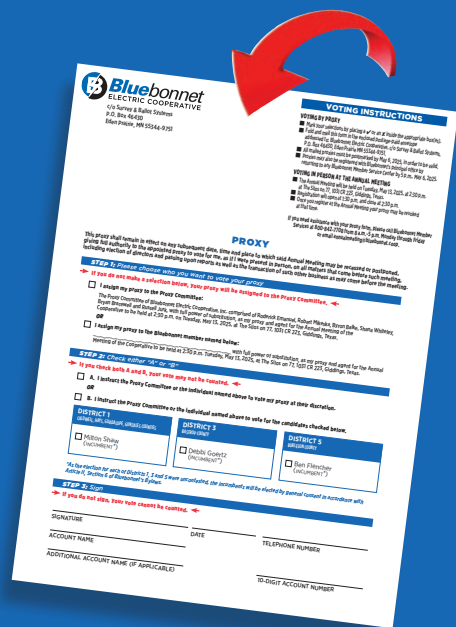


Your co-op works for you!

Submit your proxy form!

You can make your voice heard if you're unable to attend the Annual Meeting by filling out and submitting your proxy. Forms were mailed in March.

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



Completed proxy forms must be postmarked or given to a representative at a member service center by 5 p.m. May 6.

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

2025 CANDIDATES FOR BLUEBONNET'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Milton Shaw

District 1 (Incumbent)

Shaw has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2010. He has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director Board Leadership certifications and Director Gold Credential through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Shaw is chairman of Bluebonnet's Legal & Governance Committee and is a member of the Member & Employee Services Committee. He grew up in Luling and traveled across America during a 30-year career with Shell Oil Company. He and his family moved to six states while he managed marketing of Shell's real estate assets and oversaw multimillion-dollar budgets. Shaw has decades of experience in community relations and customer service. After graduating from what is now Texas State University in San Marcos in 1962, Shaw managed a store for Western Auto and later was a manager in the Sears department store chain's management development program. He retired from Shell in 1998 and returned to Luling with his wife and high school sweetheart, Judy. They run a few head of cattle on 46 acres in Caldwell County. Shaw is active in his community, including service over the years in the Luling Chamber of Commerce, Community Action, Inc., Kiwanis Club, Caldwell County Development Board, Polonia Water Supply Corp. and McNeil Baptist Church. When he's not attending to co-op duties, Milton and his wife, Judy, enjoy spending time with friends and their three sons, seven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.



Debbi Goertz

District 3 (Incumbent)

Goertz has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2017. She has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director, Board Leadership certifications and Director Gold Credential through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. She is a member of the Energy Services and Legal & Governance committees. She was born in Kilgore and grew up there and in Bryan. After graduating from Bryan High School, she received a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in merchandising from Texas Tech University in Lubbock. She worked at Bloomingdale's in Dallas as a department manager before opting for a career change. Goertz attended Baylor Law School in Waco and earned her law degree in 1993. After graduation, she moved to Bastrop and has been a Bluebonnet member since 1998. Goertz worked briefly at a Bastrop law firm before beginning a career with the Texas Department of Public Safety, first as a hearing examiner, then as Texas' administrator for school bus safety. She opened her solo legal practice in Bastrop in 2004, representing clients in civil matters including estate planning, probate law and Medicaid issues. She has worked with numerous Bastrop and Smithville nonprofit groups, including Samella Williams Angels Unaware Ministry, Children's Advocacy Center, Bastrop County Historical Society and Family Crisis Center, and was a Girl Scout leader for 10 years. Her daughter, Abby, graduated from the University of Texas at Austin.



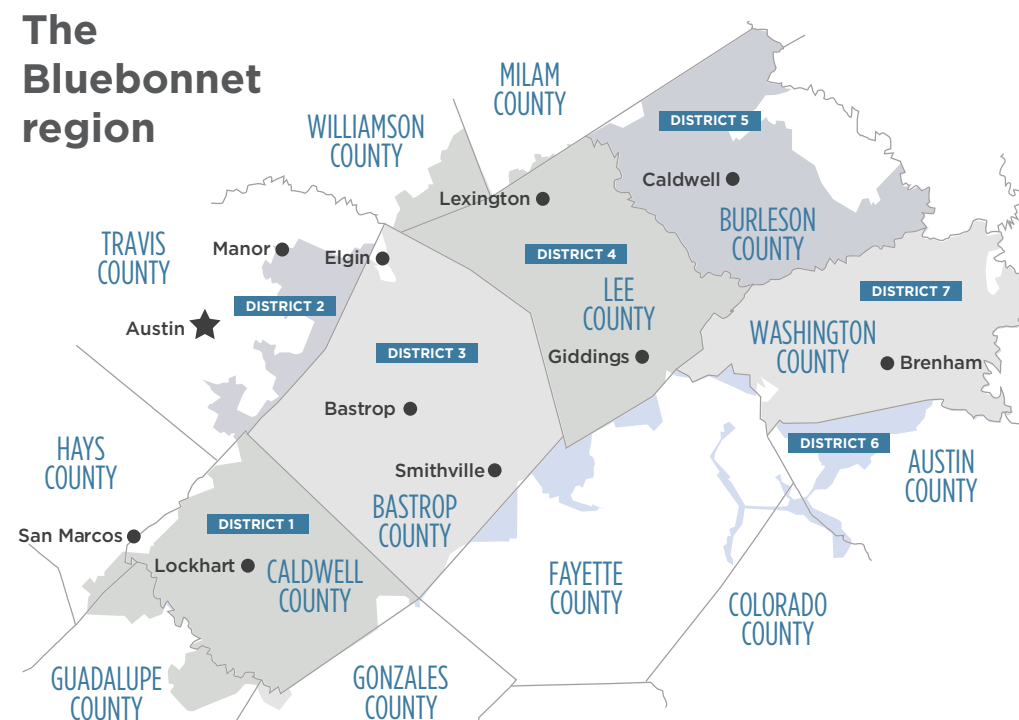
Ben Flencher

District 5 (Incumbent)

Flencher, chairman of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric co-op's Board since 1987. He is an ex-officio member of Bluebonnet's Board committees — Audit & Finance, Energy Services, Legal & Governance, Member & Employee Services. He grew up in a banking family in Somerville and began his lifelong banking career by rolling coins and filing checks as a young boy at the bank where his father worked. He was officially hired when he was in eighth grade and continued to work at the bank while in college. Today, he is chairman of the board of that same bank — Citizens State Bank—and served as its president from 1981 to 2021. Under his leadership, the bank has expanded to seven locations. Flencher graduated from Texas A&M University in 1974 with a degree in finance. He is a lifelong member of the First Lutheran Church in Somerville. He and his wife, Betsy, have four sons: Aaron and Cory, who work in the banking industry; Ryan, who works in commercial real estate; and Josh, who owns a dirt contracting company. The Flenchers have seven grandchildren. When not working on co-op matters, Ben enjoys hunting and fishing with his family and watching his grandkids' sporting events.



The Bluebonnet region



The Bluebonnet service territory stretches over 3,800 square miles in all or part of 14 counties. Bluebonnet owns and maintains more than 12,000 miles of power lines in the region and serves more than 138,000 meters.

SUBMIT YOUR PROXY

for a chance to win at Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting

Submitting your proxy or attending Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting ensures your voice is heard and is one of the benefits of being a member of an electric cooperative. Whether you attend the Annual Meeting on Tuesday, May 13, or submit a proxy form, you'll have a chance to win a prize.



The grand prize is a 2013 Ford F-150 extended cab four-wheel-drive truck, which is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. The truck has approximately 187,000 miles.

Any member who submits a proxy form or attends the Annual Meeting will be entered into drawings for the truck and other prizes. Prize winners will be selected at random in the days leading up to the Annual Meeting. The truck drawing will occur after the event and the winner will be notified on May 14, 2025.

For more information about proxy forms and Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting, visit bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting.

JOIN US for **BLUEBONNET'S** 2025 ANNUAL MEETING

TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2025

The Silos on 77

1031 County Road 223, Giddings

Registration at 1:30 p.m.

Meeting starts at 2:30 p.m.

Here's why you should attend

- **A chance to win a retired Bluebonnet fleet truck — just vote by proxy or register at the meeting**
(Find details inside this wrap).
- **Have a chance to win door prizes during the event.**
- **Enjoy refreshments and connect with members.**
- **Get the latest Bluebonnet news and updates.**

2025 ANNUAL MEETING PROXY AND VOTING Q&A

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting will be Tuesday, May 13, 2025, at The Silos on 77, 1031 County Road 223 in Giddings. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. The meeting will start at 2:30 p.m. Look for details about the meeting in the coming weeks with your bill, in Bluebonnet's pages in the April and May issues of Texas Co-op Power magazine, on our social media and on our website, bluebonnet.coop.

How many Board of Director seats are up for election?

Three seats on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors are up for election this year. There is one candidate for the District 1 seat, Caldwell, Hays, Guadalupe and Gonzales counties: Milton Shaw (incumbent). There is one candidate for the District 3 seat, Bastrop County: Debbi Goertz (incumbent). There is one candidate for the District 5 seat, Burleson County: Ben Flencher (incumbent).

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

During Board elections, co-op members can vote for directors in all districts. The districts in the co-op's service area were drawn along Bluebonnet's service area boundaries and county lines. The seven districts are represented by one to three directors in each district.

What are my voting options?

Members may vote by submitting their proxy form by May 6, 2025, or by attending the Annual Meeting in person on May 13, 2025.

What is proxy voting, and how does it work?

Proxy voting allows members to designate Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee or another natural person member to vote in his or her place. Proxies are counted to ensure a quorum is present at the Annual Meeting.

Who serves on Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee?

This year's Proxy Committee members are Roderick Emanuel, Robert Mikeska, Byron Balke, Shana Whiteley, Bryan Bracewell and Russell Jurk.

How do I vote by proxy?

Complete the proxy form that was mailed to all members in March and return it by mail or drop it off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor. If you misplace the proxy form, pick one up at a member service center or call 800-842-7708. Proxies must either be hand-delivered to a member service center by 5 p.m. May 6, 2025, or mailed to:

**Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative
c/o Survey & Ballot Systems
P.O. Box 46430
Eden Prairie, MN 55344-9751**

Mailed proxies must be postmarked by May 6, 2025.

Can this proxy be used again at future Annual Meetings?

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

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

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

Who administers the election?

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

What if I have more questions?

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

2025 ANNUAL MEETING



Join us for Bluebonnet's biggest event of the year!

The cooperative works for you,
so gather with members and celebrate
Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's
progress.

MAY 13, 2025

← SEE INSIDE FOR MORE!

PIONEERING PILOTS
OF SWEETWATER

A TEXAN'S HISTORIC
PLAY AT THE MASTERS

THE MOST OVERLOOKED
BIG BEND VISTA

Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

APRIL 2025

Jewels of the Sky

Dragonflies and damselflies
rule Texas skies
with deadly grace



**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

WATERFURNACE UNITS QUALIFY FOR A 30% FEDERAL TAX CREDIT²

State of Texas

MONTHLY AVERAGE¹

\$53

for Geothermal Heating & Cooling



Symphony Insight

With WaterFurnace, the average Texan pays \$53/mo. to provide heating, cooling and hot water for their home.

WaterFurnace homeowners across the country are reaping the benefits of geothermal heat pumps by utilizing the unlimited reservoir of stored solar energy underground. A WaterFurnace geothermal system taps into this free and renewable resource to provide savings of up to 70% on heating, cooling, and hot water—with a comfort you have to experience to believe. Right now you can save thousands on installation thanks to a 30% federal tax credit². Contact our WaterFurnace Concierges Team to learn more today!



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1. 14.5¢ kWh - June 2024 Texa's Monthly Electricity Rate Average | Actual data powered by Symphony

2. ENERGY STAR rated units qualify for 30% through 2032, 26% through 2033 and 22% through 2034

April 2025



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06 Ode to a Mighty Hunter

Texas' diversity of colorful dragonflies and damselflies beguiles bird and butterfly watchers.

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

The WASPs Who Flew Out of Sweetwater

Hundreds of female pilots made history at Avenger Field, where they're still celebrated.

By Pam LeBlanc

ON THE COVER

Widow skimmer dragonflies use their legs and fangs to catch and eat prey.
Photo by Kerry Carloy

ABOVE

Women Airforce Service Pilots trainees in the 1940s.
Photo courtesy Official National WASP WWII Museum, Sweetwater, Texas

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Overlooked (No More)
By Pam LeBlanc



Troy Moore, a crew supervisor at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

Grounded in Co-op Pride

WILLIAM KAISER JOINS the rest of Co-op Country in saluting a special segment of the workforce April 14, National Lineworker Appreciation Day.

As a groundman in the late 1940s, Kaiser, 96, helped construct power lines in Central Texas for San Bernard Electric Cooperative.

He did so from the back of a Burma Jeep, unspooling line around Hallettsville, about halfway between San Antonio and Houston. Bringing electricity to rural Texas was backbreaking work in the years after co-ops got their start, and all these decades later, Kaiser is proud of his role.

“Somebody had to lay those lines out through the right-of-way so that they could hang the lines on the pole,” he says. “It takes a whole crew, many people, to get to where the lineman could do his job.”

A job, Kaiser notes, that wasn’t for him: “I’m not somebody who likes to get up in the air.”



“A flower blossoms for its own joy.”

— OSCAR WILDE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The best view in Texas is ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our February prompt: **My first car was ...**

A 1953 Chevy with a nonworking reverse gear. Had to be creative in finding a place to park.

WANDA SIKES
TRINITY VALLEY EC
TERRELL

Such a clunker that it was on my mechanic’s lift so much that it had more miles on it vertically than horizontally.

JOE POLINO
TRI-COUNTY EC
GRANBURY

A hearse! Specifically, a 1958 Cadillac coach by Miller-Meteor. My father wanted to make sure if I got in an accident, it would be the other guy who got hurt.

JAY WEBER
PEDERNALES EC
ROUND ROCK

A used fluorescent yellow Ford Maverick. Living in a small town, my parents always knew where I was—no tracking/locator services needed!

PEGGY RUSTERHOLTZ
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
LUCAS

Visit our website to see more responses.



TCP Contests and More

ENTER CONTESTS AT
TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM



\$500 RECIPE CONTEST
One-Skillet Dinners
FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
College Life
RECOMMENDED READING

We sure love telling you about intriguing insects—as we did with *The Bugs That Make You See Red* in February 2019. Find it at TexasCoopPower.com.

FEBRUARY 2025 It's Hip To Be a Square

"I square danced for 20 years. Nothing better for exercise, enjoyment, friendships."

DONNA DEAN HUTCHERSON
VIA FACEBOOK



DAVE SHAFER

Fun For All

I plan to send *It's Hip To Be a Square* [February 2025] to some folks who may be shy about trying square dancing or round dancing.

Cheryl Rush
Upshur Rural EC
Winnsboro

It brought back so many memories of when my hubby and I had a blast square dancing for so many years. It was very challenging, and the friendship was incredible.

Genny Pruitt
Nueces EC
Victoria

Not Light Reading

I enjoyed *Field of Beams* [December 2024] so much that I had a tear in my eye when I finished.

Roberta McLaughlin
Heart of Texas EC
Lorena



KENNY BRAUN

Bears in Texas

Around age 10 my friend and I were walking on a trail that ended at a dirt road. We saw a large black bear less than a football field away [*Our Nosy New Neighbors*, January 2025]. We cried and ran.

Then, my friend stopped running and started laughing. I turned around and saw the bear running away from us.

There were many black bears in Minnesota. None of our bear meetings turned out bad for anyone other than our garbage cans. But I still don't think people will like having that many bears in Texas.

Tyler Carlson
Pedernales EC
San Marcos

Black History Month

Thank you for the informative articles in February [*Currents* and *History to a Tea*] about the achievements and contributions of Black Americans in the U.S. and world. It is much appreciated.

Gabrielle Gordon
Tri-County EC
Tarrant County

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 81, Number 10 (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 \$5.11 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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Texas Electric Cooperatives
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative







ODE TO A MIGHTY HUNTER

Texas' diversity of colorful dragonflies and damselflies beguiles bird and butterfly watchers

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

On the grassy edge of a dry irrigation canal, an emerald green insect darted about in the air. Then it landed on the limb of a thorny mesquite.

Armed with a camera, amateur naturalist Tripp Davenport of Uvalde aimed his long lens at the dazzling dragonfly and quickly snapped photos before it flitted away.

That morning in July 2017, he had visited the National Butterfly Center in South Texas in hopes

of spotting a red-mantled skimmer, a dragonfly from central Mexico that rarely ventures into Texas. Instead he found something even more special.

“When I looked at my images, I realized it was a dragonfly that I’d never seen before,” says Davenport, a high school teacher and Medina Electric Cooperative member. “And I’ve seen nearly all of them in Texas.”

Perplexed and excited, he called and texted pictures to some fellow naturalists. One beelined to Davenport’s location. Another researched records and nailed down the species. “It was a secretive darter that had only been photographed twice before, in central Mexico,” Davenport says. “My adrenaline was running!”

When you’re a dragonfly chaser, that’s what can happen. Like avid bird watchers, many chasers keep life lists of every species they’ve seen. Similarly, they may travel long distances in pursuit of dragonflies. Damselflies, too. The closely related insects, which have two pairs of long wings, elongated bodies and large compound eyes, are listed in the taxonomic group Odonata (derived from *odont*, a Greek root word for “tooth” that refers to their large chewing mandibles).

Luckily for Texans, our state is home to hundreds of species.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A female eastern pondhawk dragonfly; dragonflies and damselflies have compound eyes made up of thousands of tiny eyes called ommatidia. The eastern amberwing is one of the only dragonflies that mimics a wasp. The great spreadwing is one of the largest damselflies in North America, with a length up to 2.4 inches, a 3-inch wingspan and a notable yellow stripe. A male eastern pondhawk with its prey.

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: KERRY CARLOY

Odonates (chasers call them “odes”) can typically be found near water but not exclusively. Their bodies come in a rainbow of hues—red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple along with black and white. They can alternately beat and rotate their four membranous wings, enabling them to zip in all directions and even backward.

Using their aerial agility, odes hunt in the air and use their strong legs to snatch prey, such as butterflies, mosquitoes, bees and other insects, including other dragonflies. Odes have excellent vision, too. Not even the tiniest movement escapes their compound eyes made of thousands of tiny eyes called ommatidia.

Of the two groups, dragonflies can generally be identified by their thicker bodies and hindwings that are broader at their base than the forewings. They fly higher than damselflies and can reach speeds of up to 35 mph. At rest, dragonflies hold their wings open whereas damselflies fold their wings over their toothpick-thin bodies.

Worldwide, odonate species total more than 6,430, a number that’s tracked virtually at Odonata Central. The website maintains an extensive database compiled from information submitted by users who report their dragonfly



COURTESY TRIPP DAVENPORT

sightings and upload photos. According to the site, more than 490 odonate species occur in the U.S., and more than half (251 species) have been documented in Texas.

John Abbott, a Texas native who serves as the director of museum research and collections at the Alabama Museum of Natural History, has studied and written about dragonflies and damselflies since the early 1990s. Among his many publications, Abbott has authored *Damselflies of Texas* and *Dragonflies of Texas*, field guides published by the University of Texas Press.

In his opinion, there’s no better place than Texas to chase dragonflies.

“The state holds a unique geographic position where there’s mixing of eastern and western faunas and temperate and subtropical faunas,” Abbott explains. “This leads to the large number of odonate species that can be regularly observed in the state and tremendous opportunities for new species to be documented.”

He credits a growing number of natural history enthusiasts interested in odonates for making major contributions to what’s known about the species of Texas.

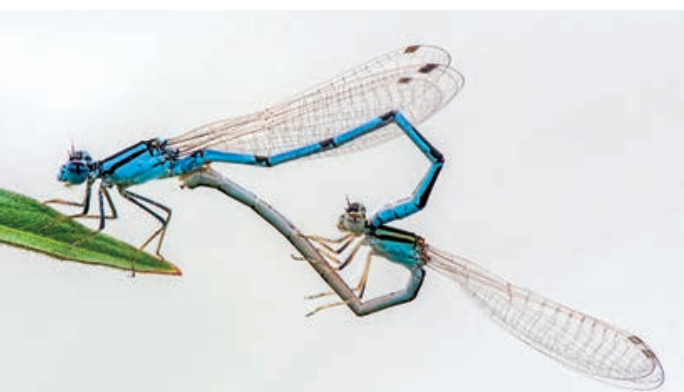
Among them are enthusiasts like Davenport and Martin Reid, a retired computer programmer from San Antonio who used to photograph mostly birds and butterflies.

“I got interested in dragonflies in 2001 when I saw a cool-looking insect eating one of my butterflies,” Reid recalls. “I took a picture, and that was it. I was hooked on dragonflies.”

Since then, Reid has sought out odonates across the country as well as in Mexico, Peru, Panama, England and other distant places. But he prefers to focus on Texas species, of which he’s photographed 230.

“Whenever there’s been a new species found in the state, I dash out and try to catch up with it,” he says. “I get tips from Facebook or when someone texts me with a sighting.”

Life for dragonflies and damselflies begins in the water, where some species deposit eggs. Others insert eggs into



LOVE ON THE WING

Butterflies and flies mate back-to-back. Not odonates. During mating, their slender bodies curl and join together (like these double-striped bluet damselflies) to form a heart-shaped “wheel” that’s unique among insects. They remain in this position for a few minutes or hours.

KERRY CARLOY



OPPOSITE One of the first photos captured in Texas of a secretive darner dragonfly, at the National Butterfly Center in South Texas.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A male checked setwing dragonfly. A male American rubyspot damselfly, found in all but two of the lower 48 states. A male neon skimmer dragonfly.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE: KERRY CARLOY

vegetation or rotting wood near water. From the eggs hatch aquatic larvae that look like big-eyed creepy crawlers. After shedding their hard skins in a series of molts, the nymphs emerge from the water and morph into winged adults.

All across Texas, adult odonates fly from spring through fall. Some occur year-round. Most adult damselflies live two to four weeks; dragonflies live four to six weeks. But some odonates survive several months.

They're best found around freshwater, where they hunt and mate. Large open spaces, such as yards, fields and parking lots, may attract hungry odes in search of winged prey.

On their travels, Reid and Davenport have frequented the Christmas Mountains Oasis, 70 miles south of Alpine in far West Texas. Since 1996, owner Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, a member of Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, has worked to transform 5 acres of her scrubby ranchland into a lush hot-spot for birds, butterflies, and, more recently, dragonflies and damselflies. So far, she has tallied 65 species.

"I remember when Tripp Davenport found a California spreadwing here," she says. "Since then, I've had hundreds of them. People come here specifically to see them and Mexican amberwings."

In Port O'Connor, on the Gulf Coast, longtime birder Petra Hockey, a member of Victoria Electric Cooperative, mostly taught herself about odonates.

Using her birding skills and Abbott's field guides, she documented local odonate species. She's since branched out to photograph dragonflies in the Big Bend, Pineywoods, Rio

Grande Valley and other places across Texas. Before a trip, she always researches her destination.

"I learn what dragonfly species are there and what habitats they're found in," Hockey says.

"What time of the day do they fly? Do they fly high or low? How do they perch? As you get more into dragonflies, you learn how interesting and unique they are."

That uniqueness fascinates retired teacher Kerry Carloy, who lives north of Dallas in Lewisville and is a CoServ member. He frequents local natural areas in search of dragonflies. "Their intelligent design to me says they weren't an accident," he says. "I try to get that point across through my photos."

"They're interesting because they can maneuver with such agility," he adds. "They have 360-degree vision, and you can watch them crunch insects up with their teeth."

Though he's chased dragonflies around the world, Brian Gooding, a quality engineer who lives in Plano, doesn't keep a life list.

"Numbers aren't important to me," he says. "My challenge is to take the best picture that I can, even if it's a common species. I've used some of my best pictures to help educate people about dragonflies and how cool they are."

They can also be wise. Gooding recalls the time he watched two male eastern pondhawks fighting over territory at the Colleyville Nature Center northeast of Fort Worth.

"After they were done, they went back to their respective perches and carried on with existing," he says. "That's when I realized I need to be more like them and let go of negative stuff in my life. It was a great lesson to learn from a dragonfly." ■

Hundreds of female pilots made history
at Avenger Field, where they're still celebrated

The WASPs Who Flew Out of Sweetwater



BY PAM LEBLANC

They had to cinch up the waistbands of their oversized, hand-me-down flight suits, and they weren't allowed to climb out of a cockpit without applying fresh lipstick. The women who trained at Avenger Field in Sweetwater stepped up in a serious way.

They volunteered when more pilots were needed to fly vital stateside missions during World War II.

The National WASP WWII Museum, which opened in 2005 in a circa 1929 hangar at Avenger Field, celebrates the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs, who trained at the remote airbase, about 40 miles west of Abilene, as part of an experimental wartime program designed to free up male pilots for combat.

"A lot were young and single and free, but some were married—and some had children," says Lisa Taylor, executive director of the museum, located across Avenger Field from what is now Texas State Technical College, where the female trainees once lived in barracks.

"The feeling was, 'We have this skill, and there's a need for us.' They adored flying and were thrilled to fly, but they were also thrilled to be needed."

Applicants to the program, which ran for two years, had to have high school diplomas or the equivalent and be between the ages of 18 and 35, although at least one 17-year-old lied about her age to get in. They had to be at least 5 feet 4 inches tall, have a pilot's license, and pass a physical exam and interview to get a spot.

About 25,000 women applied, and 1,830 were accepted.

They came from all 48 states and Alaska and Hawaii. They were overwhelmingly white, but there were at least two Chinese Americans, a Native American and two Latina women. The program rejected Black applicants. They were high school dropouts and debutantes, blackjack dealers and teachers. One was a pinup girl. Some had worked as crop duster pilots or barn stormers, performing stunts in traveling shows.

OPPOSITE Women Airforce Service Pilots assigned to Camp Davis in North Carolina pose in front of a Beechcraft AT-11.

BELOW The courtyard between hangars at the National WASP WWII Museum features three steel cutouts based on a historical photograph of women arriving at the base.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OFFICIAL NATIONAL WASP WWII MUSEUM, SWEETWATER, TEXAS

The program officially started in Houston in November 1942, under the direction of pioneering aviators Jacqueline Cochran and Nancy Harkness Love. It quickly outgrew its space in Houston and moved to Avenger Field, where the women could live in bunks in on-site barracks.

The new location worked well. The airfield had two runways plus classroom space. The sparsely populated area's big skies and open fields suited the flight school's needs, and the stiff West Texas wind provided ample training opportunities.

The women spent half their days in ground school, learning meteorology, navigation, first aid, military law, Morse code, mechanics and parachute packing. The rest of the working day was spent learning to fly various military aircraft.

Many of the women were small and had a hard time reaching the pedals on aircraft designed for men. They used blocks of wood and parachute packs as cushions to make it work. One bragged that she was a "three-cushion pilot," meaning she stuffed three packs behind her back so she could operate the controls.

For their efforts, the women earned \$174.50 per month (about \$3,250 today), deducting \$1.65 for room and board. Because they were civil workers and not officially part of the U.S. military, they even had to buy their own uniforms.

Training lasted at least seven months, and about 40% of the recruits washed out before earning their wings. But ultimately, 1,102 women completed training.

Those who graduated were assigned to air bases around the country, where they went to work shuttling military personnel

Notable Texan WASPs

Millie Dalrymple

After her husband was shot down in a B-17 over Europe, Dalrymple of Llano took up flying, joined the WASPs and was soon flying B-17s herself.



Madge Moore

As a local who grew up just up the road from Sweetwater, in Haskell, Moore used dead reckoning—a navigational method of estimating a plane's current position based on a previously known location, course, speed and time traveled—to ferry planes without working instruments.

Florene Miller Watson

Watson of San Angelo was one of just 25 women who qualified for a forerunner to the WASP program. She flew every type of plane used by the Army Air Corps.



and ferrying aircraft from base to base. The WASPs flew 78 different aircraft, including pursuit planes and bombers, and flight-tested others, flying more than 60 million miles.

Some of the women served as tow pilots, dragging targets 1,000 feet behind their planes so soldiers on the ground could practice firing at them with live ammunition. Others worked as instructors or practiced concealment, learning to lay smoke that would hide personnel on the ground.

Thirty-eight WASPs were killed during their service, including 11 who died in training accidents. The military didn't pay for their funerals, so fellow WASPs took up collections to send the women's remains home to family.

About 14,000 people visit the museum in Sweetwater every year, exploring two hangars filled with everything from flight suits to logbooks, part of a tow target, a flight simulator, medals, parachutes and four complete aircraft of the type the women used for training.

Visitors can take a turn at a chin-up bar like one the women used during daily calisthenics or grab a seat in a re-creation of a classroom, where a film leads them through what it was like as an incoming recruit reporting for duty. They can peer into a mock-up of a room in the barracks too.

Mostly, though, visitors can learn who the WASPs were as individuals. "They've all got really amazing stories," Taylor says, sharing a few as she walks through the museum.

When one group of WASPs traveled to California on a mission, they were arrested and briefly jailed for impersonating military pilots, Taylor says. Another WASP made an emergency landing in a farmer's field, and the family who owned the land fed and housed her for the night. Other stories describe WASPs who had to parachute to safety from their airplanes and WASPs who tested aircraft with engines prone to catching fire.

The names of all the WASPs, including those who didn't complete training, are listed on one wall of the museum, and visitors can access a database that includes information about each one. There are photos and handprints of many of the women.

Each April, the museum hosts a Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In, set for April 25–26 this year. While most of the

Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In

The National WASP World War II Museum will celebrate its 20th anniversary at this year's WASP Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In, Friday–Saturday, April 25–26. There will be museum tours, guest speakers, live reenactors, aviation games and a display of aircraft. For more information, go to wasmuseum.org/homecoming.



OPPOSITE A graduation ceremony August 7, 1943, at Avenger Field in Sweetwater.

ABOVE AND LEFT Nell "Mickey" Stevenson Bright, 103, knew she wanted to learn to fly when she was 8. She ended up being one of only 20 women chosen to train on B-25 bombers.



WASPs are now gone, their families, as well as members of the public, still attend.

At the 2012 homecoming, WASP Nell "Mickey" Stevenson Bright, who is now 103 years old, explained that she skipped meals as a teenager to pay for flying lessons. After becoming a WASP, she remembers standing in a shower wearing her flight suit to clean it.

"The thrill of flying those wonderful airplanes and getting paid for it—that was worth it," Bright, who is from Canyon, said at the time.

The WASPs were deactivated in December 1944, but it took more than 30 years before President Jimmy Carter signed a bill recognizing them as military veterans. In 2010, President Barack Obama awarded the WASPs Congressional Gold Medals, the oldest and most prestigious civilian award in the U.S.

Today, museum officials hope the institution can inspire the next generation.

"These women went to a lot of time and trouble to learn how to fly in a world that wasn't going to let them in," Taylor says. "So, what is it that you want to do and try, and what barriers will you need to overcome to leave a good legacy for yourself?" ■

TCP Tour Hangar 2 at the National WASP WWII Museum with Lisa Taylor, the museum's director.



The future of hearing aids has arrived

NEW! HORIZON IX HEARING AIDS

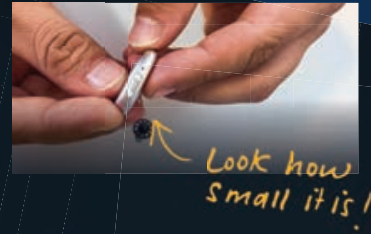


Alarming fact: More than 48 million Americans hear so poorly that their quality of life significantly suffers as a result.

The problem: Most wait too long to act, hoping their hearing will improve on its own. Sadly, it never does. But now, a game-changing device is making waves across the industry, and experts say it's the biggest breakthrough they've seen in over a decade. It's the new Horizon IX hearing aids.

What makes Horizon IX so special?

It's one of the world's first hearing aids with dual processing. This is special because it's the first time engineers have been able to pack not one, but two state-of-the-art computer chips into a device this small. And with double the power comes double the clarity.

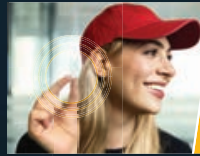


Here's what that means: in addition to Bluetooth connectivity, a smartphone app, and rechargeable batteries, the Horizon IX offers something completely new: they process speech and background noise independently, then combine them for unparalleled, crystal clear sound.

Where can I get Horizon IX?

Over 540,000 happy customers enjoy life with better hearing, thanks to Horizon IX. **Now, it's your turn!**

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Scan the QR code or visit hear.com/tx to check if you qualify for a 45-day no-risk trial.

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POWER ON

Story by Kirsten Tyler

Photos by Sarah Beal

IMAGINE THIS: It's night, and a powerful storm is moving through the region. There is thunder and lightning. Your lights flicker once, twice, a third time. Then, darkness. As you reach for your phone to report the outage, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's control center operators are standing by to take the first steps to restore your power.

Every day, control center operators monitor more than 138,000 meters spread across 12,000 miles of power lines. They notify lineworker crews and member service representatives when power outages occur. All day and night, teams work until your and your neighbors' electric service is restored.

The members — Jeanne and Wiley Mathis

Bluebonnet members Jeanne and Wiley Mathis have lived at Kick Back Ranch on Geers Road in Brenham since 2007. Several family members — Jeanne's two sisters and the couple's niece — also live nearby. On May 16, 2024, a powerful "derecho" storm swept through Central Texas. Derecho is Spanish for "straight ahead," a reference to this type of storm's wide swath of straight-line winds, which on this day were measured at 60 to 100 mph. The destructive wind and lightning knocked out power to the Mathises. Those outages are representative of the hundreds of other outages in the Bluebonnet service area caused by this storm.



Jeanne Mathis, left, and her husband, Wiley Mathis, monitor her phone for texts from Bluebonnet and check the outage map.

Jeanne Mathis knows what to do when electricity goes out: watch for texts from Bluebonnet about her outage, check in with neighbors and look at Bluebonnet's online outage map for more information.

During the May storm, she called Bluebonnet directly to report the outage. "Bluebonnet's service has always been great, and the member service representative I spoke with was knowledgeable and congenial," Jeanne said.

During the outage, the family remained at home and waited out the storm to care for their livestock and cats.

The "derecho" developed in West Texas. It increased in strength as it swept through Central Texas and caused the most severe damage in Washington and Austin counties. Trees were uprooted and twisted, ripping down power lines and breaking poles and crossarms.

Those kinds of outages are the most time-consuming and labor-intensive. They require specially trained and equipped crews to remove trees before power restoration crews can begin to repair or replace equipment and restore members' power.

Bluebonnet crews were prepared and ready to respond to the massive storm.



More than 345 lineworkers, contractors and tree trimmers worked around the clock to repair damage and restore power.

Like many outages during the derecho, the outage at the Mathises' property was caused by trees falling into power lines. Bluebonnet crews attacked these complex outages across the region, which suffered widespread damage.

Jeanne Mathis received four text messages from Bluebonnet. The messages included information about the trees falling into the power lines that served her home, when crews arrived on location and their progress while repairing the damage.

After her power was restored, she shared a kind message on Bluebonnet's Facebook page. "Thank you to all the linemen in restoring our power on Geers Road and all the other linemen helping the Brenham area. Job well done!!! Stay safe out there and get back home to your families and loved ones."

The lineworker — the complex job of restoring power

Jeffrey Bolding started at Bluebonnet as a lineworker in 2009. "My brother, Danny, and several others I grew up with worked for

Stories of outages, response and restoration — and communication every step of the way



Matt Mole, left, a journeyman lineworker, and Joe Lockhart, a crew supervisor, safely remove a twisted tree branch from power lines in Washington County during the May 'derecho' storm.

Bluebonnet and loved it," he said. "I figured I would give it a try. I have never looked back because it is a tight, proud, loving and community-oriented organization."

In the last 16 years, Bolding has worked on challenging outages, from troubleshooting and repairing damaged underground lines to restoring service after tornadoes tore down above-ground power lines and poles. He said it is always rewarding to restore power to members after a storm.

Bolding has plenty of experience working through some of the most destructive weather events in Bluebonnet's recent history. The weather always factors into what he takes to the job. He packs plenty of snacks and extra clothes — a shirt, pants and two pairs of socks — to change into. Keeping his feet dry and warm inside steel-toe boots is especially important.

Continued on Page 21



The power of connection

It's easy to get updates quickly through Bluebonnet outage text alerts. All cooperative members with a smartphone are automatically enrolled in the outage alerts program and will receive regular text updates on outages affecting them.

If you are a member with a power outage, you will:

- 1. Receive a text** whenever an outage occurs at your home or business.
- 2. Get text updates** on the status of the outage.
- 3. Receive a final text** when your power is restored.

Are you not receiving outage text notifications? Enroll in the program by texting "BBOUTAGE" to 44141 or call member services at 800-842-7708.



Update your contact information

Did you change your phone number? You must update your contact information with your new number in order to receive outage text alerts from Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

You can update your number on your online MyBluebonnet account or mobile app. This ensures that Bluebonnet will be able to text you in the event of an outage, maintenance or any other concern.

INSIDE:

- Step-by-step: Restoring power, **Page 18**
- Before the storm: Advance preparations, **Page 18**
- Control center: Eyes on outage response, **Page 20**

How Bluebonnet restores

POWER

Every outage notification sets in motion a coordinated process that ends only when power is fully restored.

IN TEXAS, the only dependable thing about the weather is that it will change — often and rapidly. That makes weather — heavy rain, lightning, strong winds and the occasional ice storm — the most common cause of outages in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region.

Other common outage causes are vehicle accidents and animals that can climb poles or walk on wires. No matter what causes an outage, the first step to restoring electricity is knowing that one has occurred. Technology can usually detect an outage, but getting notifications from Bluebonnet members is the surest way to begin the power restoration process.



1 A power outage occurs.

Members report the outage to Bluebonnet in one of four ways:

- Texting OUT to 44141.
- Online at bluebonnet.coop/report-outage.
- Via the MyBluebonnet mobile app.
- Calling the automated outage reporting system at 800-949-4414.

2 The outage report is confirmed and members are notified.

Control center operators determine how many homes or businesses are affected and where the outage originates. Members



affected by the power outage receive a text from Bluebonnet. **Learn more about Bluebonnet's control center on Page 20.**

Bluebonnet crews start preparing

WHEN SEVERE weather is headed for Central Texas — regardless of whether it's a fierce spring thunderstorm, the threat of a tornado, flooding from a hurricane pushing inland or a winter storm that could ice roads and power lines — Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative employees are prepared.

Leadership and operations teams start preparing days and weeks in advance by stocking additional materials, filling fuel tanks, and creating staging areas for crews and contractors.

“Our members deserve and expect the very best service from us, and we take

that responsibility seriously,” said Eric Kocian, Bluebonnet’s Chief Engineer and System Operations Officer. “Storms can be unpredictable, but our preparation isn’t. The more planning we do ahead of time, the more efficiently we can restore power.”

If the possibility of long outages looms, contractor crews are notified to be on standby to efficiently support Bluebonnet’s crews. These additional lineworkers, whether from Texas or out of state, are called in based on the anticipated severity of the storm, and staged at service centers and areas where the most damage is expected. The need for these crews is

consistently reevaluated as severe weather moves through the cooperative’s service area.

As the storm approaches, Bluebonnet’s operations teams continuously monitor the forecast and provide updates around the clock to ensure a rapid response. Meetings are held to assess the changing situation and adjust crew deployment accordingly. Depending on where the storm impacts Bluebonnet’s 14-county service area, crews are strategically moved across counties to restore power as efficiently as possible.

The fleet and operations teams also prepare specialized equipment, including

3 Bluebonnet crews are located and dispatched.

Control center operators can identify which Bluebonnet lineworkers or contractors are near the outage area and available to respond. The crew can include a journeyman lineworker, an apprentice and a helper. Additional crews are called as needed. About 25 lineworkers are on call daily and more are available if severe weather is forecast. **Learn more about how we prepare for storms in the story below.**



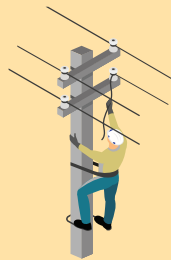
4 Bluebonnet updates you about the outage.

In many cases, especially during large or lengthy outages, Bluebonnet is able to provide additional information about the cause of the outage and give an estimated time of restoration. Bluebonnet sent more than 300,000 text messages to its members in 2024.



5 Power lines and equipment are inspected and repairs are made.

Restoring power can be as simple as replacing a fuse, which can take a few minutes, or as time-consuming as repairing downed power lines, replacing broken poles or faulty transformers.



6 Power is restored.

Crews work around the clock, troubleshooting and making necessary repairs to restore your power. On average, power outages in the Bluebonnet service area last about 90 minutes. Once your electricity is back on, you'll receive a final text notification.

Members can monitor power outages using a link to Bluebonnet's outage map viewer at bluebonnet.coop, via the mobile app, or by texting STATUS to 44141 using the phone number associated with their account.

long before bad weather arrives

tracked machines, side-by-side offroad vehicles, snow chains for tire traction and drones to locate storm damage and make necessary repairs.

While preparations vary based on the anticipated size and severity of a storm, some steps are the same for every weather event.

"We show up at the office, gather the other guys on the crew like any other day," said Logan Lancaster, a lineworker crew supervisor who started at the cooperative's Giddings service center in 2013. Crews are then assigned to an area or section of line to work on.

"I once worked a storm in the Wash-

ington County area, 100 miles from the service center I work out of," said Joe Lockhart, a Bluebonnet crew supervisor in Maxwell. "Our job is the same regardless of where we work. Our priority is still getting the power on as quickly and safely as possible."

As soon as conditions are safe, crews are dispatched to assess damage, prioritize critical repairs and restore power as quickly as possible. Lineworkers are in constant contact with crew supervisors, who are always communicating with control center operators.

By ramping up resources before and dur-

ing storms, all crews can operate on shifts to ensure their safety while restoring power.

"Depending on the type and severity of the storm, we transition to 12-hour shift work and are put on rest when we are not working," Lancaster said. "It is hard to sleep during the day when the sun is up, especially after working all night, so I try to rest as much as I can to be prepared for storm events."

No matter the season or severity of the storm, Bluebonnet's commitment is always to restore power as quickly and safely as possible, and to keep its members informed.

Guarding Bluebonnet's grid

All day, every day, skilled operators watch Bluebonnet's electric system to locate outages, coordinate crews and keep the lights on.

By Alyssa Meinke

WHEN A STORM rolls in, a vehicle hits a power pole or an animal touches the wrong piece of equipment, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's control center is the first to respond. A team of 10 control center operators work in shifts to monitor Bluebonnet's electric grid. When an outage occurs, the operators dispatch lineworkers to restore power as quickly and safely as possible.

These operators are the unseen first responders of Bluebonnet's electric grid that keep power flowing to more than 138,000 homes, businesses and critical facilities. They are the vanguard of a team that works to keep members' lights on 99.93% of the time, on average.

The process is complex and constant, requiring continuous reprioritization. "It's like running a busy restaurant kitchen during a dinner rush — serving multiple dishes at once while new orders keep coming in," said Bryn Janca, a control center operator at Bluebonnet for five years.

In addition to tracking and prioritizing outages — whether they impact a single member or thousands — and dispatching Bluebonnet and contractor crews to restore power, the operators use advanced technology to monitor and troubleshoot the entire electric system. They coordinate planned work requests and track the location and status of crews. They keep a close watch on weather conditions. They communicate regularly with member services and other departments to provide status reports to members.

The process has come a long way since Greg Roeber, Bluebonnet's control center manager, started dispatching crews in 1995. Back then, the control center had one computer. "We used the computer to print outage reports and stacked them on a desk, prioritizing them by height — based on the number of pages," Roeber said.

Now, operators use advanced software to detect outages, pinpoint issues on power lines and, when possible, reroute power to



Greg Roeber, pictured in 2003 at Bluebonnet's Giddings control center. Today, the control center operators have even more computers, phones and radios to support power restoration efforts.



Bryn Janca, a control center operator, above right, takes a call from a lineworker while fellow operator Dillon Stavinoaha, above left, assists with another. Operators receive hundreds of calls daily.

minimize disruptions. "We're a support system," he said. Roeber began working at Bluebonnet in 1982 as a lineworker before transitioning to the control center in 1995. He became its superintendent in 2005, then manager of the control center in 2017. After more than 40 years of service, he plans to retire in July.

"One of the things I'm most proud of is seeing how our team has grown," Roeber said. "Training a new employee that doesn't have a lot of electrical experience and watching him connect the dots as he becomes a knowledgeable and thoughtful operator is one of the most fulfilling aspects of the job."

The operators come from various educational and military backgrounds, contributing diverse strengths to the team.

"The best trait of an operator is being self-motivated and having the ability to learn," Roeber said. When there is downtime, the team runs drills to ensure they are prepared for any situation.

"We want everyone to learn," Roeber explained. "We take a look at what we can improve and how we can operate differently to get better."

Despite all the technological advancements, the heart of the control center is the people. Operators ensure lineworkers are safe in the field, relay information to update members on the status of their outage and respond to emergency calls.

Communication is key to a smooth response to outages. Operators constantly relay information to and from the field, with 350 to 400 messages by phone, radio and text coming in and going out on a typical day. "As soon as we get any relevant information, we relay it — whether it's from the members, our guys in the field or other operators," Janca said.

"It's like community service," said Max Baird, a control center operator with 11 years of experience. "Serving the community while supporting our families is rewarding."

"We don't like to see our members out of power for any reason," Janca said. Baird agrees: "We're a team. We're here for our members."

There is one piece of advice operators want to give to members: Keep your contact information updated. "It helps us find you in the event of an outage, dispatch crews and get your power back on faster," Janca said. "Leave detailed and clear messages when you call to report an issue. We're always listening," Baird said.



Above, Jeffrey Bolding, a crew supervisor in Bastrop, carries a long stick — an insulated tool used to restore power — while responding to a storm in February.

Continued from Page 17

For Bluebonnet and other utilities across the state, restoring power during an outage is an all-hands-on-deck effort. Teams work non-stop until power has been restored to all members.

Because of this, Bolding also makes sure his family is prepared. “Every time I am called out, I get a hug and kiss from everyone. They tell me to stay safe and they make sure I have everything I need,” he said. “Often times, packed away with my lunch or in the pockets of my clothes, I find notes and drawings from my family.”

Bolding said the best part of his job is that after working long hours in terrible weather, he goes home to his family, takes a hot shower and sleeps in his own bed. “That is really wonderful,” he said.

Bolding and other lineworkers said they get great satisfaction from hearing members shout with joy once a storm passes and their electricity is restored. “I feel a huge sense of relief. Not only because the power to members was restored, but because I know my crew and my family are safe,” Bolding said.

The communications team — keeping members updated

“Whether it’s one member out of power or thousands, we stay in constant contact with the control center to gather details about what caused an outage, what is being done to fix it and how long repairs will take,” said Clarissa Ortiz, part of the team responsible for communicating with Bluebonnet members during outages.

Ortiz joined Bluebonnet in 2016 as a member service representative in Bluebonnet’s Bastrop-based call center. She answers calls from both English- and Spanish-speaking members to connect new service, process bill payments and address any questions about

electric service. Since November 2023, she has also been part of the member communications teams that work shifts to send text messages to Bluebonnet members whose power is out.

She and her teammates stay in contact with control center operators through texts and phone calls to get updates about power outages.

“Members want to know when crews are on-site, what caused the outage — whether it was an animal or a car hitting a pole — and when their power will be restored. It is our job to give them those answers as soon as possible,” Ortiz said. “We also let members know if we are still investigating the cause of their outage.”

Communications teams also monitor Bluebonnet’s social media and sometimes call members during smaller or multi-hour outages. During major storms that can cause hundreds of outages across Bluebonnet’s large service area, Ortiz and the team are in the control center, working side-by-side with operators to provide rapid updates to members.

“Every outage is different, and so is the information we send in text messages,” Ortiz said.

“We typically determine the cause within 30 minutes of the crew’s arrival. Lineworkers provide the control center with an estimated repair time. Then this information is passed to the communications team to send an update to the members affected.”

One storm was particularly memorable for Ortiz. In July, after Hurricane Beryl affected part of Bluebonnet’s service area, she arrived at the control center at 6 a.m., prepared to work a 12- to 16-hour shift.

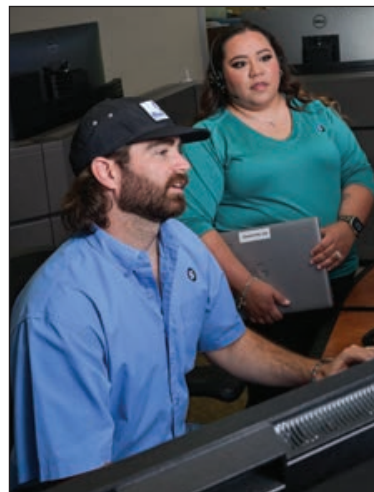
“The atmosphere was intense. Phones were ringing, radios cracked with updates and large TV screens displayed maps of outages across Bluebonnet’s area,” she said.

Clarissa Ortiz, right, works with Jarod Jatzlau, a control center operator, to gather details about a power outage. Ortiz is part of the member communications team that sends text updates to members affected by outages.

“Everyone was locked in and focused to get our members’ power back on.”

Ortiz took a seat in the middle of it, listening closely to conversations between control center operators and field crews. “Every piece of information mattered,” she said.

“We have families, too, so we understand what we would want to hear and strive to tailor our messages to that,” she said. ■



Bluebonnet supports Child Abuse Prevention Month

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative’s five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor will shine blue at night throughout April to raise awareness of National Child Abuse Prevention Month and the region’s organizations that support families affected by abuse and neglect.

In the Bluebonnet area, six Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) programs cover all 14 counties where the cooperative provides electricity.

Other organizations in the Bluebonnet region that support cooperative members and their families include the Children’s Advocacy Center, which serves Bastrop, Lee and Fayette counties

and offers care, support and services to children who have been abused or neglected; and SAFE Alliance, a nonprofit which operates in eastern Travis County and supports children, adults and families who have been affected by abuse or neglect. These local organizations welcome adult volunteers and donations.

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 800-252-5400, or submit a report online at txabusehotline.org. In case of immediate danger to a child, call 911 to contact local law enforcement.

Find out more about the region’s abuse prevention assistance agencies online at bluebonnet.coop/child-abuse-prevention.

Apprentice lineworkers a

Three graduates began Bluebonnet careers as interns; two employees get advanced technical training certifications

By Connie Juarez

FOURTEEN apprentice lineworker graduates at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative are now prepared to join the skilled team of journeymen who provide reliable service across the cooperative's 3,800-square-mile service area.

Three of those graduates began as lineworker interns at Bluebonnet, completing a six-month training program before beginning years of apprentice courses and on-the-job learning.

In addition to the lineworker graduates, Tristin Lagrone, a substation technician, received his certification from the U.S. Department of Labor. Dillon Stavinoha, a control center operator, completed a 10-month program and proficiency exam to receive a certification as a system operator.

Each program has unique requirements for study, testing, training and work experience. Bluebonnet's lineworker apprentice program requires 8,000 hours of on-the-job training, along with 672 hours of technical instruction, typically completed over four years. Program graduates receive certification as lineworkers from the Department of Labor.

For John Courtney, an apprentice graduate, the program offered a stable career with room for growth.

"I earned something I can really be proud of, something that's going to help me build a better future," said Courtney, who is based in Brenham. "If anyone's thinking about the program, I'd say go for it and give it 100%. It's going to be a challenge, but it definitely pays off."

Lagrone said he was inspired by the lineworkers he saw as a child.

"I grew up in Lexington, and I can remember as a kid watching Randall Bownds and other linemen come out



Fourteen Bluebonnet apprentice lineworkers completed years of required training to reach journeyman status. They are, from left, John Courtney, Dustin Barker, Dior Smith, David Martin, Preston Vaughn, Kyle Jenke, Brad Young, Stephen Branef, Thurston Bennett, Colton Matthijetz, Trey Townsend, Colton Burch, Timmy Medack and Jordan 'J.D.' Boecker. Sarah Beal photos

during storms and outages to restore power," said Lagrone, who is based in Giddings. "I thought that was pretty cool that they could get the lights back on." Bownds is an assistant field superintendent also working out of Giddings.

The best parts of his job, Lagrone said, are the variety each day brings and the satisfaction of helping his community.

Several apprentice graduates spoke about how much the program has helped them



Tristin Lagrone, a substation technician.



Dillon Stavinoha, a control center operator.

grow personally, emphasizing that the skills they've developed go beyond just their work.

"The leadership skills I've gained through the program have truly changed me as a person. I apply them every day — whether

achieve journeyman ranks



it's in my role as a husband and father, or by stepping up to give my time in the community," said Thurston Bennett, who is based in Bastrop.

With the addition of this year's group, 153 Bluebonnet lineworker apprentices have graduated from the program since it began in 2004.

In addition to hundreds of classroom hours, apprentices gain extensive experience in the field, learning skills such as building overhead and underground power lines, restoring power during outages, maintaining equipment, and installing and repairing meters.

Paul Herzog, superintendent in Giddings, discussed the value of the program.

"This program gives local people a chance to get into a rewarding career. It's more than just a job — it's about building a future, learning skills that'll last a lifetime," Herzog said. "By offering these opportunities, we're not only making sure

our community has the right people to keep things running smoothly, but we're also building the next generation to serve and support the community for years to come."

The newest Bluebonnet apprentice graduates, in addition to Courtney and Bennett, are Dustin Barker, Jordan "J.D." Boecker, Stephen Braneff, Colton Burch, Kyle Jenke, David Martin, Colton Matthijetz, Timmy Medack, Dior Smith, Trey Townsend, Preston Vaughn and Brad Young.

Smith, Townsend and Vaughn began their careers as lineworker interns.

The intern program, which started in 2018, provides six months of technical instruction in line work. To advance into the apprentice program, participants must also obtain a power-pole climbing certification and a commercial driver's license.

Learn more about Bluebonnet's lineworker intern and apprenticeship programs at bluebonnet.coop/careers. ■

Lineworker Appreciation Day is April 14

Electric cooperatives across America will observe April 14 as National Lineworker Appreciation Day. Take time to recognize the hard work and dedication of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's lineworkers by visiting our social media pages on that day to see a special video tribute to our lineworkers. Not only are they on call to work — any time, any day of the year — to restore electricity during outages, but they install, repair, replace and maintain the cooperative's electrical equipment.

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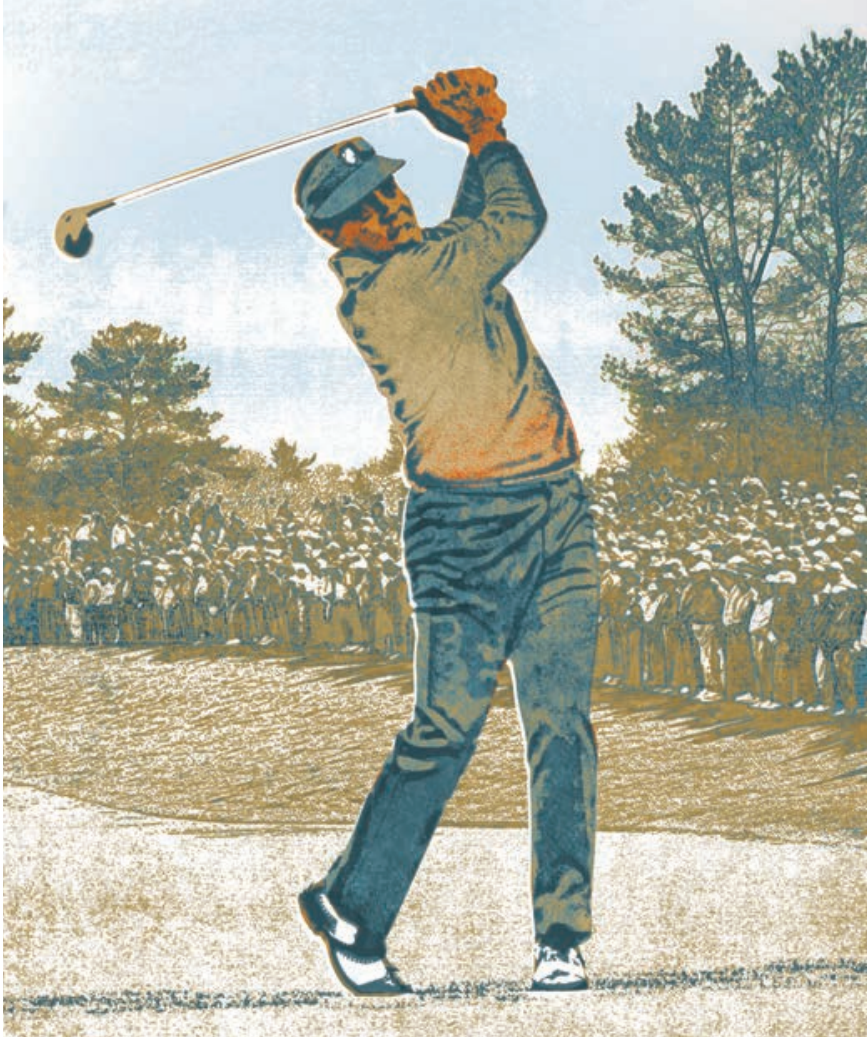
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Playing Through

Golfer Lee Elder shot his way to the very top despite grave barriers

BY KEVIN ROBBINS • ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC KITTELBERGER

LEE ELDER WAS 40 when he played in his first Masters Tournament, the spring golf ritual in Augusta, Georgia, that represents the first of the four major championships each season. But his rather advanced age wasn't the story at all 50 years ago this month—in April 1975. Nor were the death threats.

The Dallas native had become the first African American to compete in the Masters. Augusta National Golf Club, which organizes and hosts the tournament, had finally responded to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. While the club had no formal policy banning Black players, it nonetheless had never extended an invitation to one.

That changed in 1971.

That year, the Masters announced that

any player who had won the previous season on the PGA Tour would automatically qualify—a policy that exists to this day.

Elder won the 1974 Monsanto Open in Pensacola, Florida. It was two weeks after Hank Aaron broke the Major League Baseball home run record set by Babe Ruth.

Elder's acceptance to play in the Masters generated massive publicity. It felt like a watershed moment in American sports.

"Move over, Hank Aaron," wrote *The Chicago Defender*, a Black newspaper. "There's enough room in the spotlight for at least two people." The threats soon followed.

In April, as the Masters neared, Elder rented two houses near the course for himself and his wife. He wanted no one

else to know where he would be while competing.

It was all so new and unnerving to the U.S. Army veteran who, along with his nine siblings, had lost his parents when he was young. Born in 1934, Elder caddied with his brother Raymond at Tenison Park Golf Course in Dallas, miles from the nearest course that allowed Black players. He moved to California in the 1940s to live with an aunt.

There he caddied, toiled in bag rooms, did odd jobs in pro shops and gradually learned to hit a golf ball straight and far.

Elder joined the United Golfers Association, a tour for Black players, who were, at the time, excluded by fiat from the PGA Tour.

Elder thrived on the UGA. He won 18 of 22 tournaments in one remarkable stretch. But that wasn't where the money and prestige were; UGA purses were a pittance. Elder joined the PGA Tour in 1968, seven years after it lifted its Caucasian-only policy.

That August, he took the mighty Jack Nicklaus to a playoff in Akron, Ohio. Elder had arrived. People knew his name.

He eventually won four tournaments in 448 starts on the PGA Tour, including once in Texas, at the 1976 Houston Open. He proved, with Charlie Sifford and Calvin Peete, that Black players belonged in professional golf.

Elder missed the 36-hole cut at that Masters (a tournament he would play five more times) in his 1975 debut. He later said he felt seen in a way he never had.

"The display from the employees at Augusta National was especially moving," Elder, who died in 2021, told *Golf Digest* in 2019. "Most of the staff was Black, and on Friday, they left their duties to line the 18th fairway as I walked toward the green.

"I couldn't hold back the tears. Of all the acknowledgments of what I had accomplished by getting there, this one meant the most." ■

Eggs

Hearty meals that just might be too good to limit to breakfast

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Team salsa verde! I unapologetically drench salsa verde over all my dishes, but over eggs in a well of hash browns topped with bacon? This is what breakfast dreams are made of. Take this directly from the stovetop to the table and serve it family style.

Salsa Verde, Hash Brown & Bacon Breakfast Skillet

6 strips bacon, diced
6 cups frozen diced hash browns
¾ cup chopped red bell pepper
¾ cup chopped green bell pepper
½ cup chopped onion
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
4 eggs
1 cup salsa verde
¼ cup chopped cilantro (optional)

1. In a large skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Remove bacon and set aside. Drain, reserving 2 tablespoons of drippings in skillet.
2. Add hash browns, peppers, onion, salt and pepper to drippings. Cook 2 minutes while stirring.
3. Cover and cook about 15 minutes more or until potatoes are browned and tender, stirring occasionally.
4. Reduce heat to low. Make 4 wells in potato mixture. Break 1 egg into each well. Top each egg with ¼ cup salsa verde.
5. Sprinkle bacon over the top, cover, and cook until eggs are completely set, about 8–10 minutes.
6. Serve warm, garnished with cilantro if desired.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifecake.com, where she features a recipe for Honey Flan.





Egg Puff & Stuff

MICHELE BRADLEY
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

If you crave an easy, sticks-to-your-bones breakfast, this one has it all—veggies, sausage, eggs, cheese and a hint of spice. Served warm with a few slices of creamy avocado, this dish will keep you going all morning.

- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed**
- 1 small potato, diced**
- ½ cup ground pork or turkey breakfast sausage**
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper**
- ½ cup diced red bell pepper**
- ½ cup diced yellow bell pepper**
- ¼ cup thinly sliced portabello mushrooms**
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic**
- 8 eggs**
- 2 tablespoons cottage cheese**
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning**
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes**
- Sliced avocado**

- 1.** Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add diced potato and sausage. Cook, stirring occasionally, until sausage is cooked through and potato is fork-tender.
- 2.** Stir in peppers, mushrooms and garlic, and cook until vegetables are slightly tender, adding additional oil if needed. Remove from skillet and set aside.
- 3.** In a bowl, beat eggs lightly. Add cottage cheese, Cajun seasoning and crushed red pepper flakes.
- 4.** Pour egg mixture into skillet over medium-high heat. Run spoon across bottom of skillet to begin lightly scrambling eggs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Easiest Breakfast Casserole

VALERIE KRUSE
TRI-COUNTY EC



Stuffing in a breakfast casserole? This recipe piqued my interest from the start, and boy was I happy I gave it a try. The stuffing addition gives this eggy dish a mouthful of flavor and bite. This casserole will feed a crowd, but you could also keep it for yourself and enjoy it for lunch all week.

- 9 eggs**
- 3 cups milk**
- 1 box stuffing mix (6 ounces), any flavor**
- 1 pound ground breakfast sausage, cooked and crumbled**
- 3 cups grated cheddar cheese, divided use**

- 1.** Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a large bowl, lightly beat eggs. Add milk, stuffing, sausage and 2 cups cheese. Stir to combine.
- 3.** Spoon into prepared dish and top with remaining 1 cup cheese.
- 4.** Cover with plastic wrap or aluminum foil and refrigerate overnight.
- 5.** In the morning, allow casserole to sit at room temperature 30 minutes while the oven preheats to 350 degrees.
- 6.** Bake uncovered 40–45 minutes or until lightly browned on top and toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12–16

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

ONE-SKILLET DINNERS DUE APRIL 10

It's a busy weeknight, and you need an easy one-dish dinner to fill up the family. What's your go-to? Send us your best skillet stunner, and you could win \$500. Enter by April 10.

UPCOMING: CANDIES AND FUDGE DUE MAY 10



RECIPES CONTINUED

5. Stir in cooked potato, sausage and vegetables to evenly coat with egg. Continue to cook until eggs are fully cooked.

6. Serve warm, topped with avocado.

SERVES 3-4

Easy Egg Bake

AMY STREET
MIDSOUTH EC

This egg bake packs all the flavors of a breakfast sandwich into a casserole. I love finding great recipes to have on hand for a lazy Sunday morning brunch with ingredients I have readily available in my kitchen. Fresh from the oven, I topped my slice with plenty of hot sauce—delicious!

1 tube crescent rolls (12 ounces)
1 pound pork breakfast sausage



½ cup diced green onion
8 eggs
1 cup milk
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese, divided use
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, divided use

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Line crescent rolls along the bottom, pinching seams to seal. Bake 8 minutes, then remove from oven.
2. While crust is baking, cook breakfast sausage in a skillet over medium-high heat, breaking up with a spoon. Add green onion and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until sausage is fully cooked. Remove from heat.
3. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees. Add eggs, milk, salt and pepper to a bowl. Whisk until thoroughly combined.
4. Spread sausage mixture over cooked crescent crust. Sprinkle half the cheddar and mozzarella over sausage. Pour egg mixture evenly over cheese and then sprinkle on remaining half of cheeses.
5. Bake 30 minutes or until top is lightly browned and toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12



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COURTESY TODD WHITE STILLS AND MOTION

Fish School

For millions of fish, life starts at Sea Center Texas

BY CHET GARNER

MANY TEXANS WILL spend their entire lives chasing the big one on the Gulf Coast. They'll traverse marshes and bays in search of a bull red or spec worthy of hanging on the wall or, perhaps more importantly, posting on social media.

I've spent my share of afternoons casting but have never had half as much luck as I did in 10 minutes fishing the ponds outside Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson, about an hour south of Houston. That's because many of the redfish and speckled trout in our state started their lives right here.

Sea Center Texas is an aquarium, science lab and fish nursery. It's where the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department breeds fish to populate our waters and educates the public on all the amazing creatures of our coast.

What immediately impressed me wasn't the live fish but the replicas of state-record saltwater fish covering the lobby walls. Let's just say the great hammerhead specimen still gives me nightmares.

I walked the halls of aquariums, each focusing on a different underwater ecosystem, from coastal marshes to deeper offshore waters. There was even a touch tank where I held a blue crab (pincers removed, thankfully).

I then grabbed a tour of the back-of-house where TPWD biologists raise millions (literally) of reds, trout and flounder. Outside is a wetlands boardwalk and 75 acres of tanks, including some open for public youth fishing. Luckily I had my kids in tow and was able to reel in a speckled trout much bigger than anything I've ever caught before. But, hey, I'll count it.

It's just one of the many reasons to plan a trip here instead of chasing the big ones all around the coast. ■

ABOVE Chet and Paul Cason, director of Sea Center Texas, with a speckled trout.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see 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.

APRIL

11

Carthage [11–12] Piney Woods Quilt Festival, (903) 754-1948, carthagetexas.com

12

Aubrey GreenFest on the Greenbelt, greenfestdenton.com

Lake Jackson Kids Reel Big Fish Event, (979) 297-4533, lakejacksontx.gov

McKinney [12–13] Spring Native Plant Sale, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

19

Fairfield Easter Eggstravaganza, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

23

Corsicana [23–26] Derrick Days, (903) 654-4850, derrickdays.com

25

Burnet [25–26] Highland Lakes Quilt Festival, hlqguild@gmail.com, hlqg.org

26

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

Castroville Alsatian Festival of Texas, castrovilletx.gov

Channing Hogs at the Point, (806) 935-5598, talonpoint.org

Fredericksburg Volunteer Fire Department Fish Fry, (830) 997-7521, fbgtx.org

Huntington Homestead Festival, shophuntingtontx.com

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

Kerrville Hill Country Chorale Spring Concert, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

Tomball Rails & Tails Mudbug Festival, (281) 290-1035, tomballtx.gov

Brazoria [26-27] Migration Celebration, 1-844-842-4737, migrationcelebration.org

Temple [26-27] Texas State Button Society Spring Show and Sale, (512) 892-4265, texasstatebuttonociety.com

MAY

2

Fort Worth UNT One O'Clock Lab Band Spring Showcase, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

Taylor [2-3] Chisholm Trail Quilt Guild Quilt Show, ctquiltguild.org

3

El Campo Cinco de Mayo Celebration, (979) 275-1600, eclostlagoon.com

Fairfield Lemonade Day, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

New Ulm Honey Bee Jubilee, (713) 568-5584, newulmtexas.org

San Marcos Heritage Home Tour, (512) 392-4295, heritagesanmarcos.org

Comfort [3-4] Hill Country Two-Step, texasminimilkers.org

TCP Submit Your Event

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Characters

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1

1 THERESA MCKEE
FANNIN EC

"This guy has been iconic over the years. He truly is a Texas character!"

2 PAUL GARCIA
MEDINA EC

"It took me forever to get this shot. I had about 10 hummingbirds at my feeder and had an idea about trying to hand-feed them."

3 MARY CARUTH
PEDERNALES EC

Cheese! This was taken at Dripping Springs Distilling.

4 AMY SAYLAK
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

"A Texas girl with her first cap gun, Sneaky Pete!"



3



2



4

Upcoming Contests

- DUE APR 10 College Life
- DUE MAY 10 Off-Road Adventures
- DUE JUN 10 Heroes



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Overlooked (No More)

The best view in the Big Bend is worth the trek

BY PAM LEBLANC
PHOTO BY CHRIS LEBLANC

FROM MY VANTAGE point on the side of a rocky slope high above the Rio Grande, the river looks like a glinting horseshoe far below.

I think it's the best view in the Big Bend region, and that's saying a lot. I've spent hours gazing down at the rippling desert floor from the South Rim, watching the sun sink behind the Window in the Chisos Basin and peering upriver at Santa Elena Canyon.

But this view, from the western edge of Mesa de Anguila, surpasses all of those, and few hikers make the trip. The mesa, an 11-mile hump of land that juts like a broken pinkie off the western side of Big Bend National Park, is one of the least-visited areas of the park.

I first discovered the overlook six years ago, during a challenging multiday back-

packing trip down the spine of the mesa. Now I make a much easier 2.5-mile jaunt to reach the overlook.

Here, the desert closes in for a prickly hug. With its shattered rocks and cactuses that look like bouquets of steak knives, this remote spot feels like the backdrop of an old *Star Trek* episode.

You've probably seen photographs of Horseshoe Bend at the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Arizona, where Instagrammers famously flock to snap photos of themselves high above a U-shaped section of the Colorado River. This, to me, is the Texas equivalent.

To get here from the park's west entrance, drive 21 miles west along FM 170 to Lajitas. The Mesa de Anguila Trail starts behind the Lajitas Golf Resort, next to a sign that says, "Poisonous snakes and insects may be present."

The first mile and a half of the trail zigzag through flat desert, dipping into shallow arroyos and winding past scrub. There is no shade; bring plenty of water, even in winter.

After about 30 minutes plodding through the desert, the trail starts to climb up a rocky gully. You'll get a quad-burning workout as you ascend 600 feet over half a mile. You might need to use your hands as you clamber over rocks as big as armchairs and tiptoe through spillways of scree.

When you reach the saddle at the top, just past the 2-mile point, the main trail continues straight. Instead of following that path, look for a faint trail to your right. Make your way up the hill, then look south, toward Mexico.

Voilà.

Find a good boulder to sit on, and take it in. I could sit for hours, contemplating the way the river embraces the land.

They say horseshoes bring good luck. In this case, I'm sure it does. Anyone who makes it to this spot is lucky to take in such a beautiful view. ■

Author Pam LeBlanc takes in the view from the western edge of Mesa de Anguila in Big Bend National Park.

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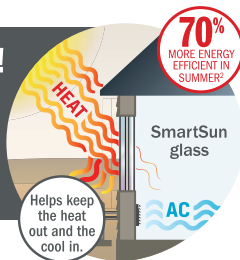
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