used instead of a plate.

Dips, meatballs, ceviche and soups can be served in **martini glasses** instead of bowls.

**Crackers** add crunch and are sturdy enough to hold salads and dips.

Easily create a beautiful display using **skewers**, which can hold meats, cheeses and veggies.

return to baking sheet. Bake 20 minutes, then allow to cool 10 minutes.

7. Crumble reserved bacon slices. Garnish mushrooms with bacon before serving.

**SERVES 8**



## Cast-Iron Skillet Giveaway Contest

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# HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

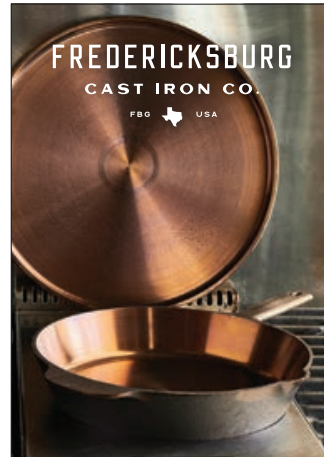
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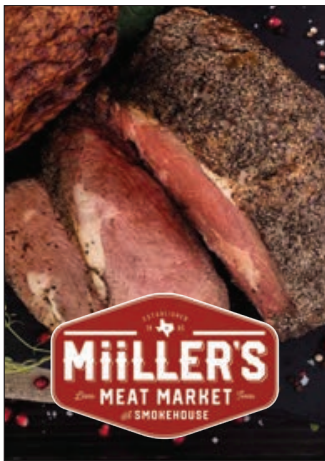
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## A Den, and Then Some

Animal World & Snake Farm Zoo boasts more than 500 tame and terrifying species

BY CHET GARNER

THERE'S ALMOST NO better way to break up a road trip than popping into a strange, offbeat roadside attraction. But this famous destination on Interstate 35 north of San Antonio is the king cobra of them all. I don't suffer from ophidiophobia (the fear of snakes), but even I was nervous stepping into a building full of the world's most venomous vipers.

Since it opened in 1967, the legend of the Snake Farm has grown far and wide, helped along by the well-known Ray Wylie Hubbard song that it inspired in 2006. Based on the lyrics, I was expecting a "nasty" and dimly lit den of danger.

What I discovered was a full-blown zoo with more than 500 species of animals ranging from mambas to mammals. It turns out that the owners who took over in 2007 had a new vision and a new name: Animal World & Snake Farm Zoo.

I started inside the front building, staring down the likes of death adders, rattlers and one of the world's deadliest snakes: the inland taipan. If you come for slithering serpents, you won't be disappointed as this zoo boasts hundreds.

The real surprises came when I wandered outside and past habitats with some of the world's most curious creatures. I said "howdy" to a pair of white lions and even got to feed the resident bison. There were otters and jaguars right next to monkeys and hyenas.

But nothing entertained the crowds more than when a staff member jumped into the gator pit with more than a dozen hungry alligators chomping for the raw chicken in his hand. I'm not sure if that was bravery, negligence or just good old-fashioned showmanship.

The best roadside stops provide visitors with a dose of the unexpected, and this one certainly delivered. ■

ABOVE Chet with Jarrod Forthman and an enormous albino Burmese python at the Snake Farm.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website to explore the place that inspired a song. And find all Chet's Explorations 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.

## NOVEMBER

7

**Lake Jackson [7-8] Mums & Mistletoe Market,** (979) 297-3041, [smlj.org](http://smlj.org)

8

**Bastrop [8-9] Heroes & Hot Rods,** [bastropareacruisers.com](http://bastropareacruisers.com)

**Buda [8-9] Buda Bee Club Quilt Show,** (512) 295-3413, [ocscbuda.org](http://ocscbuda.org)

**Fredericksburg [8-10] Die Künstler von Fredericksburg Art Show and Sale,** (830) 739-2875, [dkfredericksburg.org](http://dkfredericksburg.org)

9

**Blanco Gem of the Hills 40th Birthday Bash,** (830) 833-2713, [gemofthehills.org](http://gemofthehills.org)

**Corsicana Texas Veterans Parade,** (214) 537-9311, [texasveteransparade.com](http://texasveteransparade.com)

**Mason Wild Game Dinner,** (325) 347-5758, [masontx.org](http://masontx.org)

**Smithville Tour of Homes,** [facebook.com/smithvillegardenclub](http://facebook.com/smithvillegardenclub)

**Surfside Beach Kites and Castles,** (979) 233-1531, [visitsurfsidebeachtx.org](http://visitsurfsidebeachtx.org)

16

**Brenham Winter Dance Party,** (979) 337-7240, [thebarnhillcenter.com](http://thebarnhillcenter.com)

**Smithville Reel Film Expo,** (512) 237-2313, [smithvilletx.org](http://smithvilletx.org)

23

**Luling Winter Wonderland Arts & Crafts Show,** (830) 875-0123, [lulingcc.org](http://lulingcc.org)

24

**Giddings Sip & Shop Christmas Market**, (979) 542-3455, giddingstx.com

25

**Grapevine Carol of Lights**, (817) 410-3450, gograpevine.com

26

**Jasper Pioneer Day**, (409) 384-5231, tpwd.texas.gov

29

**Granbury Night of Lights Christmas Parade**, (682) 936-4550, granburysquare.com

30

**Liberty Hill Holiday Around the Hill**, facebook.com/holidayaroundthehill

## DECEMBER

6

**Fredericksburg Light the Night Christmas Parade**, (830) 997-5000, fredericksburg-texas.com

**Castroville [6-7] Old Fashion Christmas**, (830) 538-3142, castroville.com

**McKinney [6-7] Holidays at the Heard**, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

7

**Palestine Christmas on Main**, (903) 723-3014, facebook.com/palestine-mainstreet

**Woodville Christmas Twilight Tour**, (409) 283-2272, heritage-village.org

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(Required by 39 USC 3685)

1. Publication Title  
Texas Co-op Power

2. Publication Number  
0540-560

3. Filing Date  
October 1, 2024

4. Issue Frequency  
Monthly

5. Number of Issues Published Annually  
Twelve

6. Annual Subscription Price  
\$7.50

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Street, city, county, state and ZIP+4)  
1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Travis, Texas 78701-2167

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher  
1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Travis, Texas 78701-2167

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor  
Publisher  
Texas Electric Cooperatives, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, Texas 78701-2167  
Editor  
Chris Burrows, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, TX 78701  
Managing Editor  
Karen Nejtcek, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Fl, Austin, TX 78701

10. Owner  
Full Name Complete Mailing Address  
Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., is a nonprofit association of rural ECs organized as a cooperative membership corporation under Article 1528b, Texas Civil Statutes. Its members are: Bailey County ECA, Muleshoe; Bandera EC, Bandera; Bartlett EC, Bartlett; Big Country EC, Roby; Bluebonnet EC, Giddings; Bowie-Cass EC, Douglassville; Brazos EC, Waco; Bryan Texas Utilities, Bryan; Central Texas EC, Fredericksburg; Cherokee County ECA, Rusk; Coleman County EC, Coleman; Comanche County ECA, Comanche; Concho Valley EC, San Angelo; CoServ EC, Corinth; Deaf Smith EC, Hereford; Deep East Texas EC, San Augustine; East Texas EC, Nacogdoches; Fannin County EC, Bonham; Farmers EC, Greenville; Fayette EC, LaGrange; Fort Belknap EC, Olney; Golden Spread EC, Amarillo; Grayson-Collin EC, Van Alstyne; Greenbelt EC, Wellington; Guadalupe Valley EC, Gonzales; Hamilton County ECA, Hamilton; Harmon EA, Hollis. Oklahoma: Heart of Texas EC, McGregor; HILCO EC, Itasca; Houston County EC, Crockett; J-A-C EC, Bluegrove; Jackson EC, Edna; Jasper-Newton EC, Kirbyville; Karnes EC, Karnes City; Lamar County ECA, Paris; Lamb County EC, Littlefield; Lea County EC, Lovington, New Mexico; Lighthouse EC, Floydada; Lower Colorado River Authority, Austin; Lyntegar EC, Tahoka; Magic Valley EC, Mercedes; Medina EC, Hondo; MidSouth EC, Navasota; Navarro County EC, Corsicana; Navasota Valley EC, Franklin; North Plains EC, Perryton; Northeast Texas EC, Longview; Nueces EC, Robstown; Panola-Harrison EC, Marshall; Pedemales EC, Johnson City; PenTex Energy, Muenster; Rayburn County EC, Rockwall; Rio Grande EC, Brackettville; Rita Blanca EC, Dalhart; Rusk County EC, Henderson; Sam Houston EC, Livingston; San Bernard EC, Bellville; San Miguel EC, Jourdanton; San Patricio EC, Sinton; South Plains EC, Lubbock; South Texas EC, Victoria; Southwest Rural EA, Tipton, Oklahoma; Southwest Texas EC, Eldorado; Swisher EC, Tulia; Taylor EC, Merkel; Tex-La EC of Texas, Nacogdoches; Tri-County EC, Azle; Trinity Valley EC, Kaufman; United Cooperative Services, Cleburne; Upshur-Rural EC, Gilmer; Victoria EC, Victoria; Wharton County EC, El Campo; Wise EC, Decatur; Wood County EC, Quitman.

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders  None

12. Tax Status  Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months

13. Publication Title  
Texas Co-op Power

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below  
October 1, 2024

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies	1,962,973	1,975,868
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation	1,952,224	1,964,879
c. Total Paid Distribution	1,952,224	1,964,879
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	5,028	5,018
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	5,168	5,207
f. Total Distribution	10,196	10,225
g. Copies not Distributed	1,962,420	1,975,104
h. Total	553	764
i. Percent Paid	1,962,973	1,975,868
	99.48%	99.48%
16. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies	none	none
b. Total Paid Print and Electronic Copies	1,952,224	1,964,879
c. Total Print and Electronic Distribution	1,962,973	1,975,868
d. Percentage Paid	99.48%	99.48%

I certify that 50% of all my distribution copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership  
 Publication required. Will be printed in the November 2024 issue of this publication.

Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager or Owner Date  
Karen Nejtcek, Production Manager October 1, 2024

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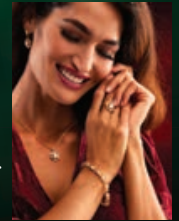
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2 VICKY PARR  
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3 LAURA DAVIS  
BANDERA EC

A moment at a Medina football game.

4 PATSY MCCLUNG  
FARMERS EC

"Johni Catherine McClung loved cheering on Sulphur Springs Middle School as Willy the Wildcat."



## Upcoming Contests

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



## The Lease of Our Concerns

Time together is time well spent—with prized lessons, if not always deer

BY MARK TROTH  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
HOKYOUNG KIM

WE CALLED IT simply “the lease.”

At 10, I may not have understood the concept of my father’s financial agreement with a property owner that allowed us to enjoy the benefits of his ranch. But it was apparent to me that we could do a lot of cool things on this 1,000-acre piece of Brazos County heaven, including hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, stargazing and exploring.

Our accommodation was an old, one-bedroom wooden shack with a kitchen and fireplace.

I was not the appropriate age to shoot a deer, according to my dad. But I would accompany him on hunts and learn valuable lessons of wildlife conservation and gun safety.

I was with him, and that was all that mattered.

Late one afternoon we decided to hunt a more wooded site. We drove for about 30 minutes along a fence line and then parked our International Scout. We walked through a gate, crossed a pasture and followed a game trail into the woods.

We found the deer blind and settled in. It was cold, and we saw no deer. Then came the rain. At dusk we headed out of the trees with flashlights in hand.

We were working our way through the dense, wet grass and shrubbery when we lost the trail. Although Dad didn’t admit it, he was completely turned around and didn’t know which direction it was to the pasture, the gate, the fence line—or the car.

More surprisingly though, especially knowing my father, he didn’t have a compass with him. We continued our way through the woods, trying to maintain a consistent direction. Time was a mystery to me.

Finally, we came to the pasture. We quickened our steps and reached the fence line. But now—which direction? Without hesitation, Dad made a right turn.

I asked him, “How far, Dad?”

“Not too far, Mark. Are you still good?” he said.

“I’m fine. Just a little tired.”

“And hungry too, I bet.” It was the levity we both needed.

A huge lightning bolt struck, sending countless fingers to the horizon. “There!” Dad exclaimed and pointed. “I just saw the Scout.”

There was no conversation on the ride back. At the shack we changed clothes and ate biscuits with butter and honey. In my eyes, it was a feast to rival no other.

“Were we in trouble?” I inquired.

“No,” he reassured me. “But we may have had to spend the night out there. We would have made out OK. Probably built a fire.”

I contemplated the possibilities. “Thanks, Dad.”

He smiled and put his arm around my shoulder. It was a rare show of physical affection from the man. “Remember though. Always bring your compass.”

Another lesson learned. ■

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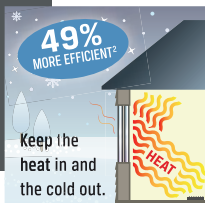


**Nation's Best Warranty<sup>1</sup>**



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Solving your window problems and having a comfortable home is easy and enjoyable when you choose Renewal by Andersen. Take advantage of this great offer to save money on your window project - and help save on high energy bills for years to come!



**RENEWAL**  
**by ANDERSEN**  
 FULL-SERVICE WINDOW & DOOR REPLACEMENT

**Offer Ends November 30**

Call for your **FREE** consultation.

**855-842-8296**

[FINDYOURWINDOW.COM](http://FINDYOURWINDOW.COM)

<sup>1</sup>DETAILS OF OFFER: Offer expires 11/30/2024. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Buy one (1) window or entry/patio door, get one (1) window or entry/patio door 40% off, and 12 months no money down, no monthly payments, no interest when you purchase four (4) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 11/1/2024 and 11/30/2024. 40% off windows and entry/patio doors are less than or equal to lowest cost window or entry/patio door in the order. Additional \$45 off each window/door, minimum purchase of 4 required, taken after initial discount(s), when you purchase by 11/30/2024. Subject to credit approval. 12-month Promo Period: while no payments are due, interest accrues but is waived if the loan is paid in full before the Promo Period expires. Any unpaid balance owed after the Promo Period, plus accrued interest, will be paid in installments based on the terms disclosed in the customer's loan agreement. Financing provided by various equal opportunity lenders. Savings comparison based on purchase of a single unit at list price. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. License numbers available at [renewalbyandersen.com/license](http://renewalbyandersen.com/license). Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. <sup>2</sup>Values are based on comparison of Renewal by Andersen<sup>TM</sup> double-hung window U-Factor to the U-Factor for clear dual-pane glass nonmetal frame default values from the 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018 International Energy Conservation Code "Glazed Fenestration" Default Tables. <sup>3</sup>Based on testing of 10 double-hung units per ASTM E2068 20 years after installation. <sup>4</sup>It is the only warranty among top selling window companies that meets all of the following requirements: easy to understand terms, unrestricted transferability, installation coverage, labor coverage, geographically unrestricted, coverage for exterior color, insect screens and hardware, and no maintenance requirement. Visit [renewalbyandersen.com/nationsbest](http://renewalbyandersen.com/nationsbest) for details. <sup>5</sup>Review aggregator survey of 5-star reviews among leading full service window replacement companies. December 2022 Reputation. <sup>6</sup>Renewal by Andersen<sup>TM</sup> and all other marks where denoted are trademarks of their respective owners. © 2024 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. RBA13747 <sup>7</sup>Using U.S. and imported parts.