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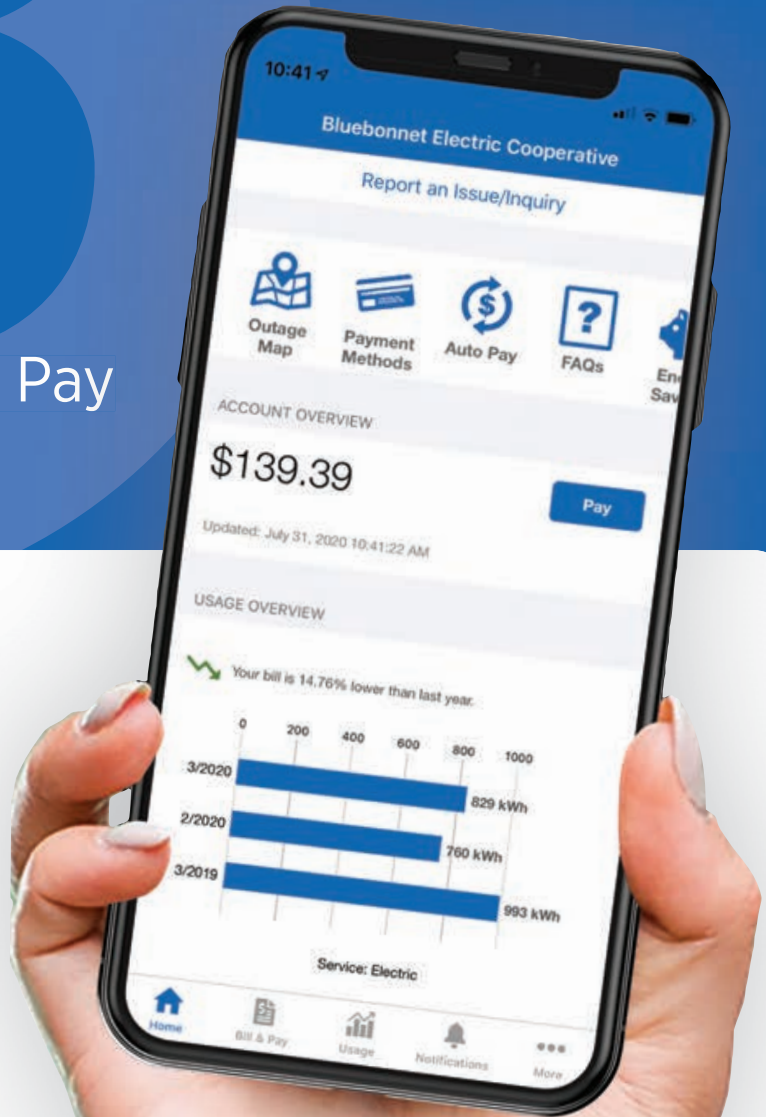
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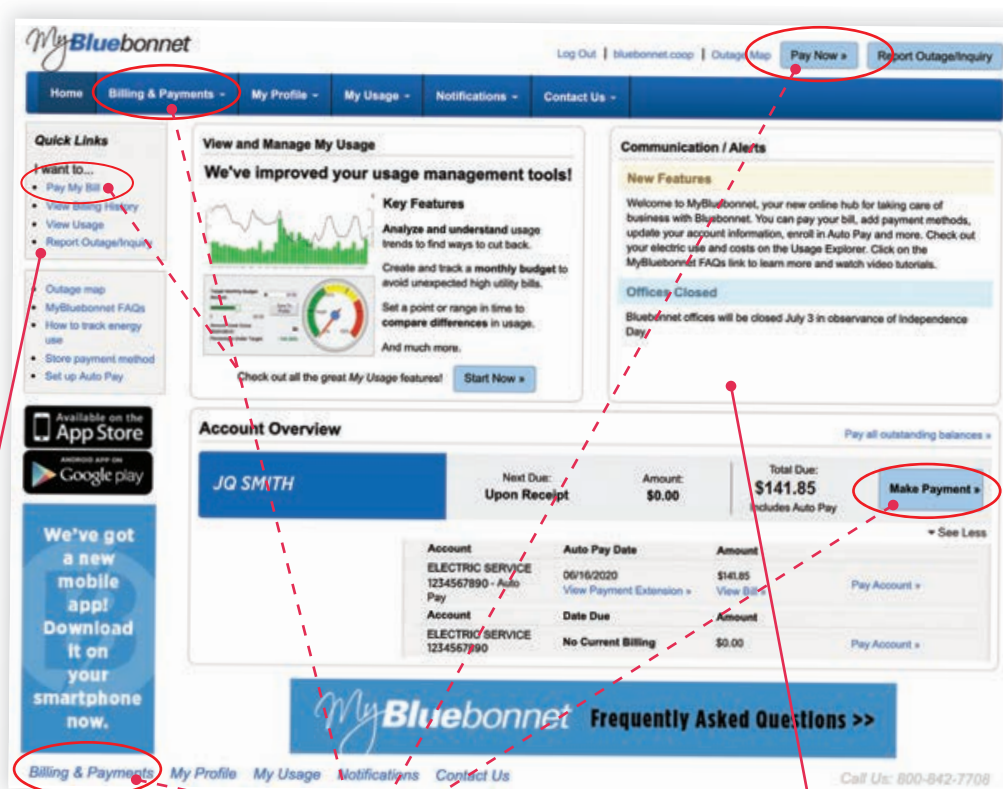


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Georgia O’Keeffe found inspiration in the Panhandle



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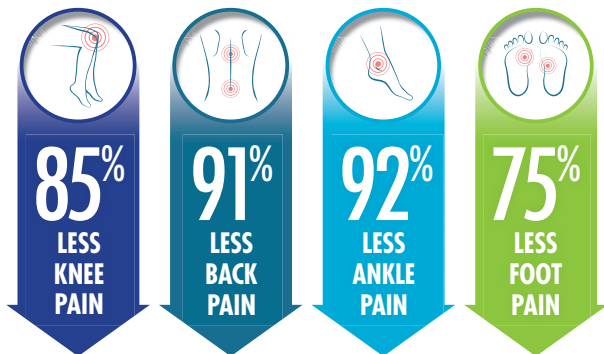
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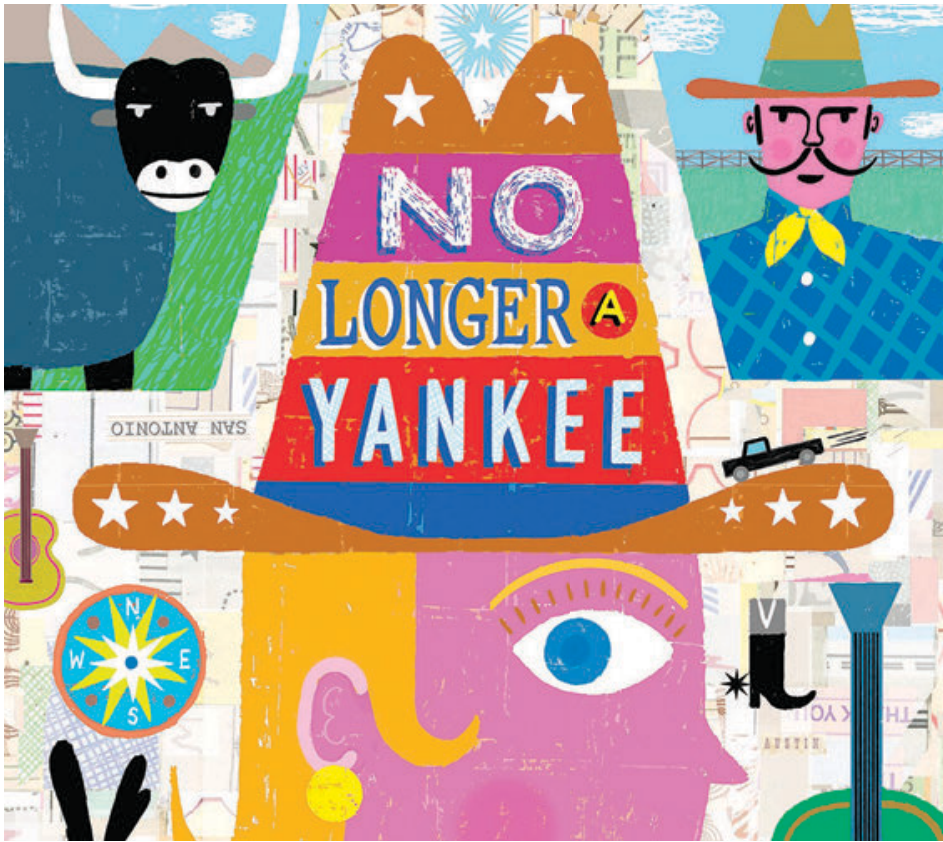
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By Chris Burrows
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Story by Pam LeBlanc | Illustration by Noah Woods

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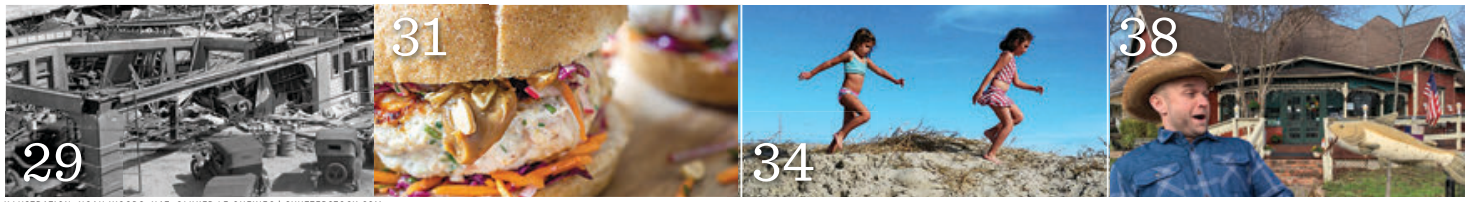
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*Sweet Adversity*  
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**NEXT MONTH**

**MYTX** *What does it mean to be Texan? We asked a variety of folks who have special connections to the state.*



**ON THE COVER** A photo of Georgia O’Keeffe in Canyon—and Palo Duro Canyon, her muse in Texas. Canyon photo by Rob Greebon | ImagesfromTexas.com

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## Stark Memories

My family lived in Orange during the mid-1950s [*Firmly Rooted*, May 2020]. I recall a classmate was the grandson of the Stark-Lutcher marriage. I recall being invited out to a huge plantation house by his parents to spend the day with him playing and exploring the land.

**BILL WHEELLESS JR. | EVANT HAMILTON COUNTY EC**

One thing the article did not mention is the church that Frances Ann Lutcher built. Known as the Lutcher Memorial Building, it was built for the First Presbyterian Church of Orange. It was built around three stained-glass windows, made by Lamb Studios, which Lutcher purchased at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. The granite was quarried in Llano.

**DAVID AND PATTY MOUTON | MEADOWLAKES PEDERNALES EC**

## Horse Sense

I enjoyed Martha Deeringer's history of the Spanish mustang in Texas [*Horses' Roundabout Trail*, May 2020]. This history is alive and well in East Texas. Vicki Ives of Karma Farms in Marshall has dedicated her life to the preservation, promotion and love of America's first horse.

**CHUCK WATERS | MARSHALL RUSK COUNTY EC**



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## My Old Friend

Every day is scary with this virus spreading like wildfire. New rules to live by: sheltering in, masks, 6 feet apart, empty grocery store shelves.

I shut all that out for a moment when I opened my mailbox and there was my old friend, *Texas Co-op Power*—arriving on the same date, entertaining, always comforting.

I don't know why, but tears filled my eyes. I was so happy to see something that had not gone by the wayside.

**JANE PATTERSON | TEXARKANA | BOWIE-CASS EC**



## Ripple Effect

In response to *Splash Across Texas* [Currents, May 2020], there is also a Texas-shaped pool in Hilltop Lakes. My grandmother lived there, and the best memories were made at that pool.

**ASHLEY PHILLIPS | BROADDUS SAM HOUSTON EC**

Here's my Texas-shaped pool [below] in western rural Fayette County near West Point.

**JOE W. ARNOLD | WEST POINT FAYETTE EC**

We've had fun through the years teaching our kids and now grandkids Texas geography by swimming around the pool at Hilltop Lakes.

A favorite memory was a big family celebration of the Texas sesquicentennial in 1986. My sister was living in Wyoming, and we joked about our wonderful Texas-shaped swimming pool and the baby pool being in the shape of Wyoming—boring rectangle.

**JANA VICK | DESOTO NAVASOTA VALLEY EC**

## Name That Snake

Thanks to the article [*Common Snakes of Texas*, April 2020], I was able to correctly identify a snake that my dogs attacked. I was afraid it was a water moccasin, but it was a nonvenomous diamondback water snake.

**CINDY LUTKENHAUS | GAINESVILLE PENTEX ENERGY**

Snakes are friends, never foes. The snakes are simply trying to survive in a home that was taken from them, in a world that is constantly changing at the hands of human beings.

**RICHARD CLAY CROWELL | VIA FACEBOOK**

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

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## LIFESTYLE

# Social Distance at the Drive-In

**AS MOVIE THEATERS** across the country were forced to close to help slow the spread of the coronavirus, many drive-in theaters found themselves in a unique position to remain open, offering an increasingly rare opportunity for public entertainment while allowing patrons to maintain distance from one another.

For some drive-ins, like the Showboat Drive-In Theater in Hockley, outside Houston, it led to a momentary uptick in business. As Showboat owner Andrew Thomas told The Associated Press, ticket sales increased by about 40% one March weekend when the theater otherwise would have expected a 40% loss. “Obviously this isn’t the way you’d want it to occur, but I’m excited for the idea that there may be a new generation of people that will get to experience going to a drive-in theater,” he said.

To find a drive-in near you, check out our story *Drive In, Chill Out* at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).



## NATURE

# FEATHER IN THEIR CAPS

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Audubon Texas have selected Bastrop, Dallas, Houston and Port Aransas for the Bird City Texas distinction. They are recognized for community engagement, habitat management and threat reduction for birds in the inaugural year of the campaign. Their Bird City designations last through 2022.

Fort Worth’s Coyote Drive-In



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*That’s how many copies of Texas Co-op Power magazine are mailed to subscribers—mostly electric cooperative members—every month.*

CO-OP PEOPLE

## Brave Faces

WHEN NICOLE CRABTREE HANEY read that her local hospital was facing a mask shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Wise Electric Cooperative customer service representative got to sewing.

The rest of Decatur, in North Texas, did, too—fulfilling the hospital's need right away. But Haney, who has a sister and two daughters who work in the medical field, was undeterred. She realized that her co-workers at the co-op, who are

critical to keeping the lights on, could use the protection.

"I was able to get all the specs and qualifications of the masks that our hospital had asked to be made, and I dusted off my sewing machine and got to work," Haney said.

By mid-April, she had sewn nearly 250 masks, donating more than 100 to her co-workers and other essential workers.

"Honestly, this has turned into a bigger project than I anticipated," she said.

"It feels good to be able to help in some small way during these uncertain times that we are in."



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

*It's not really summer until . . .*

► **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. Please include your city and co-op.

Below are some of the responses to our May prompt: **The best part about being a mom is ...**

Hugs—real heartwarming hugs, not virtual hugs.

CAROLYN GOLAN | BELLVILLE  
SAN BERNARD EC

Weed flowers and sticky kisses.

DEBORAH JENNINGS | HAWKINS  
WOOD COUNTY EC

Getting to say, "Ask your dad."  
MARK BROWNING | GOODRICH  
SAM HOUSTON EC

Mothers turn into grandmothers, and you can send the kids back home.

MARIE MELGOZA | GRANBURY  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Having your kids grow up into adults you're very proud of who bear no resemblance to themselves as teenagers.

ELLEN PATTERSON | FATE  
FARMERS EC

Knowing there is no way to be a perfect mom but a million ways to be a great mom.

JO LESTER | WIMBERLEY  
PEDERNALES EC

Feeling the love you gave to your children come back to you 10 times greater.

GAIL VERNER | JUSTIN  
COSERV

To see more responses, read Currents on our website.

THE ARTS

## Culinary Canvas

**Palo Duro Love Letters** on Page 8 looks at Georgia O'Keeffe's creative legacy—her paintings and writing—from her time in Texas 100 years ago.

When the artist died in 1986, she left behind a collection of some 300 recipes, which Sotheby's auctioned in March, along with artistic works, books, clothes and other personal effects from the estates of O'Keeffe and her husband, noted photographer Alfred Stieglitz. Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library paid \$17.2 million for the whole lot.

The recipes, many handwritten on notecards, slips of paper and hotel stationery, reflect O'Keeffe's culinary passions. She was as exacting in her kitchen as she was on her canvases, growing vegetables at her New Mexico home, obtaining eggs from a local woman and weekly making yogurt from goat's milk.

O'Keeffe and her guests enjoyed a variety of dishes, including pecan butterball cookies, tomato aspic, vegetable soup, applesauce and chicken flautas.



ALMANAC

## WAVING OLD GLORY

The U.S. flag is said to have been raised on San José Island, a sand barrier between Matagorda Island and Mustang Island in the Gulf, on July 26, 1845—the first time it was flown in Texas.



“There is something wonderful about the bigness and the loneliness and the windiness of it all,” O’Keeffe wrote to a friend.

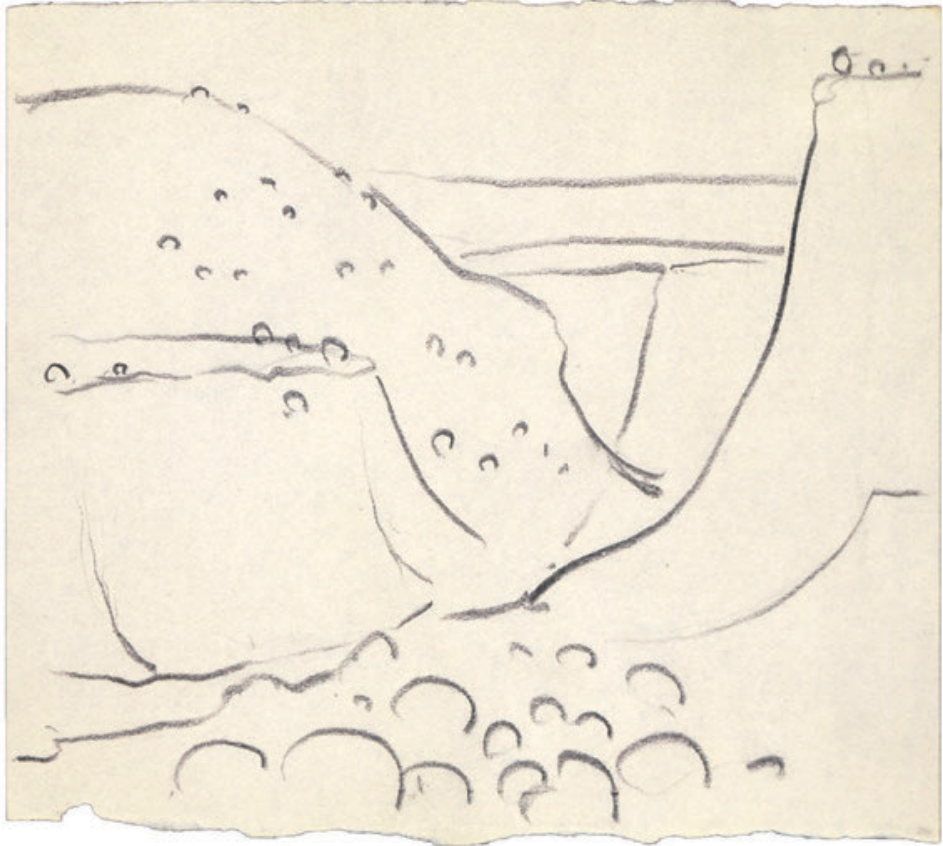


# PALO DURO LOVE LETTERS



Georgia O'Keeffe's  
paintings captured  
the Panhandle;  
her wistful writings  
brought it to life

BY CHRIS BURROWS



Ammy Von Lintel's art history students need little guidance when she shows them *Light Coming on the Plains No. III*. The abstract painting consists only of an elliptical shape formed by darkening cool hues and bisected by a horizontal line of paper.

The West Texas A&M University students aren't fine arts majors, but they recognize that image.

"I'm like 'What is this? You guys know what this is,'" Von Lintel says of the 1917 watercolor by Georgia O'Keeffe. "The students know what a sunset and a sunrise look like here, and you put up an O'Keeffe that's totally abstract. They're like, 'Oh yeah, she got it, and I get it.'"

O'Keeffe got it—the stunning way the sun breaks the horizon

on the Staked Plains of the Texas Panhandle—because she lived it.

One hundred years ago, O'Keeffe taught art on the same campus—years before her oil paintings would earn her the title Mother of American Modernism. O'Keeffe's Texas landscapes hang in galleries nationwide, but only recently has her dazzling prose—preserved in dozens of letters and studied by scholars—allowed the artist herself to convey the feelings that colored the paintings and painter. Her words show a stunning well of creativity within a young woman who was figuring out life—and how to stay upright in the craggy paths of Palo Duro Canyon.

O'Keeffe spent only a few years in Texas, but it had a hold on her.

"There is something wonderful about the bigness and the loneliness and the windiness of it all," O'Keeffe wrote to a friend. "I like it so much that I wonder if it's true—The country is almost all sky—and such wonderful sky—and the wind blows—blows hard—and the sun is hot—the glare almost blinding—but I don't care—I like it," she wrote another.

**Clockwise from opposite: Georgia O'Keeffe's *Light Coming on the Plains No. III*. O'Keeffe, center, among friends in Texas; she crisscrossed the Panhandle by car, wagon, foot and train. One of her drawings of Palo Duro Canyon.**

DRAWING: GEORGIA O'KEEFFE. UNTITLED (PALO DURO CANYON). 1916-1917. GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 3 7/8 X 5 INCHES. GEORGIA O'KEEFFE FOUNDATION. © GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM. [2006.5.1]



### ‘Kick Your Heels in the Air’

Many decades before she would be hailed as “the undisputed doyenne of American painting” by *The New York Times*, O’Keeffe needed a job. That’s what brought her to Texas from Virginia in 1912, when the 24-year-old artist took a job teaching art in the Amarillo public school system. She had never been to Texas, knew no one when she arrived alone and had never taught.

She took to the place and the work. “Pretty soon, I got so interested in teaching I wondered why I should be paid for it,” O’Keeffe said in a 1974 interview.

In 1914, she relocated to New York City and expressed jubilation in 1916 when she was offered the job as head of the art department at what was then West Texas State Normal College, in Canyon, south of Amarillo. The Wisconsin native who had studied in Chicago and Virginia and taught in South Carolina was headed back to the Panhandle.

“Kick your heels in the air!” she wrote to a friend. “I’ve elected to go to Texas.”



**Above: Friends in New York City supplied O’Keeffe with books and prints of textiles and pottery for her Canyon classroom. Left: Her 1917 yearbook photo.**

Texas Panhandle and had never studied O’Keeffe. “I think the thing that also led me to study her is this strange connection of being in the department that is hers,” Von

Lintel says. “It takes some bravery to move into the middle of nowhere and fall in love with it, and I think she did.”

O’Keeffe is still present in the Panhandle. The Amarillo Museum of Art and the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum display her works.

“Canyon is very aware of its history with Georgia O’Keeffe,” says Carol Lovelady, PPHM director. “It’s a tremendous point of pride for the museum and for Canyon.”

The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, near where the artist spent her later years, houses many of her works, but her letters are kept at Yale University.

The trove is mostly correspondence between O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, the New York City photographer whom she married in 1924. The letters were unsealed in 2006. In them, “She talks about abstraction, about how her mind works and about how she makes a piece,” Von Lintel says. “We learn about her technique, we learn about her thought process, her frustrations of like, ‘I’m seeing this form, but I can’t get it right.’”

The dozens of letters recorded life among the vestiges of the Old West: Texans coming to terms with a world

**Red Landscape is on display at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.**

### ‘Big Quiet Moonlight’

A decade ago, Von Lintel needed a job. When West Texas A&M University offered her a position in O’Keeffe’s former department, the Kansas City native, who studied in California, moved her family to Amarillo. She had never lived in the

PHOTOS: COURTESY PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL MUSEUM. PAINTING: GEORGIA O’KEEFFE. RED LANDSCAPE, 1916-1917. OIL ON BOARD. COURTESY PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL MUSEUM.

“What she liked here were people that she felt like had a lot of red in their blood,” Von Lintel says.  
“Red-blooded, vibrant people who go outside, who stand in the light and live their lives.”



O’Keeffe explored the canyon with fervor, writing of it in many letters.



at war and life as a 20-something who spent her free time not just painting on front porches but also shooting rifles, riding in cars with boys and walking for miles on end.

“It’s a wonderful night—still and warm and moonlight—big quiet moonlight—As I walked home alone in it—I was tired,” she wrote Stieglitz. “... I think the best way I can tell it to you is—that last night I loved the starlight—the dark—the wind and the miles and miles of the thin strip of dark that is land.”

### ‘So Big and Impossible’

Von Lintel began studying the letters in 2011, using them to assemble a timeline of O’Keeffe’s time in Texas. That work culminated in her book, *Georgia O’Keeffe’s Wartime Texas Letters*, published in March. The professor sought to empower the artist to tell her own story.

“I wanted her to just kind of stand on her own because when she was out here, she was on her own,” Von Lintel says.

The letters trace the feelings that shaped O’Keeffe’s early paintings, some of which feature 800-foot-deep Palo Duro Canyon—what she called “a curious slit in the plains.”

O’Keeffe explored the canyon with fervor, writing of it in many letters: “Yesterday was sunny and fine and I went to the Canyon again—about twenty miles east—climbed and scrambled about till I was ... out of breath many times over—

**Hikers in Palo Duro in the 1910s.**

and felt very little—such a tiny little part of what I could see had worn me out—Yes—I was very small and very puny and helpless—and all around was so big and impossible.”

Those “big and impossible” feelings are apparent in O’Keeffe’s 32 canyon works—many of which include imposing forms and dark colors, including deep reds. And while the iron-rich walls of the place do bear a reddish tinge, O’Keeffe’s feelings bore the rest.

“What she liked here were people that she felt like had a lot of red in their blood,” Von Lintel says. “Red-blooded, vibrant people who go outside, who stand in the light and live their lives.”

### ‘Terrifically Alive’

I n April 1917, O’Keeffe opened her first solo show, in New York. She also sold her first piece, a charcoal drawing of a Panhandle train, which she described in a letter: “A train was coming way off—just a light with a trail of smoke—white—I walked toward it—The sun and the train got to me at the same time—It’s great to see that terrifically alive black thing coming at you in the big frosty stillness.”

Von Lintel hopes her students, through O’Keeffe, can see the beauty right in front of them.

“One of the things I always do is connect whatever I’m teaching to the local area because students should learn to look around themselves and see art and beauty here,” she says. “It’s not like we’re in the middle of nowhere.”

Chris Burrows is a TEC senior communications specialist.

#### WEB EXTRAS

► Read online how a co-op spread Palo Duro Canyon’s beauty.



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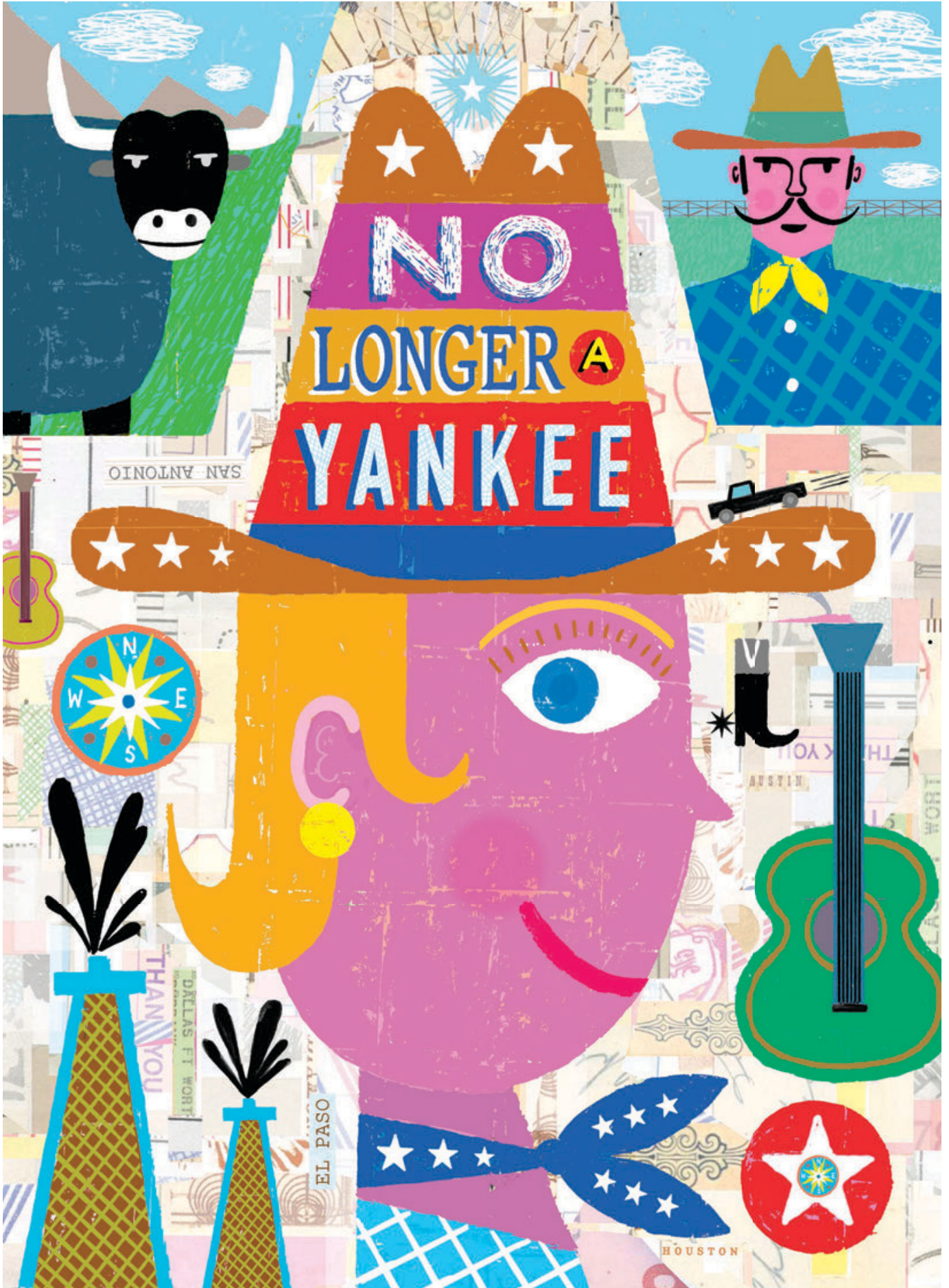
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**I WAS BORN IN MICHIGAN** but moved to Texas 50 years ago. I'm 56 now, which means I've spent 90% of my life as a resident of the Lone Star State. Until recently, I have not thought of myself as a Texan. I came from "up north."

In Ann Arbor, my family ate dinner, not supper. We sipped pop, not soda. We nibbled PEE-cons instead of pe-CONS—and never baked them into pies. And we never, ever blessed anybody's heart.

We moved to Texas in 1969, when my dad, an aeronautical engineer, transferred to Austin. In my 5-year-old mind's eye, I was moving to the land of tumbleweeds where people rode horses, wore cowboy hats and lived in a forest of prickly cactus. All that sounded exciting, but when I moved into a tract house in an Austin neighborhood, I still had to walk to school, and not once did I see a tumbleweed.

I've spent most of the past five decades thinking of myself as a misplaced Midwesterner. Texans are big, bold and, I used to think, a tad obnoxious when it came to state pride. Now I've changed my mind.

Texans are a proud lot, always noting how many generations of their family have lived on Texas soil. A few years back, a blog from *The New York Times* published a report noting population trends across the United States. The article said 61% of the people who lived in Texas in 2014 were born here, the highest retention rate of any state. That percentage had dropped just six points since 1900, when 67% of the state's residents were born within its borders.

I asked some of my most Texan friends their opinions about my Texanness, noting that I'd been living on Texas soil for half a century. Steven Fulton, a 39-year-old native and ranch manager of Selah Bamberger Ranch Preserve near Johnson City, was skeptical. "I don't know. There's a lot of development that happens in those first five years," he said. "Are you driving a truck yet?"

My personal vehicle is a bicycle, with a Fiat Spyder convertible as backup, but my husband drives a Ford F-150. And while out adventuring in his truck, I've taken a baseball-sized rock through the windshield and collided with a white-tailed deer, which all seem pretty Texan.

Next I phoned West Hansen, a 57-year-old fourth-generation Texan born in Pasadena. One of his great-grandfathers is buried in the Texas State Cemetery; another was the Dutch consul to Texas. Hansen stops for ribs on his weekly commute from Austin to Port Arthur and paddles rivers with a group of guys called the Cowboys.

When I asked him if I had to be born on Texas soil to qualify as Texan, he pointed out that if that was true, Stephen F. Austin, the Father of Texas, couldn't claim Texas heritage. Austin was born in Virginia, spent just 15 years in Texas before dying of pneumonia

in 1836 and still has a city named for him plus a 76-foot statue of himself outside Angleton.

"It's kind of like what it takes to be an Australian," Hansen went on, fleshing out his only-a-true-Texan-would-think-of-it reasoning. "There's a certain attitude that has to do with being the ultimate C student. We're probably not welcome in most polite atmospheres, and we have no qualms about that. We tend to make our own way where it's needed."

So, I'm not native, but I've been here longer than someone half my age who was born over Texas caliche. I'm more Texan than them, aren't I?

Hansen, probably wiping a dollop of cream gravy off a chicken-fried steak from the other end of the phone line, hesitated. "You don't sound like one—you have a distinct accent," he said, in a slow drawl. But Texans are brash, bold, independent and paradoxically,

he said, rely upon one another. They aren't concerned with the opinions of people outside their state but do care about their parents' opinions.

"I'd say you are," he finally conceded.

Another native Texan, Jason Jones, who lives part-time in Terlingua, assured me I qualify.

"I think it's more of a state of mind. If you've been here for a while and you feel Texan, then you're Texan," he said. "It's kind of a mindset of vastness and diversity."

I know that March 2 is Texas Independence Day. I like country music—especially James Hand. I've attended chicken poop bingo night at a local bar and even buy jars of pickled okra. I've petted a longhorn, sat in a field of bluebonnets, held a horned toad, watched the raging power of a flash flood and two-stepped across a creaky, wooden floor in a genuine Hill Country dance hall. I've paddled the Pecos and Devils rivers, gone teal hunting with the former head of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and own not just one but two cowboy hats, which I actually wear with regularity. I know how to ride a horse, can load a powerboat onto a trailer and make a mean margarita.

My best friend lives in the country with 15 horses and three dogs (bless her heart). Her boyfriend, a horse trainer with a handlebar mustache, makes chili (no beans) and frijoles a la charra from a 1949 cookbook called *A Taste of Texas*.

No, I wasn't born in Texas. I'll never be a native Texan. But after half a century in this amazing state, I'm officially claiming it as my own.

**Pam LeBlanc** is a former staff writer at the *Austin American-Statesman*. She has finally embraced what she calls her "Texanixity" and admits a soft spot for chicken-fried steak, cowboy hats and horses.

**AFTER HALF A CENTURY HERE, I'M CALLING MYSELF A TEXAN**

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Monique Celedon, above, a Realtor and community volunteer, started a busy food pantry in Manor that operates out of St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church. It gives out hot meals and distributes large boxes of food to those in need. **PAGE 21**  
*Ralph Barrera photo*



Kevin Deramus, above, director of Washington County's Emergency Medical Service, arranged for access to a helicopter for emergency medical transport and scrambled to find personal protective equipment for his co-workers. **PAGE 21.** *Sarah Beal photo*

# EVERYDAY HEROES

There are too many to count. People across the Bluebonnet region have risen to the challenge of COVID-19 with supplies, support, food and love. Here are just a few.

**THEY ARE OUR NEIGHBORS**, family, friends and co-workers. The most essential of workers across Central Texas includes the doctors, nurses and medical staffers; the food pantry workers and donors; and the emergency first responders.

But there are others: the teacher working from behind a computer instead of in front of a classroom to keep students learning, the dressmaker who started mass-producing masks for the community, and the small distillery that switched from making bourbon to pumping out hand sanitizer.

Their actions don't make the evening news. They aren't walking away wealthy from their efforts, and they aren't seeking medals. They are just good people who want to help others.

The 10 people profiled here are a sample of the innumerable Bluebonnet-area residents choosing to help their communities. They may not consider themselves heroes, but together their efforts are heroic.

Read more about them on the following pages.

— **Melissa Segrest**



Traci Campbell, left, is director of dining for Chartwells K12, which provides food service for the Giddings school district. The district began handing out hundreds of meal bags to students after schools closed. **PAGE 20C.**  
*Ralph Barrera photo*

Robert Gillespie, below, an emergency department nurse at Ascension Seton Bastrop hospital, wears a Spider-Man cap that reflects his personality and love of Marvel comics. **PAGE 20D.**  
*Sarah Beal photo*



Dr. Karen Smith, left, is a family medicine doctor at Baylor Scott & White Clinic in Manor. She has gone beyond her medical practice to help members of the community in other ways. **PAGE 20A.**  
*Ralph Barrera photo*

**Want to highlight another person who has made a difference during the COVID-19 crisis? Email [lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop).**

# CALDWELL COUNTY CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES

LOCKHART-BASED FOOD PANTRY FEEDS MORE THAN EVER BEFORE

**THE CALDWELL COUNTY** Christian Ministries food pantry in Lockhart served the most families in its history in March after the coronavirus hit, said Meredith Jakovich, executive director of the nonprofit.

In “normal” hard times, the pantry — affiliated with the Central Texas Food Bank — assists 750 families a month. As the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns took effect, new people pulled in to the pantry’s parking lot on the west side of town. Jakovich, shown at right, instituted a drive-through distribution system and put out a call for extra volunteers. By the end of March, the pantry was serving 1,100 families. She is also a Bluebonnet member.

“I’m overwhelmed by the generosity of this community,” Jakovich said. “It’s been phenomenal, with donations, with volunteering, with people bringing canned food — organizations that are saying, ‘What can we do to help?’ and businesses asking what they can do, folks writing checks. I’m not surprised by it, but I’m overwhelmed at the amount. The community has really shown up to help those who need it.”

— Clayton Stromberger

Ralph Barrera photo



Sarah Beal photo





## DR. KAREN SMITH

MANOR PHYSICIAN TREATS PATIENTS,  
HELPS HUNGRY AND ELDERLY

**DR. KAREN SMITH** loves practicing family medicine with Baylor Scott & White Clinic in Manor, where she draws on her teaching skills, a desire to help the underserved and her Christian faith.

“My friends tell me I practice medicine like it’s education,” said Smith, a bilingual teacher for 12 years before medical school. “I like empowering patients with information.”

Not only does she treat COVID-19 patients and others at the Manor clinic — and virtually through telemedicine — she works with community groups that provide food for those in need and call to check on people who are older and homebound. She is also a Bluebonnet member.

Smith, shown at right, wears many hats. Teacher of Dell Medical School students. Co-founder of the Manor Health Alliance, which in October opened a free clinic that sees patients periodically. Adviser to Manor Mayor Larry Wallace Jr.’s task force on COVID-19. Ordained minister. International medical mission volunteer. “I want to build things that outlive me,” said Smith, who has five grown children.

— Mary Ann Roser

Ralph Barrera photo



## BONE SPIRITS

SMITHVILLE DISTILLERY CONVERTS BOURBON  
TO SOUGHT-AFTER SANITIZER

**BONE SPIRITS DISTILLERY** in Smithville responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of essential supplies that followed by turning spirits into a potentially lifesaving liquid.

Instead of selling 2,500 gallons of bourbon aging in barrels to wholesalers, the 10-year-old company converted that alcohol into sought-after hand sanitizer.

“We initially gave away 1,000 gallons to city and county first responders, EMS and area hospitals,” said Anthony Chiappetta, vice president of engineering at Bone Spirits. The first batch was made on March 23.

Now the company sells sanitizer to the public.

Bourbon used for the sanitizer had been aging from three months to two years. It was expected to age four or more years at the distillery.

“We initially gave away 1,000 gallons to city and county first responders, EMS and area hospitals.”

— Anthony Chiappetta,  
**BONE SPIRITS VICE PRESIDENT OF ENGINEERING**

“First, we put our bourbon back in our pot stills to extract the tannins that come from the oak barrels. Then we used our column stills to bring the alcohol content up from 120 proof to 190 proof and blended it down with water,” said Chiappetta, shown at left.

They added hard-to-track-down hydrogen peroxide, glycerin and propylene glycol.

Bone Spirits joined more than 800 distilleries around the country that shifted gears to fight the virus.

— Ed Crowell

Ralph Barrera photo



## CULINARY COWGIRLS

LOCKHART SQUARE STORE PROVIDES ESSENTIAL ITEMS

**AS THE PANDEMIC** hit, longtime friends and foodies Alana Chandler and Alexandra Worthington, creators of the award-winning Culinary Cowgirls queso and owners of the cozy Culinary Room store on the square in Lockhart, realized they were in a unique position to help their community.

The store was deemed an essential business because of its small-batch, locally made grocery items. The two women also have a factory kitchen license for their queso, which gave them access to a supply chain of sanitizing wipes, disinfectant, medical-grade gloves and masks — items suddenly impossible to find anywhere else. Soon Lockhart residents were lining up outside the store each morning as Chandler and Worthington, along with their dedicated staff, worked tirelessly to sell these virus-stopping items at cost.

“We supplied to every doctor’s office in Lockhart, the clinics, the police, the bank, even the jail,” said Chandler, shown above with her Pomeranian, Queso, unofficial store greeter. Customers began “paying it forward,” donating funds to ensure that neighbors in need could keep their families safe.

“We’ve seen the best in people through all this,” Chandler said. “And that’s something unique to see when you feel like the world’s falling apart because it gives you hope.”

— Clayton Stromberger

Ralph Barrera photo



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## GIDDINGS ISD FOOD WORKERS

WHEN SCHOOLS SHUT DOWN, THEY KEPT FEEDING STUDENTS

**IN GIDDINGS**, the line of vehicles on East Industry Street started forming before 9 a.m. every Tuesday. Drivers outside Giddings Elementary School are handed tall, white plastic bags full of meals.

All students could get a five-day supply of breakfasts and lunches. The line had been growing since the free and open-to-all meal service began March 23 after Texas shut down schools because of COVID-19.

By May 5, 325 students had received food bags — a total of 3,125 meals. The food is prepared and distributed by 14 Giddings school district workers or a food service contractor, Chartwells K12.

It's a challenge unlike anything Traci Campbell has faced. She is Chartwells K12's director of dining for the school district and a Bluebonnet member. In March, she applied to the Texas Department of Agriculture for funds from the Seamless Summer feeding program that usually begins when school ends in late May and continues through the summer.

At the pickup site, bags of food were handed out at one stop and homework from teachers at another stop. Lunches were hamburgers or chicken sandwiches, fish sticks or hot dogs, vegetables and salads. Breakfasts were cereal or pancakes with fruit or juice and milk. Money for the program was scheduled to run out June 30, which would put an end to Tuesday meal pickups in Giddings. In May, Campbell, below, was unsure if other funds could be found.

— Ed Crowell



'I would like things to go back to the way they were, but I know the new normal is this.'

— Daniela Vlad,  
DESIGN STUDIO OWNER



Ralph Barrera photo

## DANIELA VLAD

BASTROP DESIGNER TURNS OUT MASKS IN BULK

**ONE LATE FEBRUARY** night, dressmaker-designer Daniela Vlad woke to repeated “dinging” notifications on her phone. Her life hasn't been the same since.

Vlad, above, opened her Design Studio dress shop in Bastrop on Feb. 1. She also sold masks online to allergy sufferers and cold-weather joggers. Suddenly, COVID-19 arrived, and everyone wanted a mask. Ding!

Immediately, Vlad, who is a Bluebonnet member, switched to sewing only masks. Thousands of them. She hired two employees — her mom is the fabric cutter — and she was logging 60 to 70 hours a week in May. In the midst of this, she got married.

Vlad estimates that as of mid-May, they had made 5,000 masks for workers in local government, public safety, utilities and more. She donated 1,000 to nursing homes, a clinic and other spots. “We can't make them fast enough.” She's also making protective medical gowns.

“I love to sew,” Vlad said, “but it's been stressful. Sometimes, I go home and cry. I would like things to go back to the way they were, but I know the new normal is this.”

— Mary Ann Roser

## ROBERT GILLESPIE

ER NURSE, ASCENSION SETON BASTROP HOSPITAL

**AFTER 26 YEARS** as an emergency room nurse, Robert Gillespie did not expect to be on the front lines of a pandemic. Now he sees suspected COVID-19 cases every day at the small hospital where he is an ER nurse and shift supervisor. The hospital opened in January 2020.

It was scary at first, said Gillespie. He works full time at the hospital and part time at a freestanding emergency department with his wife, who is also a nurse. They are vigilant about protecting their son, now home from college, to keep him safe from infection.

Support from the community and a staff that's "like a family" keep Gillespie motivated. "We bounce stuff off of each other all day."

Not all of it is heavy. Gillespie, inset above, sometimes wears colorful scrub caps or masks to reflect his personality. Here his Spider-Man cap shows his love of Marvel comics. He doesn't see himself as a superhero. "I love taking care of people," he said. "It's my job."

He's exactly where he wants to be.



— Mary Ann Roser

Ralph Barrera photo



## LESLIE VILLERE

BREHAM ISD SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR

**AFTER TEXAS CLOSED** public schools in March because of the coronavirus pandemic, a Brenham child with a visual impairment was desperate to "see" her teacher.

She put her face on an iPad at home. The teacher saw only an eyeball. "Don't get so close, honey," the teacher said. "Just listen."

As special education teachers say: Every student can learn, just not always on the same day or in the same way.

The shutdown tested that wisdom. Children in wheelchairs, with hearing and vision impairments and with intellectual and developmental disabilities all had to be taught remotely, just like all other students. But "we can't do it virtually" for all students with disabilities, said Leslie Villere, special education director for the Brenham school district. Lessons were modified or shortened.

Villere, at right, had to creatively think of ways to teach more than 700 special education students in their homes at a time when teachers were home, too. Teachers stuffed crayons, craft projects and books into envelopes to mail to students.

Special education teachers and staff "call, video chat or text with parents and caregivers to help them through academic activities that we have provided for students," she said. "Parents are very overwhelmed."

"I work with personnel who go above and beyond to ensure that our kids are safe and happy and making as much academic progress as we can for them."

Special education is evolving with the pandemic. But, Villere said, "we have no idea what August is going to bring."

— Denise Gamino

Sarah Beal photo





## MONIQUE CELEDON

STARTED NEW MANOR DISASTER RELIEF FOOD BANK

**MONIQUE CELEDON** grew up watching her parents volunteer for so many time-consuming community causes “I swore I’d never do that.”

“But here I am,” she said. “Serving is definitely in my nature.”

The longtime Realtor from Manor — mother of five, grandmother of three and school board vice president — created a large food bank to prevent any of the 40,000 residents of the Manor area from going hungry during the pandemic.

She started with what she thought was a small project: asking volunteers to deliver groceries to older people. Word got out, and food poured in. “Within two days, we needed a building,” said Celedon, shown above with some of her team. Soon, Travis County and the Central Texas Food Bank asked if she could host a mobile food distribution center for larger amounts of food and meals.

The new Manor disaster relief food bank operates in the sanctuary of St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Manor, with tables piled with food. Travis County brings lunches three days a week, and the Central Texas Food Bank brings 350 boxes of food twice a month for distribution.

Manor Mayor Larry Wallace Jr. said Celedon “continuously leads this effort like a full-time job, making her the epitome of a community volunteer, advocate and leader.” Celedon is a Bluebonnet member.

“People ask me, ‘How in the world did you do it?’” Celedon said. “I tell people all the time: build lifelong relationships so when something like this happens and others need you, you’re able to do something because people trust you.”

— Denise Gamino

## KEVIN DERAMUS

WASHINGTON COUNTY’S EMS DIRECTOR

**JUST WEEKS AFTER** the coronavirus hit Texas, Washington County put into service a shiny orange-and-white medical helicopter to assist the county’s Emergency Medical Service. Kevin Deramus, director of EMS, had worked for two years to acquire the helicopter but never imagined it would arrive amid a pandemic.

The refurbished Airbus EC145 was used for 14 transports to hospitals in its first two weeks at Brenham Municipal Airport. Those trips weren’t for people known to have COVID-19, but Deramus anticipates



that will happen. By mid-May, his department’s six ambulances, six squad SUVs and 50 paramedics had transported 140 COVID-19 patients, some requiring multiple hospital trips.

California-based REACH Air Medical Services owns, pilots and maintains the helicopter. “It doesn’t cost us anything,” Deramus said of the lease arrangement that Washington County Commissioners approved last fall. “But the company gets all the revenue from transport charges.” Deramus and the EMS facility both get electricity from Bluebonnet.

Before the helicopter arrived on May 1, Deramus, inset above, had another quest. His staff needed personal protective equipment — the gloves, gowns, goggles and masks that keep first responders safe.

“What once lasted us a month was now being used up in a week,” he said. With an assist from state Sen. Lois Kolkhorst of Brenham, Deramus and his staff got a sufficient supply of PPE.

At times, EMS crews must take patients to hospitals in College Station, Temple and Houston. The helicopter can reach College Station in 12 minutes. It takes 50 minutes to drive. Each of those precious minutes can save lives.

— Ed Crowell

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# Annual Meeting held without public attendance

The coronavirus threat led to a big change for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting on Tuesday, May 12. Federal and state public health officials' guidelines said large public gatherings were potentially dangerous to the health of those attending. The cooperative's Board of Directors made the decision that the meeting would take place, but without public attendance.

"Our Annual Meeting is our most important event each year," said Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet's Board chairman. "It certainly was a different experience this year. We missed visiting with members, seeing old friends and making new ones."

During the Annual Meeting, four incumbent directors were unopposed in their respective races and thus re-elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws. They were Roderick Emanuel, District 3, Bastrop County; Russell Jurk, District 4, Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; Byron Balke, District 6, Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties; and Robert Mikeska, District 7, Washington County. Emanuel, first elected in 2011, is vice-chairman of the Board. Jurk, who was also first elected in 2011, chairs the Board's audit and finance committee. Balke is assistant secretary-treasurer and has been on the Board since 2000. Mikeska is secretary-treasurer and has been on the Board since 2008.

Though the public was unable to attend this year's Annual Meeting, 6,487 Bluebonnet members submitted their proxy forms in advance and were thus represented and established a quorum for the meeting.

"It was important to hold our Annual Meeting in accordance with our bylaws and to re-elect the four incumbent directors so the Board could continue representing our members during this challenging period," said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet's general manager. "The prohibition against large meetings for public health reasons demonstrated the importance of our members' ability to



Cynthia Counts, a Bluebonnet member in Austin County, won a 2011 Ford F-150 retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. Counts was selected at random among all members who submitted a proxy form in advance of the Annual Meeting. Sarah Beal photo

'The prohibition against large meetings for public health reasons demonstrated the importance of our members' ability to participate by proxy.'

— Matt Bentke,  
GENERAL MANAGER

participate by proxy."

There was no new business on the meeting's agenda, but had there been, those items would have been voted on with members' proxy forms.

In other business during the Annual Meeting, Board Secretary-Treasurer Mikeska certified the Annual Meeting's legal notice and that a quorum was represented, and the cooperative's Board of Directors approved the minutes from last year's meeting. Flencher provided the chairman's report and Bentke provided his general manager's report, both of which included financial and operational highlights.

"Bluebonnet's directors and employees are proud of the way we have supported our communities and helped our members during this difficult time," Bentke said. "That included returning \$4.2 million in capital credits in May, providing financial assistance to nonprofit organizations that help Bluebonnet's members pay their electric bills, and donating much-needed money to area food banks that provide meals to families across



Facing no opposition, four Bluebonnet Board members were re-elected by general consent: clockwise from top left, Roderick Emanuel, representing Bastrop County; Russell Jurk, representing Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; Robert Mikeska, representing Washington County; and Byron Balke, representing Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties.

our service area."

Bluebonnet members who submitted proxy forms were entered into drawings for prizes, including a 2011 Ford F-150 that had been retired from Bluebonnet's fleet, two Cub Cadet riding mowers and a Yeti cooler. Prizes were drawn Wednesday, May 13. Prizes were paid for through donations from Bluebonnet vendors. ■



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The Industry Volunteer Fire Department will buy new protective gear for firefighters and hydraulic rescue tools that would extract crash victims. Fire Chief Ronnie Geistmann, above, showcases a portable air supply pack. *Photo courtesy Industry VFD*

## Bluebonnet, LCRA grants support area projects that serve community



'The low runoff area is perfect to capture water from rains, but we have never had enough funds to complete the project,' said David Williams, Crowe's Nest Farm executive director. 'Until now, the area was just a grassy bowl that never held water. Thanks to this grant, we can re-dig, seal and complete the pond.' *Photo courtesy David Williams*

The Lower Colorado River Authority and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative provided several grants in Bluebonnet's service area recently. The grants are part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program to give back to the communities it serves. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and a partner in the grant program. Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted July 1-31. More information is available at [lcra.org/cdpp](http://lcra.org/cdpp).

A \$30,000 grant will help the Industry Volunteer Fire Department purchase two much-needed pieces of equipment: new and improved hydraulic rescue tools to extract crash victims from vehicles and new protective gear for firefighters.

The grant will be paired with matching funds of \$12,874 from the Industry VFD, which serves approximately 2,000 people in northwest Austin County. The department's 54.5-square-mile service area includes Industry, a farming community situated about halfway between Austin and Houston.

A \$24,500 grant will help Crowe's Nest Farm construct a 1-acre pond to collect water and provide a habitat for migrating waterfowl. The grant, along with \$10,500 in matching funds, will help build the water capture pond, which also will provide a wetlands habitat educational exhibit for the tens of thousands of school children who visit the farm annually. ■



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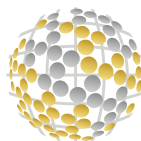
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# A Town Tormented

The 1927 Rocksprings tornado ranks among the state's deadliest

BY MELISSA GASKILL

ON APRIL 12, 1927, A TORNADO TORE through the Edwards County town of Rocksprings, killing 74 people and injuring more than 200. Among Texas tornadoes, it ranks as the third deadliest, behind one that struck Waco on May 11, 1953, killing 114 and injuring 597, and one that hit Goliad on May 18, 1902, also killing 114 and injuring 250.

The damage scale for twisters goes from EF0 to EF5, with EF5s inflicting the most damage. Since 1950, when official record keeping began, the National Weather Service has determined that 59 tornadoes qualify as EF5, six of them in Texas: Jarrell, May 27, 1997; Brownwood, April 19, 1976; Valley Mills, May 6, 1973; Lubbock, May 11, 1970; Wichita Falls, April 3, 1964; and the 1953 Waco twister.

Rocksprings, 100 miles west of San Antonio, became the seat of Edwards County in 1891, complete with a courthouse. Townspeople built a public school in 1893, and by 1914, the town had 500 residents, a hotel, saloons, a general store and bank. A high school opened in 1916.

On that afternoon in 1927, enormous black clouds gathered, producing large hail and winds that took out the power. The tornado touched down 3 miles to the northwest and moved southeast, growing to almost a mile wide as it crossed Rocksprings. It continued southeastward for at least 35 miles and may have traveled as far as 65 miles.

The second floor of the high school, where a music recital had been planned



**Only eight buildings remained after the milewide tornado ripped through Rocksprings.**

town would have been in the school auditorium,” says Andrew Barnebey, president of the Devil’s Sinkhole Society in Rocksprings. Its visitor center has a small display on the tornado. “Only eight buildings in town were not damaged.” The twister destroyed all the town’s churches, damaged the courthouse (but not the jail) and toppled the water tower. The town of Junction, 47 miles northeast, gave Rocksprings a new one, Barnebey adds.

“The telephone operator had to go out of town to find a live telephone line to tell the rest of the world about it,” he says. “People came from throughout the surrounding countryside and even Mexico to help. The first rescuers were soldiers on horseback from Fort Clark.”

The town held a commemorative ceremony on the event’s 90th anniversary, in 2017. Edwards County Historical Commission chair Kari Cloudt says research for the event turned up many heartbreaking stories, including entire families lost. Others show the goodness in people, she

for that evening, was gone.

“If it had happened an hour earlier, the whole

adds, such as the 1,000 doses of tetanus vaccine sent by what is now Bristol-Myers Squibb to San Antonio’s Kelly Field, whose pilots airdropped them into town.

The twister damaged the original, wooden circa-1916 Rocksprings Hotel, but a concrete wing added in 1926 served as a temporary hospital for those not seriously injured, says Debra Wolcott, current owner. Those with serious injuries were taken to hospitals in San Antonio via train.

The town quickly replaced the school with a larger one and rebuilt churches and the hotel. The 2010 census counted 1,182 residents. Visitors know Rocksprings as the Angora goat capital of the world and for the nearby Devil’s Sinkhole State Natural Area, famous for a seasonal population of 3 million Mexican free-tailed bats.

But locals can’t escape memories of 1927.

“A 14-year-old girl taking a bath when the tornado hit flew about 2 miles in the bathtub and landed in a debris field. There is still debris there,” Cloudt says. “A lot of people who are still here lost family members. It must have been just a hideous storm.”

Read more about **Melissa Gaskill’s** work at [melissagaskill.blogspot.com](http://melissagaskill.blogspot.com).

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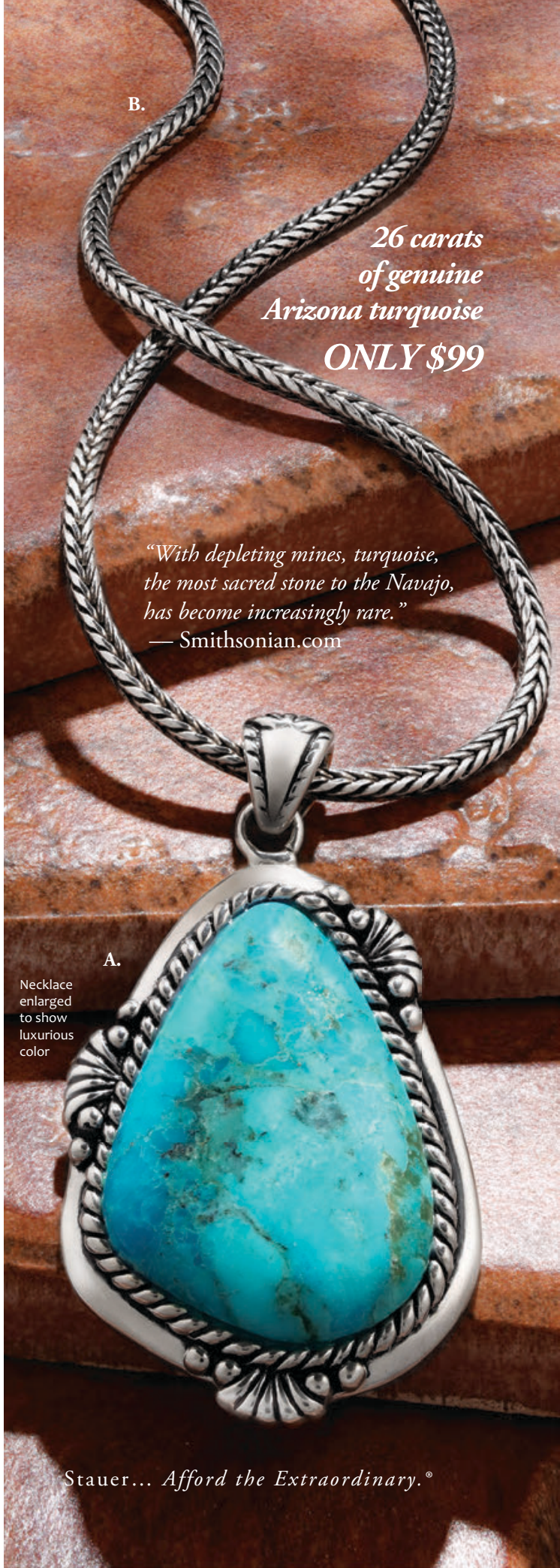
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## Hot Off the Grill

WE'RE LUCKY IN TEXAS THAT GRILLING season often lasts all year long. I take advantage by branching out from hamburgers and hot dogs to experiment with other flavors on the grill, which resulted in this recipe.

For a moist burger, you'll need chicken breast and fattier chicken thigh meat. Take care not to press the patties onto the grill, which will make the juices run out.

Make the optional slaw in advance to let the flavors meld while you prepare the burgers. Brown rice vinegar and sesame oil can be found in the Asian section of your grocery store. If you can't find Thai basil, regular basil will do.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

### Thai Peanut Chicken Burgers

#### SLAW

- ½ cup shredded red cabbage
- ½ cup shredded carrots
- ¼ cup radish matchsticks
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
- 1–2 teaspoons chopped fresh mint
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 2 teaspoons brown rice vinegar

#### BURGERS

- ½ pound ground chicken breast
- ½ pound ground chicken thigh
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Thai basil
- 2 whole wheat hamburger buns

#### SAUCE

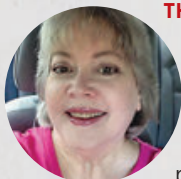
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1½ teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon brown rice vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- Crushed red chile flakes, to taste
- Chopped peanuts

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



# Recipes

## Hot Off the Grill



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

STEPHANIE BALDOCK | WOOD COUNTY EC

Moist and flavorful, this dish is a hit for those who love jalapeño poppers. The marinade ensures the chicken stays juicy on the grill, and its sweet tang provides a nice contrast to the bacon and heat of the pepper. When grilling, make sure to start with the side that has the loose bacon ends, as it will help adhere the bacon to the chicken.

### Devil Chicken

- ¾ cup teriyaki sauce
- ¾ cup Italian salad dressing
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- 12-14 boneless, skinless chicken tenders
- 12-14 slices jalapeño pepper
- 12-14 slices bacon

1. Whisk together teriyaki sauce, salad dressing and brown sugar until sugar is dissolved.
2. Place chicken tenders in a bowl or 1-quart baking dish. Pour marinade over the chicken and turn chicken to coat

thoroughly. Cover and let marinate in a refrigerator at least 2 hours or overnight.

3. When ready to cook, prepare grill for cooking over a medium flame. Place one slice of jalapeño on top of each tender, then wrap a slice of bacon around the length of the tender.
4. Grill bacon-wrapped chicken tenders 6-7 minutes on each side, until they reach a temperature of 160 degrees and juices run clear when cut into. ▶ Serves 4.



### \$500 Recipe Contest

Does your family favor turkey, ham, beef or another main dish for the holiday table? Tell us what you serve for **The Main Event**. Enter our December contest by **July 10**. Featured recipes will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

ENTER ONLINE at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests); MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

1. **SLAW:** In a bowl, mix together all ingredients. Set aside.
2. **BURGERS:** In a large bowl, mix together all ingredients. Form mixture into two patties and set aside.
3. Prepare a grill or stovetop grill pan.
4. Cook patties 5-6 minutes on each side over medium heat, until completely cooked through.
5. **SAUCE:** In another bowl, whisk together peanut butter, soy sauce, honey, rice vinegar, garlic, sesame oil and crushed red chile flakes.
6. Assemble chicken patties, slaw and peanut sauce on buns. Sprinkle on chopped peanuts, add top bun and serve. ▶ Serves 2.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com), where she features a recipe for Lemony Grilled Potato Salad.

### Butter Lover's Steak

JESSICA DEEMER | PEDERNALES EC

This rib-eye recipe gets a boost from a butter rub and a simple finishing sauce. "This is the creation of my 8-year-old son, Mason, who is a huge butter lover," Deemer says. The sauce will thicken as it stands, so make it just before serving. Whisk in additional milk for a thinner sauce.

- 4 rib-eye steaks
- 1 stick (½ cup) butter, softened, divided use
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 ounces cream cheese, cut into small pieces
- ⅓ cup whole milk
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon olive oil

1. Preheat grill to high heat.
2. Using a sharp grilling fork, poke 4-8 holes in each steak to allow butter to be absorbed. Rub both sides of the steaks generously with about half of the butter. Season steaks with salt and pepper on both sides.
3. Slice remaining butter into 4 pieces and set aside.
4. Sear steaks 1 minute on each side, then move to indirect heat and place a piece of butter on each steak. Grill 3-4 minutes per side, then remove from heat and tent steaks with foil to keep warm.



5. To make the sauce, place the cream cheese and milk in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Stir until cream cheese is almost completely melted, then remove from heat and continue to stir until the sauce is smooth and lump-free. Stir in garlic powder, olive oil and salt to taste.
  6. Transfer steaks to a plate and pour the sauce on top, or serve it on the side.
- Serves 4.

## Kielbasa Kebabs

PEGGI TEBBEN | TRI-COUNTY EC

If using wooden skewers, be sure to soak them in water before assembling kebabs to prevent them from catching fire while grilling.

- 4 packages (12 ounces each) kielbasa, cut into bite-size chunks
- 2 cans (20 ounces each) pineapple chunks, ½ cup juice reserved
- 16 ounces whole button mushrooms, cut in half from top through stem
- 3 bell peppers, cut into bite-size chunks
- 2 onions, cut into bite-size chunks

- 1 cup soy sauce
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon California-style garlic seasoning with parsley
- 1 teaspoon Montreal steak seasoning

1. Assemble the kebabs by layering sausage, pineapple, mushroom, bell pepper and onion onto barbecue skewers. Repeat, pushing layers tightly together, until skewers are completely full, beginning and ending with sausage.
2. Place kebabs into a large casserole or other dish that allows them to lie flat.
3. Whisk together reserved pineapple juice, soy sauce and brown sugar until sugar is dissolved. Pour over the kebabs and then turn kebabs to coat.
4. Cover and place in the refrigerator overnight, turning kebabs every so often.
5. When ready to cook, prepare grill for cooking over a medium flame. Brush kebabs with excess marinade from the pan, then sprinkle seasonings on both sides.
6. Grill kebabs over indirect heat 10 minutes per side. ► Makes 30 kebabs.



## Marinade Tips

Marinades are one of the easiest ways to liven up your grilled foods. A few tips:

**INGREDIENTS CAN VARY**, but don't forget salt, which helps the meat absorb even more of the marinade's flavor.

**POKING SMALL HOLES** into your meat before marinating will help it absorb the sauce.

**COMPLETELY COVER MEAT** with the marinade, and let it rest in the refrigerator to prevent food-borne illnesses.

MEGAN MYERS

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# Exploration

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

—T.S. Eliot, poet and literary critic

GRACE FULTZ

**WEB EXTRAS** ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ **LORY VON STADEN**, Heart of Texas EC: “Exploring murals and downtown Brenham.”

▼ **J. REAGAN FERGUSON**, Central Texas EC: “Exploring the Longhorn Caverns State Park in the summertime is a great way to cool off.”



▲ **DENISA MCBEE**, Southwest Texas EC: “While on a visit to our farm, our grandson, Max Dawson, was exploring his granddad’s tractor. He found the perfect spot for a rest.”



▲ **STEVE COYLE**, Pedernales EC: “I captured this image of my friend Paul midway through our five-day kayak trip down the Devils River in West Texas. It was definitely one of the more adventure-filled journeys of my life.”

**AROUND TEXAS** ▶ TCP's monthly list of local events has been suspended due to COVID-19 cancellations. Always call or check an event's website for scheduling details.



◀ **LENORA ISENHOUR**, Pedernales EC: "Cousins Ava Isenhour and Nora Lynn frolic on the beach at Port Aransas."



▲ **JOHNATHAN KANA**, Bluebonnet EC: "The kids were fascinated with the flourishing ecosystem in a pool of water atop Enchanted Rock."



**UPCOMING CONTESTS**

NOVEMBER EXTREMES	DUE JULY 10
DECEMBER ON WHEELS	DUE AUGUST 10
JANUARY DINERS	DUE SEPTEMBER 10

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

▲ **KIM LEATHERWOOD**, United Cooperative Services: Santa Elena Canyon, Big Bend National Park.



▲ **MARVIN MILLER**, Pedernales EC: "Christin Miller has helped her dad explore and survey Texas caves for years."



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**DECEMBER ISSUE**  
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Deadline: August 10

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# Something's Fishy Here

Catfish Plantation in Waxahachie takes you deep-fried to the other side

FOR GENERATIONS, FRIED CATFISH, WITH its faithful sidekicks french fries and hush puppies, has served family reunions and Southern potlucks. Waxahachie's Catfish Plantation provides this country classic but requires visitors to go beyond the normal.

Waxahachie, the Crape Myrtle Capital of Texas, is also known for its dozens of ornate historic homes. I discovered that one of these 19th-century gingerbread houses delivers some of the best catfish in Texas from one of the state's strangest dining rooms.

I knew something was different about the Catfish Plantation when I noticed two cartoon ghosts dancing on the restaurant's logo. Once I stepped inside, I realized the ghost theme continues throughout the building, appearing in framed pictures, salt and pepper shakers, and even the peppermint dish. This would have made sense at Halloween, but my visit was in April. The hostess confirmed my suspicions that by all accounts, the house is haunted. I asked if she believed in ghosts, and she said, "After working here, absolutely."

I took a seat in the parlor to wait for my table and noticed two binders filled with handwritten customer stories about experiences of the paranormal kind. I couldn't resist reading spooky stories ranging from disappearing silverware to unexpected taps on the shoulder. There were even a number of customer photos that, if tilted just right, captured a face in the window.

The house was built in 1895, and since



**Chet was expecting a frying catfish, not a flying catfish.**

it was converted to a restaurant in 1984, otherworldly occurrences have become as common as the catfish. The Landis family purchased this institution more than a decade ago. Shawn Landis, the executive chef and family matriarch, provides background to support customer and staff ghost stories. She recounts tales of the antique crank-style doorbell ringing on its own and the light switches that sit inside a glass case flipping off without warning. Even so, she was quick to assure me that nothing sinister ever happens. "Customers may come for the ghosts, but they come back for the catfish," Landis said.

Before I could dine, I felt obligated to brave the most haunted room in the house: the men's restroom. That room is notorious for shadowy figures appearing in the mirror and for the latch unlocking without help from human hands. I took a deep breath and tried not to look in the mirror as I washed my hands.

The hostess seated me in the front room, where I looked over a menu filled with options including steak and grilled quail. I couldn't pass up the house special Cajun catfish, which features a layer of spice beneath the golden cornmeal crust. It was some of the best catfish I've eaten on the road, which made me wonder why they needed to embrace a gimmick like ghosts in order to fill seats. The food could speak for itself.

These thoughts left me with the uneasy conclusion that the ghost stories were not a marketing ploy but actually were true. I was not going to believe the stories until I had a ghostly experience for myself. With that in mind, I had no choice but to order a piece of homemade bread pudding topped with white chocolate sauce, just to give the ghosts a little longer to haunt me.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video of the ghostly Catfish Plantation in Waxahachie.

COURTESY CHET GARNER

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