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IN THE KITCHEN

RANCHES COME
WITH BUILT-IN POOLS

Texas Coop Power

FOR GVEC MEMBERS

AUGUST 2021

Citizen Scientists

Volunteers help track,
identify and protect the
state's natural resources

**GVEC
ANNUAL
MEETING
RECAP**

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in Education
Through Ag Days



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August 2021



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Opportunities abound for Texans to augment impactful research.

*By Melissa Gaskill
Photos by Julia Robinson*

Easing Life's Baggage

Flush with bags, a college student finds new ways to support foster youths through life transitions.

*By Chris Burrows
Photos by Eric Pohl*

ON THE COVER

Diane Wilson shows nurdles—plastic pellets—she has collected at the Texas coast.
Photo by Julia Robinson

ABOVE

One of the thousands of bags Hunter Beaton has prepared for foster youths.
Photo courtesy NRECA

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Chess Royalty

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS Rio Grande Valley chess team won its third consecutive national championship, defeating Webster University in April for the President's Cup.

Our June 2012 story *The Kings and Queens of Brownsville* told how young students made all the right moves to turn the U.S.'s southernmost border town into a chess powerhouse.



Members of the UTRGV chess team often mentor K-12 students in Brownsville schools.



TCP Contests and More

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\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Soups and Stews

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Bridges

POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

Know anybody as inspired and exceptional as Hunter Beaton, featured on Page 12? Let us know so we can shine the spotlight on them.

August 22

National Tooth Fairy Day

The tooth fairy forks over an average of \$4.70 per visit in the U.S., a recent poll shows. That's a far cry from the nickel recommended more than a century ago.

The *Chicago Tribune* carried the first published mention of the tooth fairy—in 1908. Writer Lillian Brown advised that parents might have an easier time persuading children to have loose teeth pulled if a "tooth fairy" left a small gift of 5 cents under youngsters' pillows for each tooth lost.





SCORE ONE FOR THE CO-OP

When Hereford Sports & Wellness took delivery of two digital scoreboards for its soccer field in the Panhandle town, the non-profit community center realized it didn't have the means to install them.

Deaf Smith Electric Cooperative did. The co-op sent a bucket truck outfitted with an auger and a crew of linemen, who drilled a half-dozen 6-foot-deep holes to securely mount the new displays.



Cool Coat

ENGINEERS HAVE CREATED the whitest paint ever—a paint so white that building surfaces coated in it are 8 degrees cooler than the air on a sunny day. The innovation could reduce air conditioning demands and mitigate the effects of climate change, Vice reports.

The new paint, developed by a team at Purdue University, reflects 98.1% of sunlight. Researchers used barium sulfate, a powder that's reflective across all wavelengths of sunlight, to pigment the new paint—unlike most white paints, which tend to use titanium dioxide as pigment.



“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

—STEPHEN KING

FINISH THIS SENTENCE IT'S SO HOT ...

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 June prompt: **I always laugh when my dad ...**

Says rain sounds like a cow peeing on a flat rock.

SUE BIGAY
SAM HOUSTON EC
LIVINGSTON

Read the comics to me—in different voices to match the character.

BETTY BILLINGSLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Couldn't pronounce a word, so he made up a new one that sounded similar.

CRAIG MASSOUH
PEDERNALES EC
SATTLER

To see more responses, read Currents online.

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COURTESY PEDERNALES ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

'That's What Co-ops Are For'

“We are blessed to have co-op employees who persevere in all types of weather to restore electricity and risk their lives to do so.”

JANE PATTERSON
BOWIE-CASS EC
TEXARKANA

Wheel Fact

Texas Talk Man [June 2021] describes a trip that some of the cast of the movie *Giant* took to the state fairgrounds in Dallas in 1955, mentioning they “boarded the soaring Texas Star” Ferris wheel. That particular wheel was shipped over from Europe and set up in Dallas in 1985.

William F. Culver III
Farmers EC
Collin County

Jessica Ridge wrote a great story. Also, the photo by Wyatt McSpadden of Hinkle leaning on the tree branch with the horse in the background was perfect.

Larry Reese
Bluebonnet EC
Brenham



The most glorious sight in Aransas County after Hurricane Harvey hit was the arrival of the line-men from all over [*'That's What Co-ops Are For,'* June 2021]. Heroes all.

KAREN BEVERLY
VIA FACEBOOK

Fruitful Adventure

Armed with our April issue, we went in search of Alphonse and Martha Dotson on a recent trip to the Hill Country [*The Seed Flourishes,* April 2021]. What we thought would be a short wine tasting turned into an afternoon of great memories. We left with extraordinary stories, exquisite wine, an auto-graphed cover, new friends and a promise to return.

Traveling is really about the people you encounter along the way.

Patti and Larry Terrell
Bowie-Cass EC
Red Lick

Fleeing Thought

I never realized that while the armies of Texians and Mexicans fought, many civilians found it necessary to abandon everything they owned and relocate in a hurry [*The Runaway Scrape,* April 2021]. This makes me wonder what I would do if that situation arose in my lifetime.

B. Jason Epps
Trinity Valley EC
Heartland



COURTESY PATTI TERRELL

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

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

Texas Co-op Power

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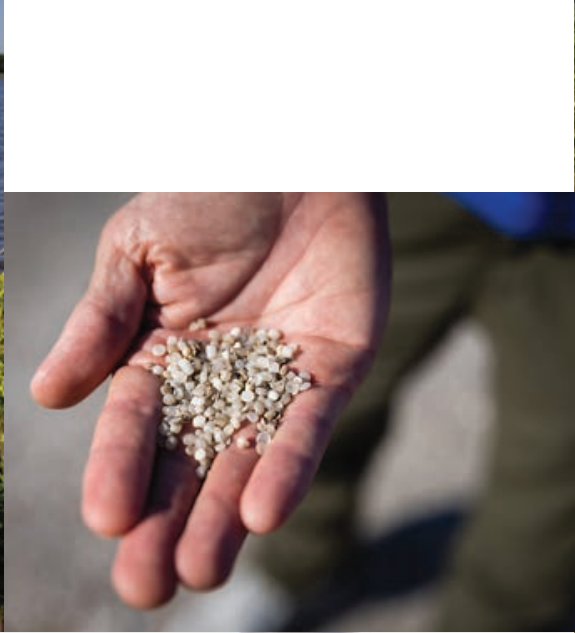
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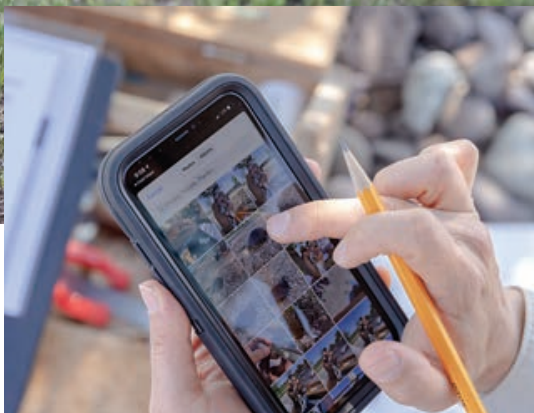


Full Transparency

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Channel Your



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Diane Wilson has gathered millions of nurdles—like the handful shown—in her decades as a citizen scientist. Jace Tunnell collects nurdles near a Port Lavaca estuary. Tania Homayoun, an urban conservation biologist, uploads a picture of a turtle using the iNaturalist app.



BY MELISSA GASKILL
PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

Inner Scientist

Opportunities abound for Texans to augment impactful research

Victoria resident and shrimp boat captain Diane Wilson often walks along the shoreline. She keeps a sharp eye out, not for seashells but for small pellets of plastic. Called nurdles, these lentil-sized bits are raw material used for manufacturing plastics. She has found as many as 21,000 nurdles at one time.

“They’re like little peas, or lentils, with different shapes,” says Wilson, who reports her finds to Nurdle Patrol at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas. This work makes her a citizen scientist—one of thousands of people who lend their eyes, ears, hands and time to professional scientists conducting all kinds of research around the world.

“To date, we’ve had more than 2,000 volunteers remove more than 1.5 million nurdles from beaches spanning from Brazil to Canada,” says Jace Tunnell, director of the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve at the institute, which runs Nurdle Patrol. After a spill left nurdles all over coastlines around Corpus Christi in September 2018, Tunnell started a Facebook group for people to report the pellets. Within a few weeks, posts had poured in from every U.S. state along the Gulf of Mexico; a university in Veracruz, Mexico; and a nonprofit on the Yucatán Peninsula. That led him to create the full-blown citizen science project.

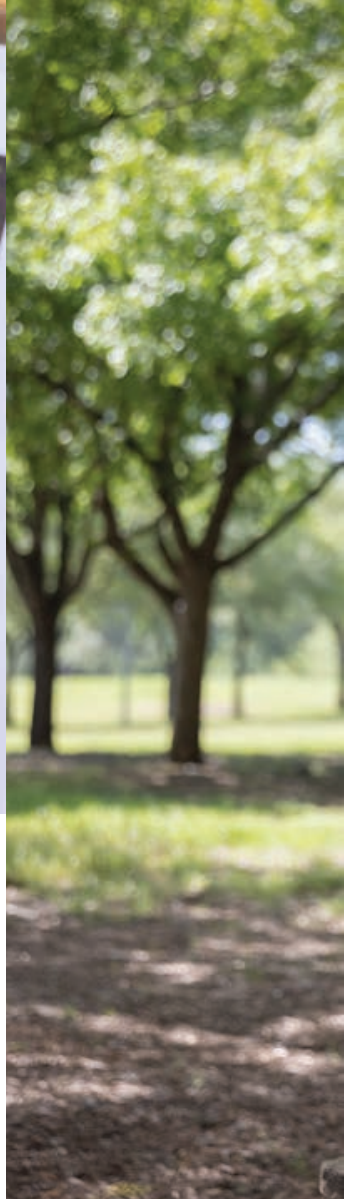
“If this was just a university project, three or four of us going out and trying to figure out where nurdles are com-

ing from, we would never be able to do it,” Tunnell says. “It is really the citizen scientists who are making this project a success.”

Early Nurdle Patrol volunteers reported high concentrations of pellets in bay systems along the Texas coast, where many plastic manufacturers are located. A map created from these reports uses warmer colors to depict higher concentrations of pellets. “Texas and Louisiana are purple, indicating more than 1,000 pellets found in 10 minutes,” Tunnell says, adding that the project hopes to stop plastic from entering the environment and to give volunteers the opportunity to be involved in impactful work.

“You just collect a sample and estimate the count from what you can pick up in 10 minutes,” Wilson explains. “You don’t remove all the pellets or you’d go nuts. It’s very easy and is a way to protect your own health as well as the bays and wildlife.”

Nurdle Patrol, like most citizen science projects, requires no special skill or knowledge. Some citizen science even can be done sitting on your couch with a computer or smartphone. The FISHstory project asks people to identify and count fish in historical fishing photos, helping to estimate what kinds of and how many fish people caught in the South Atlantic during the 1940s through the 1970s. That information supports current management of those waters. Other couch-bound projects include transcribing historical



documents, playing video games to show how people solve problems and completing a survey about your dog.

Other tasks can be done just outside your door. For Globe at Night, a worldwide map of artificial light pollution, simply go outside after dark, use a night sky phone app to find a designated constellation and then use a star chart to identify the faintest star you can see nearby.

Still other projects provide the perfect excuse to go exploring. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's dozen Texas Nature Trackers projects ask people to report sightings anywhere in Texas of specific plants and animals using the iNaturalist app. The information helps the department understand the distribution and seasonality of species and how they change over time.

"Every county in Texas has one assigned wildlife biologist, and it's impossible for one individual in any given county to keep track of all the flora and fauna," says the program's Craig Hensley. "Through citizen science, we gain information that leads to better conservation decisions." The projects focus on species with the greatest conservation need, such as the Texas horned lizard, whooping cranes, monarch butterflies and milkweed, and freshwater mussels, which are threatened by invasive species.

Lee County resident and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member Linda Jo Conn, a Texas master naturalist, participates in Nature Trackers projects on milkweed and mammals. "I call myself an iNaturalist addict," Conn says. "I learn a lot. That's one of the reasons I'm involved. I go places just to see what I can find and am known to stop on highways. My friends know that if I'm not waving my arms, I'm OK."

Elaine Cowley, a Guadalupe Valley EC member who lives in Luling, helps Nature Trackers refine data on mammals in Texas, specifically the swamp rabbit. "I was already using iNaturalist for some other projects, so I said yes to this curation project," she says. "There is so much data out there,

LEFT TO RIGHT Biologist Craig Hensley examines a wing banding to find the age of a loggerhead shrike. Hensley helps train citizen scientists to monitor target species all over the state. He and Homayoun attach leg bands to a loggerhead.

TCP WEB EXTRA See what links we have to help you contribute to citizen science projects.

but unless it is in the right category, TPWD can't use it.

"There are so many ways to get involved in citizen science that don't take a lot of time," she adds. "It's enjoyable at the same time. You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize."

Weather watchers can turn their interest into citizen science as well. For six years Chris Keating of Mason has collected data for the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, known as CoCoRaHS. At the most basic level, volunteers report the amount of rain in their gauges daily. Keating also submits a weekly report summarizing conditions in his Hill Country town, the number of thunderclaps when there is a storm and extreme weather details when something unusual happens, such as hail.

"I have read scientific papers that refer to CoCoRaHS, so it is a productive project, with the data put to scientific use," Keating says. "You can do it on a phone app or a computer. It's designed for the layperson. You just have to be able to read a rain gauge."

A related project, the Global Learning and Observations



'You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize.'



photographers and eventually want to know what they're taking pictures of," Tjelmeland says. "Others are more like me and want to know what's in their backyard or favorite natural area. You can just grab a camera and start snapping pictures, even without knowing a lot initially."

Insects can seem overwhelming in terms of sheer numbers of species and the difficulty of identifying them. Tjelmeland advises starting with things you are interested in, perhaps moths or grasshoppers, and expanding from there. On the plus side, you do not have to go far to find insects.

Volunteers at the preserve have tallied almost 2,000 species of plants and animals, including insects. "Almost anywhere you go, biodiversity is weighted toward those smaller things that are often overlooked but really important in terms of ecology," he says.

Citizen scientists contribute information needed by scientists and project managers, providing much more than those professionals could obtain on their own. These contributions are equally if not more important in rural communities, Hensley says, especially when information is collected on private land. He notes that iNaturalist allows users to protect the location of their reports, sharing it only with the project and not the public.

"The more we know, the better we can be at managing things," Hensley says. "An animal may be more common than we know it to be because there is good habitat on private land holdings but no one is sharing the information. As a result, we may be making decisions without all the facts. Citizen science is vital to conservation efforts going forward." ■


to Benefit the Environment Observer Program, asks citizen scientists to submit photographs of cloud cover.

People who live near or visit the Texas coast can use the iSeaTurtle app to report sightings of these endangered reptiles. The data helps scientists at Texas A&M University map and understand their distribution.

At the Nature Conservancy's Texas City Prairie Preserve, outside Houston, volunteers can photograph and report plants and animals observed on its 2,300 acres using iNaturalist. Aaron Tjelmeland, preserve manager, has tallied almost 600 species of moths there. The project grew from his participation in the 2019 City Nature Challenge, an annual international event that mobilizes citizen scientists to record urban biodiversity on iNaturalist.

"That interested me in the depth and breadth of biodiversity here at the preserve, things other than the more obvious birds and reptiles," Tjelmeland says. "From moths, it grew into the broader insect community—anything I could take a picture of, basically."

People come into the project in different ways. "Some are



POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

Easing Life's Baggage

Flush with bags, a college student finds new ways to support foster youths through difficult transitions

Hunter Beaton has delivered some 45,000 bags since he started his project in 2016.

Serenity Packs

With bags supplied by Hunter Beaton and donations from Houston County businesses, Allen created packs of snacks, activities and other items designed to comfort children caught up in police incidents—especially in rural areas, where family members or Child Protective Services may be miles away.

“It could be 30, 40 minutes, and they don’t know what’s going on; there’s lights flashing, and the officer has to take care of an accident scene or an arrest,” said Allen, who is president of the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards, in which capacity he met Beaton in 2017, and a member of Houston County EC.

To equip police vehicles with bags for children, Allen worked with nearby departments, who were enthusiastic about the A Serenity Activity Packs, or ASAP bags, as he called them. Beaton was too, and his bags, sourced from Boerne-based Flying Circle Gear, were a perfect match.

“It seems odd maybe to have a bag full of toys and trinkets in a patrol car, but from what I’ve heard, the police officers love it,” Beaton said. “It’s something that can build a little bit of trust.”

Since January, ASAP bags have spread from Houston County to more than 30 police agencies in Texas—a total of 2,500 bags.

“It just kind of took off,” Allen said. “One county after the next—about every week or two we’ll hear about a new county implementing it.”

Adopt a Senior

Allie Grace Graves knows how life can be different for foster children because she was one before she was adopted as a 6-year-old.

“I had to grow up a lot faster than the average child,” said the native of Lone Star, in northeast Texas. “I was doing the dishes, getting on the church bus, roaming around town by myself before I was 4 years old.”

That was on Graves’ mind in 2020 as she was set to graduate from high school. She had her family to celebrate with but knew that more than 500 graduating high school students still in foster care in Texas would not.

She wanted to help and reached out to someone she knew could bring her idea to life: Hunter Beaton.

“Most high school students have someone to celebrate their graduation with,” Graves said. “We want that to be the case for every foster youth in Texas.”

Graves and Beaton teamed up to send duffel bags full of goodies, including personalized letters, to each graduate still in foster care. Donors “adopt” a senior through the program.

About 1,200 foster youths in Texas turn 18 each year without being reunited with their birth family or adopted. More than a quarter of them exit the system without a high school diploma or stable housing, and nearly half are unemployed, according to Texas CASA.

“When I first started, I was so focused on the younger side of

BY CHRIS BURROWS • PHOTOS BY ERIC POHL

The police cruiser barely registered with Tim Allen when it moved past the porch where he was meeting with a child in the foster care system.

But the 11-year-old girl from rural Houston County noticed. “She just started shaking,” said Allen, a volunteer for Court Appointed Special Advocates, which assists children in the foster care system. “And I realized that the only context she’s ever had for a police officer was when her mother was pulled over with her in the car, for a drug violation.”

Stirred by the young girl’s response, Allen wanted to do something to help other children in her position, who may be entering the foster care system after a traumatic police encounter.

He knew who could bring his idea to life.

Hunter Beaton started Day 1 Bags in 2016, after his own foster siblings arrived at the Beaton house in Boerne with their belongings in trash bags. “How awful is that?” Beaton told *Texas Co-op Power* in July 2018. “No kid deserves this.”

In the five years since, what started as an Eagle Scout project with \$10,000 in community donations for 15-year-old Beaton has become a full-fledged independent nonprofit that has delivered some 45,000 locally made duffel bags to children in foster care in 22 states. The premise is simple: Give those kids a reason to smile and something to call their own. Beaton, 20, now serves as CEO of the organization while he studies at the University of Texas at Austin, even spending his spring break meeting with police agencies and donors, looking over the finances, and crafting social media strategy.

“We are continuing to do our main mission: providing backpacks and luggage for foster children and at-risk youth who are moving from home to home,” Beaton said. “So many youth have been moved around so much—so to have something they can keep, that is really nice and to put any belongings inside really means so much to them.”

But now Day 1 Bags is expanding its reach, partnering with advocates like Allen to help more children and shine a light on lesser-known issues faced by youths in the foster system.

“I never envisioned it taking off like it did,” said Paula Beaton, Hunter’s mom and a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative. “And it’s overwhelming at times. I mean, we’ll have boxes arrive, and my husband’s like, ‘Ugh, another set of boxes’—and we never intended for our house to be a warehouse.

“But honestly, every quarter I ask Hunter, ‘Do you want to keep doing this?’ And he says, ‘Absolutely.’”



LEFT Comal County sheriff's deputies carry ASAP bags in their cruisers. BELOW Beaton loads boxes from Flying Circle Gear, the Boerne company that makes the bags, into his family's van for delivery.

TCP HOW TO HELP Visit day1bags.org/donate to help Hunter Beaton further his mission.

the board. The Beatons' Hill Country neighbors also have kept up their support.

"People think it's the corporate donors who do all the heavy lifting, but it's really all the \$10, \$20, \$50 donations here and there that really build it up," Beaton said. "People are just so generous."

He said he plans to continue his nonprofit work after college, where he's studying communications and leadership. And while he accomplished more than most on spring break this year, Beaton still made time for the former

foster children in his life—his own siblings, who started it all.

They played board games, basketball and tennis. "It's fun to come back home and be around kids," he said. "They aren't so serious and make you laugh a lot." ■

things, toddlers and children, that I completely overlooked high school," Beaton said. "So now we're doing our best to help."

Beaton expanded the program this year, outfitting all 562 graduates in the class of 2021 with a vital documents bag, gift cards, reusable water bottles and other items.

"Just so they have something to celebrate their graduation with," he said.

Riding to the Challenge

A few years ago, when Beaton was preparing to get his driver's license, he didn't want to drive a vehicle with an automatic transmission. That would be too easy.

"I wanted to test in a stick shift," he said. "So I practiced a lot, burned out my dad's clutch but ended up being able to pass the driver's test. I like big challenges like that."

That same ethic is visible in Beaton's commitment to foster children. Being named the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars Scout of the Year and winning a Congressional Gold Medal for his work was just the start.

"There's always going to be a need," Beaton said. "I want to continue to grow and do new things and make Day 1 Bags incredibly influential for these youth."

It's still a family effort behind him with Paula (his "top pusher and supporter," he said) as treasurer; his sister Hailey as social media guru; and his dad, Kevin, serving on



TCP POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

To nominate a co-op member who makes a difference in your community, email details to people@texascooppower.com.



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Just Released!



Actual size is 40.6 mm

NEW DESIGN

The Biggest Event In Silver Dollar History!

The American Silver Eagle has been the most popular silver coin *on the planet* since its introduction in 1986. Its beautiful, iconic design inspires collectors, and investors love it because it's struck in one full ounce of 99.9% fine silver, and guaranteed for weight and fineness by the U.S. Government. Now in 2021, for the first time ever, the coin's design is changing.

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When President Ronald Reagan signed the Liberty Coin Act into law, he didn't know American Eagles would have the impact they've had, year after year. The coins were so popular that between 1986 and 2020, over 535 million were struck. That's more than HALF A BILLION coins, easily making Silver Eagles the most bought coins in the world. Hugely popular now, Silver Eagles may soon become even more popular!

Collectors Crave Firsts

Collectors covet coins with Key Dates. Key Dates mark significance in a coin's history...firsts, lasts, lowest mintage,

new finishes and new designs. Now, for the first time in over three-and-a-half decades, the Silver Eagle is getting a new design, leading to a historic "first" unlike anything we've seen. The iconic Heraldic Eagle reverse is being replaced by a beautiful new "Eagle Landing" design. This is arguably a bigger deal than even the actual introduction of the coin because there's so much more interest now than in 1986, with investors and collectors!

If You Knew Then What You Know Now...

If you'd had a crystal ball in 1986, you undoubtedly would have grabbed every Silver Eagle you could get. Those coins in uncirculated condition continue to be sought-after. Now you're getting another chance to land a big Silver Eagle first, a Key Date. Additionally, since these newly designed Silver Eagles are only being released during the second half of 2021, it's quite possible this will be one of the lowest mintages we've seen. That's significant because it could make 2021 a DOUBLE Key Date, with both a new design and a low mintage. Demand for these coins is already sky-high, but if that

happens, watch out! No one can predict the future value of silver, but many Americans are rushing to stock up, for themselves, and their loved ones.

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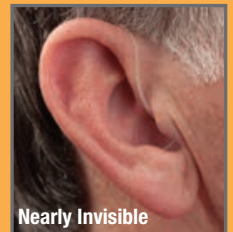
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An Annual Meeting to Remember



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER DARREN SCHAUER

In this month's issue of *The GVEC Review*, we'll look back on our Annual Meeting held in June. In the years to come, I suspect I'll look back on this year's Meeting with a sense of pride in how the Cooperative navigated one of the most difficult chapters in its history. This is because it was a symbol of how GVEC withstood a year of unprecedented obstacles after having to postpone our 2020 Annual Meeting due to COVID-19.

The decision to postpone last year's Meeting was a difficult one and not made lightly. Little did we know at that time, the postponement would be a full year. Although we still published the 2019 Annual Report in the June issue of *The GVEC Review* for members to read, it was disappointing we couldn't meet in person. Sometimes you don't realize how much you truly appreciate gathering together until you aren't able to do so.

So, with grateful hearts and a full agenda, the 2021 Annual Meeting was one for the books. In addition to the election of our 2021 Director-Candidates for Districts 3, 9 and 11, members elected a new Director to the Board when Candidate Leo York won the contested District 6 election. I look forward to working with Mr. York and would like to welcome him to our Board. I'd also like to express my sincere thanks to Joe Castilleja, who well represented District 6 since 2017. His dedication to serving GVEC and its members has been a great asset to the Cooperative, and it was my honor to work with him over the last four years.

We voted on the 2020 Director-Candidates for Districts 2, 5 and 8 as well. All three of these 2020 incumbents ran unopposed and had remained in their positions from 2020-2021. Consequently, each Director will serve two more years before standing for reelection in 2023.

Of course, we resumed other traditional favorite festivities of the Meeting: hot dogs, door prizes and recognizing those making a difference in our communities by presenting GVEC Public Service Awards to two very deserving organizations: Gonzales Healthcare Systems and Guadalupe Regional Medical Center. (See pages 20 to 21 for more information.)

As we looked back on 2020 in the pages of the Annual Report and watched the Annual Video, we were reminded just how essential the services GVEC delivers are to the people and communities we serve. We recalled that even a worldwide pandemic wasn't stronger than the hearts of the service-minded men and women who make up the GVEC team and their commitment to our members and customers.

If you weren't able to attend our 2021 GVEC Annual Meeting, you can check out a full recap of the event on pages 20 and 21 and view the Annual Meeting video at www.gvec.org/annual-meeting.

I am always interested in your comments and feedback. Contact me by phone at 830.857.1152, by email at dschauer@gvec.org or by mail at P.O. Box 118, Gonzales, Texas 78629.

Respectfully,



825 E. Sarah DeWitt Drive • P.O. Box 118
Gonzales, TX 78629

For information during office hours and outages after hours:

CALL US AT 800.223.4832

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GENERAL MANAGER AND CEO

Darren Schauer

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Henry "Bubba" Schmidt Jr., Secretary/Treasurer, District 3

Shawn Martinez, District 4

Morris Harvey, District 5

Leo York, District 6

Melvin E. Strey, Vice President, District 7

Mark Roberts, District 8

Gary Birdwell, District 9

Don Williams, District 10

David Warzecha, District 11

LOCATIONS

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Seguin 830.379.2114

La Vernia 830.253.1600

Cuero 361.275.2334

Schertz 210.658.7033

DID YOU KNOW?

The focus of GVEC is on people, not profit. That's one reason we support and help improve the areas our members live and work.

UPDATE YOUR INFO!

Keeping your contact information up-to-date with GVEC is important. In fact, it's downright essential!



Hurricane season is upon us. Making sure your information stays updated not only ensures you have access to convenient apps and services like SmartHub® and TextPower™; it helps keep you aware of outages or other important information in emergency or severe weather situations.

EMAIL ADDRESS

Making sure you keep a current email address on your account allows you to receive email alerts about your usage and billing. It also allows you to receive messages from GVEC regarding things like line maintenance going on in your area or communication in emergency weather situations.



MAILING ADDRESS

Keeping your mailing address up-to-date is always important—even if you receive your monthly statements at your email address or through SmartHub. Items like capital credit refunds on inactive accounts are only sent through traditional mail, so it's important to keep this updated even if you move and end your GVEC membership. You might also miss out on important planned outage or maintenance notifications as well as information about new services GVEC has to offer if your mailing address is outdated.



PHONE NUMBER

Having a good phone number on file is necessary in case we ever need to reach you by phone for a variety of reasons. Maintaining your mobile phone number gives you convenient communication options, like activating text message notifications in SmartHub to receive important emergency communications from GVEC when necessary. Making sure your current cellphone number is on file lets you register for TextPower, too! TextPower allows you to report or check the status of an outage with a simple one-word text message. Signing up is fast and easy.



HOW TO SIGN UP FOR TEXTPOWER

First, you must make sure the cellphone you are texting from is listed on your GVEC account. You can update or add your number anytime via the SmartHub self-service portal (not through the SmartHub app), or call us for assistance. Up to three cellphones can be registered.

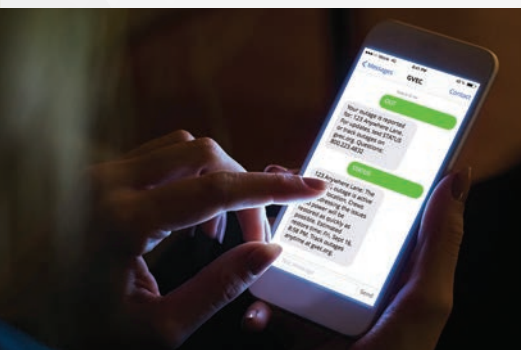
From one of the cellphone numbers listed on your account, text GVEC to 800.223.4832 to enroll. (We recommend saving this number as GVEC in your contacts on your phone.) It's that simple!

TO REPORT AN OUTAGE OR RECEIVE UPDATES WITH TEXTPOWER

- Text **OUT** to report an outage.
- Text **STATUS** to get an update. (Updates are available after line crews are on site and evaluate the cause of the outage.)
- Text **HELP** for the text message menu and our contact number.
- Text **QUIT** to opt-out of this service any time.

When power is restored, we'll send you a text.

This is a free service from GVEC. However, messaging and data rates from your cellphone provider may apply.



ATTENTION ALL LOCAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS:

Don't Miss Your Chance to



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The application deadline for the second cycle of the Power Up community grant program for 2021 is

AUGUST 16 BY 5 P.M.

For program qualifications and an application, visit gvec.org, or call Christine Presley, GVEC Community Relations Representative, at 830.857.1218 for assistance.

DELIVERING MORE

2021

GVEC Annual Meeting: *Empowering Life*

“ ATTENDEES AND GVEC EMPLOYEES ALIKE WERE DELIGHTED TO BE BACK IN PERSON AND CELEBRATED THE COOPERATIVE’S RESILIENCE, COMPASSION AND CONTINUED FINANCIAL STRENGTH AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. ”

After last year’s postponement due to COVID-19, GVEC was pleased to host the 2021 Annual Meeting live and in person on June 25 at the Gonzales High School Special Events Center.

A total of 1,745 members participated, either in person or by proxy. Attendees and GVEC employees alike were delighted to be back in person and celebrated the Cooperative’s resilience, compassion and continued financial strength amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



Members began arriving and registering at 5:30 p.m. While waiting for the business meeting, attendees mingled, enjoyed refreshments, chili dogs and a prerecorded selection of classic and contemporary country music. They also browsed exhibits featuring GVEC

products and services, including AC/heating services and high-speed internet.

Customer Service Representatives were available to help members sign up for the SmartHub® self-service customer portal and TextPower™, a convenient service allowing members



to report outages and receive a power restoration estimate by text message.

GVEC Board President Lewis Borgfeld opened the business meeting at 7 p.m. and Board Vice President Melvin E. Strey delivered the invocation.

Next came the election of District Directors. Three of 2021’s elections were uncontested: Henry C. Schmidt Jr. will serve as District 3 Director; Gary Birdwell will serve as District 9 Director; and David Warzecha will serve as District 11 Director. District 6 was a contested election in 2021. Leo York received 860 total votes and Joe A. Castilleja 814 total votes, making York the new District 6 Director.



Three additional elections deferred from 2020 were also conducted. All three incumbents from these districts ran unopposed and had remained in their position from 2020 to 2021. Consequently, each Director will serve two more years before standing for reelection in 2023: Lewis Borgfeld, District 2; Morris Harvey, District 5 and Mark Roberts, District 8.



This year's Annual Meeting Video, titled *Empowering Life*, emphasized ways COVID-19 impacted GVEC's 2020 projects and initiatives, forcing us to adapt and adjust in ways never before necessary. This, in turn, created new opportunities to empower lives across the Guadalupe Valley in innovative ways, helping to ease pandemic hardships among those we serve.

For example, COVID-19 triggered explosive demand for new internet installations. GVEC's Internet team worked tirelessly to fulfill that need, adding over 17,000 total new Wireless and Fiber Internet customers in 2020. The Cooperative also suspended electric disconnects for nonpayment and late fees. Our charitable foundation, meanwhile, increased Power Up™ billing assistance by \$20,000, and we paid \$6.6 million in capital credits to members, the largest such payout in Cooperative history. GVEC also donated Wi-Fi coverage to local school systems, allowing students and teachers without home internet to participate in online learning. Other topics covered in the 2021 Annual Meeting video include the following:

- Our new Peak-Time Payback demand response program, designed to reduce overall energy usage during peak demand periods and stabilize transmission rates
- Our new Drone Inspection program, which allows the Cooperative to inspect transmission infrastructure in a dramatically decreased amount of time
- Growth in our beyond the meter services despite the pandemic, including AC/heating, Solar and Battery, and Electrician services
- Completion of GVEC's second E-Rate project in 2020, this one in partnership with Moulton ISD. This project increased the district's internet speed from 100 Mbps to 750 Mbps, while lowering its monthly costs. The project also allowed GVEC to bring Fiber Internet service to Moulton, while upgrading and enhancing the electric grid.
- Community initiatives, economic development activities and the 2020 financial report

Members can view the Annual Report as well as the video presentation online at gvec.org.

Amid a year of struggle, loss and recovery throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, GVEC's Public Service Awards presentation took on added meaning in 2021. GVEC introduced the award in 1986 to recognize people, businesses and organizations who've provided consistent, unselfish and considerable service to their communities and to the people around them.

COVID-19 pressed and mobilized Cooperative communities in unprecedented ways. As such, GVEC believed it appropriate to recognize two healthcare organizations that were instrumental in helping plan, implement and coordinate the region's pandemic response: Gonzales Healthcare Systems and Guadalupe Regional Medical Center.

Both these outstanding local hospitals stepped up to provide services to those needing it most, implementing new policies and procedures to keep patients and medical personnel safe. Long hours became a way of life for many of these professionals in their steadfast dedication to caring for COVID-19 patients. More recently, these same hospitals have been critical in setting up COVID-19 vaccination clinics, helping drive new cases dramatically lower. These hospital employees are the unsung heroes of COVID-19, working tirelessly and selflessly for the public good. That's why GVEC chose to honor them with these awards.



Gonzales Healthcare Systems and Guadalupe Regional Medical Center received the 2020 GVEC Public Service Awards for their extensive services provided to GVEC and its service area during the COVID-19 pandemic. *From left: GVEC Board President Lewis Borgfeld, Gonzales Healthcare Systems Chief Executive Officer Patty Stewart, Guadalupe Regional Medical Center Chief Operating Officer Sheri Williams, GVEC Secretary-Treasurer Henry C. Schmidt Jr., and GVEC General Manager and CEO Darren Schauer.*

SUMMER HEAT IS PEAKING

STAY MINDFUL OF YOUR USAGE!

School may be starting soon, but that doesn't mean cooler weather will be...

In South Central Texas, extremely warm temperatures can last well into autumn. It's important to continue practicing energy efficiency, so your bills don't become too hot to handle.

Here are some reminders of what you can do to help save electricity and save on your bill.



Set your thermostat for the recommended 78 degrees while cooling your home. Think of this: If it's 98 degrees outside, your AC unit will use less energy cooling your home 20 degrees below the outside temperature as opposed to 30 degrees if it were set to 68. If 78 degrees is unbearable, turning it up as high as you can comfortably stand can help—every degree counts!



Hit the switch when you leave the room! Don't forget to turn off the lights and the ceiling fan when you leave the room. Because ceiling fans only circulate air, making you feel cooler when you are in the room, there's no reason to leave them on. Doing so can be useless and costly.



Check your AC filter monthly, and change it if it's dirty. Running your AC with a dirty filter reduces air flow, which, in turn, reduces your system's efficiency. A dirty filter can also strain your system, allowing dirt to build up on fan blades and coils.



Unplug small appliances and phone and tablet chargers when not in use. All things plugged in use some electricity—even when they're turned off. Unplugging toasters, coffee makers, lamps and televisions can reduce some of your household's daily energy consumption.

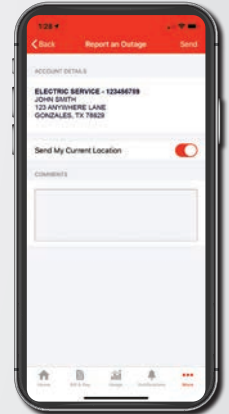
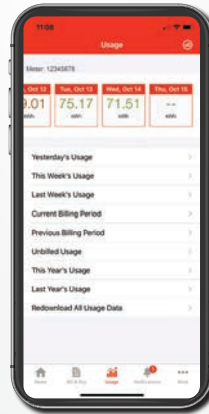


Download SmartHub®! This convenient app is for more than just paying your electricity bill. It allows you to monitor and compare your daily, weekly and monthly usage.

The GVEC SmartHub tool helps you keep an eye on your consumption, so you can see if energy-efficient measures are making a difference or if you need to do more.



The My Usage screen gives you access to check real-time usage, along with daily temperatures to help you relate your energy usage to seasonal conditions outside.



The user-friendly app also makes it easy to set up alerts, report outages, view our outage map, and contact us with questions or concerns!

TACL00018344E



To download the SmartHub app from iTunes or Google Play, search for "SmartHub," and install. Type "GVEC" into the search box when prompted to search by name. It's the cool way to monitor your usage as this summer's temperatures linger a bit longer!



PET ELECTRICAL SAFETY

We love our pets! They're important parts of our families. So when we talk about electrical safety in the home, it stands to reason this includes keeping the furriest of our family members safe also!

National Dog Day is August 26, so we thought this month would be a great time to "paws" and think about electrical safety when it comes to keeping your fuzzy-wuzzies from catching a buzzy zap!

Here are some tips and reminders to help keep your pets safe from electricity:

The saying "out of sight, out of mind" stands true for animals, too. Keeping electrical cords hidden or preventing access to them will help keep your pets from chewing on them, which could be dangerous for the entire household. Not only could your pets get electrocuted, but the frayed wires could cause a shock to those unplugging or plugging in the cords or even create a fire hazard.

ELECTRICAL CORDS

KEEP YOUR PETS AWAY FROM ELECTRICAL CORDS



Clean up your cables to keep safe. Tangled up electrical cords offer another danger other than electrocution—strangulation! If pets get stuck in a nest of cords, they could accidentally choke themselves while playing or trying to get free. They could also injure themselves in a panic as they squirm or jerk trying to free themselves from the trap of wires.

DETANGLE 'NESTS' OF WIRES



SAFETY TIPS

Electricity and water don't mix. As much of a safety tip this is for humans, it is for our furry family members also. If a playful pet accidentally (or even purposely—we're looking at you, cats) knocks a plugged-in appliance into a tub, sink, pool or any other wet area, they could be seriously hurt.

KEEP SMALL APPLIANCES AWAY FROM WATER



If you have a dog who loves digging, keep in mind any underground electrical wires that may be buried in your yard. You may need to fence or block off where those lines are located to keep Fido from getting fried. Remember, you can always call 811 if you need help locating lines.

WATCH OUT FOR UNDERGROUND WIRES



KNOW WHAT TO DO

If the unthinkable does occur, and your precious pet is injured or electrocuted, be prepared by knowing what to do in case of this type of emergency.

- 1 Immediately unplug or remove the hazard to avoid further injury.
- 2 If you notice burns, apply a cold compress.
- 3 Keep your vet's after-hours or emergency phone number handy, so you can find it easily in the chaos of what's going on.
- 4 If you feel it's not necessary to contact your vet, be sure to keep a close eye on your pet and monitor them for a day or two to notice any changes in breathing patterns or other behavior.

We hope you'll find these pet electrical safety tips helpful and useful.

At GVEC we care about keeping all our members safe—even the hairiest! And we care about their pets, too!

BACK TO SCHOOL

Readiness with GVEC Internet



Back-to-School time is right around the corner, and many prepared parents have already gotten a jumpstart on school supplies shopping. Kudos to those who've already acquired the pencils, notebooks, folders and backpacks; you're off to a great start! But don't overlook one of the most commonly forgotten, yet often most needed, tools for your student this school year—a dependable internet connection!

GVEC WIRELESS INTERNET



GVEC Wireless utilizes a small radio and mast (if necessary) installed at your home. The radio communicates with a nearby tower and delivers service to your computer or router via Ethernet cable.

This high-speed, reliable internet service delivers a variety of plans to fit differing needs and budgets for most people. Speeds from 1 Mbps-3 Mbps are great for web surfing, email, homework and accessing your students' school websites. Plans with speeds of up to 8 Mbps-25 Mbps have the bandwidth to support online gaming, video streaming and handle multiple users—great for times everyone is scrambling to finish assignments due the next day!

GVEC FIBER INTERNET



Pop quiz: What do you do about a slow connection that's stressing out students (and parents)? GVEC Fiber is the answer! Fiber delivers dependable service and extreme-speeds of up to 1 Gbps.

GVEC Fiber runs a seamless fiber-optic connection directly to your home. This connection has the necessary bandwidth to deliver large amounts of data at one time. It's also far more resistant to outside interference like weather conditions or other providers' signals.

HOME WI-FI OPTIMIZATION



Does spotty internet in some areas of your home limit where your student can do their schoolwork? If so, optimizing your Wi-Fi signal with a mesh network may be the solution you need.

A mesh network consists of separate pods that give your Wi-Fi signal a boost where it's needed. The pods are placed in parts of your home where your Wi-Fi signal may have trouble reaching or is weaker. They retransmit your router's signal to those areas without loss, giving you the high-quality coverage you need. It's an optimal and affordable solution, costing only \$2 per month for each pod, in addition to the \$6 rental fee for a GVEC router.

Whether you're a new or existing GVEC Internet customer, see what services or upgrades are available in your area to make sure you have the connectivity the students in your home need.

GIVE US A CALL AT 866.675.9296, OR VISIT GVEC.NET.

BLOG ALERT:

Culture in Our Communities

You don't have to travel far to gain a sense of culture in Texas. Our great state is rich in fascinating history, intriguing landmarks and artifacts, and interesting museums. Be sure to check out our blog this month at gvec.org to read where you can get a local dose of culture in the communities you live in.

AG DAYS AND GVEC

GVEC has always taken great interest in the education of young people in our communities. This is why we have developed and delivered useful programs for school children in the areas we serve. While *Louie the Lightning Bug* or other electrical safety presentations may be what come to mind when you think of these programs, there may be others you're unaware of—like Ag Days.

WHAT ARE AG DAYS?

To put it simply, Ag Days are educational field trip days for students. They are often organized by the local county branches of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offices and Texas Farm Bureau Insurance firms.

The events include vendors, many from local businesses, offering information and demonstrations about local agriculture in the area. Students learn about a variety of subjects like dairy, gardening, wildlife management, water conservation, nutrition and more.

A FOCUS ON HISTORY AND SCIENCE



Though you may automatically think of safety when you think of youth electrical education programs, GVEC brings a bit of history and science to the table in our participation during Ag Days.

We explain and demonstrate how electricity is made and delivered. Not only that—we explain how GVEC was the first to introduce electricity to the rural communities in the Guadalupe Valley and how this helped advance farming and ranching to the thriving agricultural businesses many local areas we serve are known for today.

THE BIG RED BARN

"The Big Red Barn" is the largest Ag Days event GVEC participates in, held several days each week—for three to five weeks—in the fall. It's sponsored by and located at The Texas Agricultural Education & Heritage Center in Seguin, whose main building is literally a big, red barn.

In the weeks GVEC participates in Ag Days at The Big Red Barn each year, we see hundreds of students, typically 4th graders. Although it's only "manned" with GVEC representatives during Ag Days, we have a standing booth at The Big Red Barn year-round. Therefore, when the educational wing is open during other events at the center, people can view our educational display during those times as well and discover the major role GVEC had in modernizing the agricultural industries in our communities.



MORE ABOUT AG DAYS

To find out more about Ag Days in your area, contact your local AgriLife Extension office. For more information about The Big Red Barn events, call 830.379.0933, or visit texagedu.org.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Shiner

Shiner Gaslight Theatre Summer Production

August 1 and 6-8

The Shiner Gaslight Theatre presents its summer production of *Pinocchio Commedia*, a harlequinade version of the beloved story of the wooden puppet who yearns to be a real boy. Friday and Saturday performances are in the evenings, with doors opening at 6:30, meal served at 7, and show beginning at 8. For Sunday afternoon matinees, doors open at 12:30, meal served at 1 and show begins at 2. All tickets must be reserved in advance. No children under 4, please. More info: 361.594.2079 or shinergaslight.org.

Cuero

World Series of Cuero Casino Night Fundraiser

August 7, 2021

The Cuero Chamber of Commerce is hosting Casino Night at The Venue on Church Street, 125 E. Church St., Cuero. Admission includes: gaming chips, appetizers, spirits, live entertainment and chances to win great prizes! Raffle drawings will also be held throughout the night. Individual tickets and reserved tables of 8 available. Proceeds go to help fund scholarships, Chamber programs and restoration projects at the new Chamber and visitor bureau location. More info: Call 361.275.2112 or visit cuero.org.

New Braunfels

Caterpillar Chamber Bowl

August 20, 2021

Rock, roll 'n' bowl at the 3rd annual Caterpillar Chamber Bowl; Fiesta Lanes, 1202 Huisache Ave., New Braunfels. Preregister your team to have a great time while raising money for DECA scholarships benefiting students from Samuel Clemens and Byron P. Steele II High Schools. Choose from one of two sessions—Corporate from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. or Lunar from 5 to 9 p.m. More info: 210.619.1952.

Hallettsville

Hallettsville Market Days

August 21, 2021

Stop by the Knights of Columbus Hall, 321 Highway 77 South, Hallettsville for one of the largest trade days in South Texas, with wood and metal works, clothing, jewelry, live plants, furniture, home décor, and specialty food. More info: Call 361.772.0084 or visit hallettsvillemarketdays.com.

All dates, times and events are subject to change without notice.

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A.

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Nelson Algren
circa 1949.

Stolen Words

While in Texas, author Nelson Algren was a man with a thieving arm

BY CHRISTOPHER ADAMS

THE AWARD-WINNING author who would go on to write the classic novel *The Man With the Golden Arm* entered a building at Sul Ross State Teachers College in Alpine in early 1934 and made off with one of the institution's typewriters. The next morning, the thief hopped a train out of town.

Nelson Algren won the National Book Award in 1950 for the aforementioned novel and earned three O. Henry Awards for his short stories, but the "poet of the Chicago slums" found trouble in Texas before achieving national literary acclaim.

Algren couldn't find work in his hometown of Chicago or anywhere else in the greater Midwest during the Great Depression and eventually traveled to Texas to pack black-eyed peas and run a Sinclair gas station between Rio Hondo

and Harlingen. But neither venture provided Algren satisfactory income, and he sought other opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley.

"He crossed the border to Matamoros and came back again, ate in missions, slept in hobo jungles, lost in crap games, rode in cattle or refrigerated boxcars," wrote author Bettina Drew in the introduction to the book *The Texas Stories of Nelson Algren*.

An exhausted Algren returned to Chicago at the end of 1932 and, having written a well-received short story, decided that creative writing was his path to fulfillment. He persuaded a New York publisher to give him an advance for a novel that was to be about the illusion of the American dream and based on

his experiences in Texas.

"He saw a lot of poverty and contradictions, such as poor whites who were oppressed by the rich but took out their anger on Mexicans and Blacks who were even poorer and more oppressed," Mary Wisniewski, author of a 2016 Algren biography called *Algren: A Life*, explained in an email.

Algren returned to Texas in September 1933 and made his way to Alpine to create his crucial work. He convinced the president of Sul Ross State Teachers College (now Sul Ross State University) that he was "a big-time New York writer," granting him access to the college's typewriters to draft his novel. However, his advance hadn't amounted to much, and by January 1934, he was broke, with an unfinished manuscript. He had no choice but to return home, where accessing a typewriter would be a real challenge. So he stole one from Sul Ross.

"I think he just figured he needed the typewriter more than the college did, so he had a right to it," Wisniewski said.

Algren fled Alpine on a freight train but was subsequently caught and locked up in the Brewster County jail. It proved to be a temporary setback. He returned to Chicago after his release and completed his first novel, *Somebody in Boots*, about his experiences living in Texas.

And the typewriter? Algren left it at an Alpine freight depot where it was to be shipped to Chicago.

"The typewriter was not sent to Chicago," Wisniewski said. Its whereabouts seem to be unknown. "Algren had used it to write *Somebody in Boots* while he was working at Alpine—but didn't finish it on that typewriter. He had to finish it back in Chicago on another machine." ■

Kids Cooking

Youngsters in the kitchen help make family meals truly rewarding

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

I've encouraged my children to join me in the kitchen ever since they were little. Cooking with kids requires extra patience but reaps rewards down the line. Small children can practice mixing and measuring ingredients and kneading dough, and older kids can learn how to chop and take charge of the stove. Encouraging their efforts makes all the difference in kids' kitchen success. My son adores meatballs, and this baked version keeps it simple. Serve with your favorite pasta or just scoop onto slices of garlic bread.

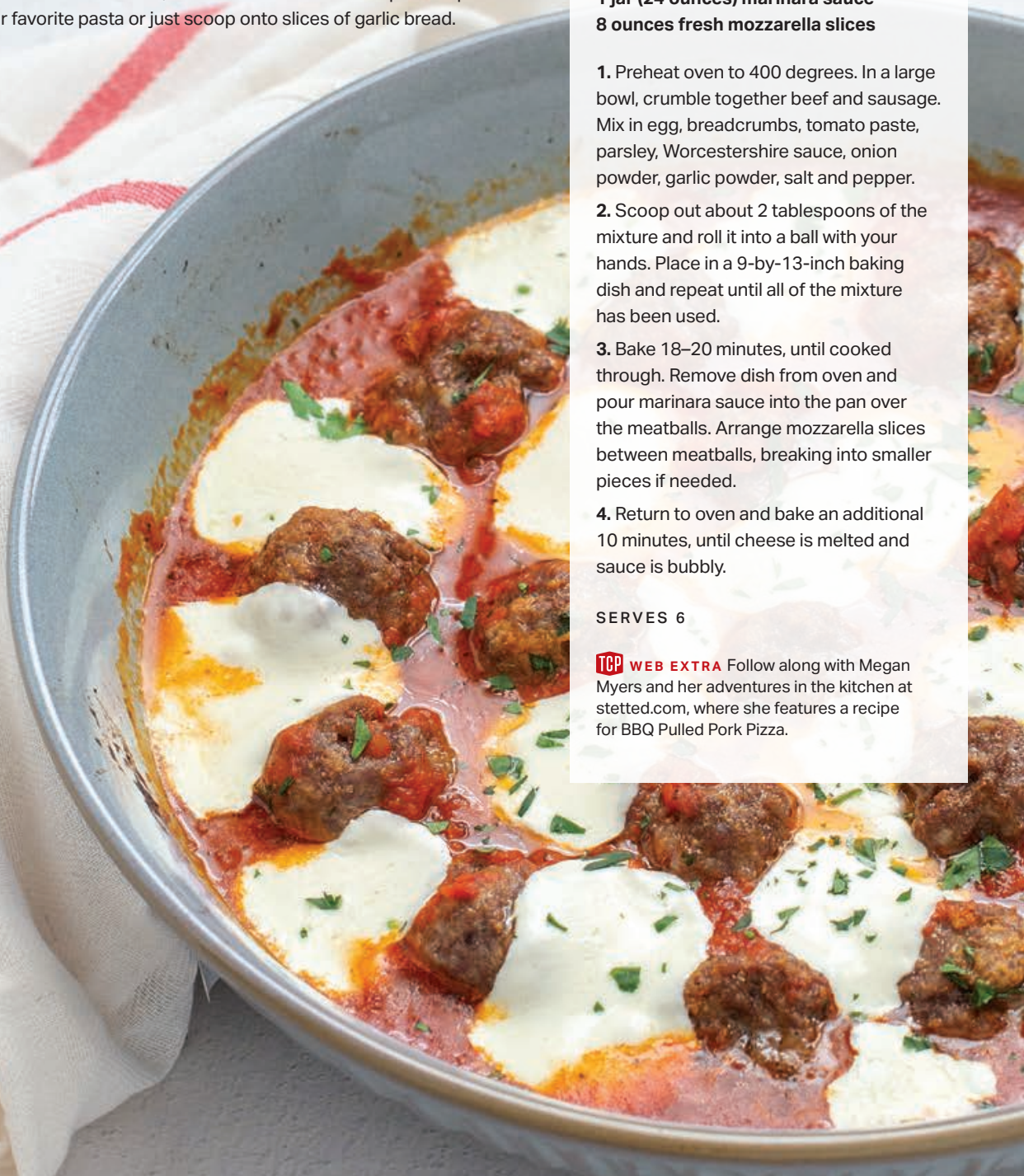
Cheesy Baked Meatballs

1 pound ground beef
½ pound pork sausage
1 egg
¼ cup breadcrumbs
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 jar (24 ounces) marinara sauce
8 ounces fresh mozzarella slices

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, crumble together beef and sausage. Mix in egg, breadcrumbs, tomato paste, parsley, Worcestershire sauce, onion powder, garlic powder, salt and pepper.
2. Scoop out about 2 tablespoons of the mixture and roll it into a ball with your hands. Place in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and repeat until all of the mixture has been used.
3. Bake 18–20 minutes, until cooked through. Remove dish from oven and pour marinara sauce into the pan over the meatballs. Arrange mozzarella slices between meatballs, breaking into smaller pieces if needed.
4. Return to oven and bake an additional 10 minutes, until cheese is melted and sauce is bubbly.

SERVES 6

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for BBQ Pulled Pork Pizza.





Guacamole

IVAN REMLEY
BLUEBONNET EC

Adults can take care of the chopping while little hands do the mashing and mixing of this fresh guacamole. Don't limit yourself to eating it with just chips or tacos—Ivan, 14, recommends serving with fresh veggies such as sliced radishes, carrots and cucumbers or even kale chips.

½ onion, diced

2 Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced

½ jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced

1 clove garlic, minced

Juice of 1–2 limes, divided use

½ teaspoon salt, plus more to taste

3 avocados, divided use

1. In a large bowl, stir together the onion, tomatoes, jalapeño, garlic, 1 tablespoon lime juice and salt.
2. Slice two avocados in half lengthwise, making one long cut around the pit. Separate the halves and remove the pits. With a spoon, scoop out the flesh and add to the mixture in the bowl.
3. Mash and stir everything together, until the ingredients are well combined.
4. Slice the third avocado lengthwise, separate the halves and remove the pit. With a small knife, cut the flesh into small cubes. Scoop out the cubes and add them to the bowl with the avocado mixture. Add 1 tablespoon of lime juice and fold the avocado cubes in just enough for a slightly chunky texture.
5. Taste and adjust seasoning with lime juice and salt as needed.

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Cooper's Bacon Cheddar Chicken Pasta

COOPER JOHNSON
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES



This family-friendly pasta recipe is a great way to teach older kids a variety of skills, such as sautéing and creating a simple cheese sauce. Cooper, 12, recommends adding chopped green onions to serve along with the extra bacon.

SERVES 6–8

1 pound pasta, any type
6 strips bacon, diced; divided use
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts; cut into 1-inch chunks
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 tablespoon butter
2 tablespoons flour
1 packet ranch dip mix
2 cups milk
1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese

1. Cook pasta according to package directions, drain and keep warm.
2. While pasta is cooking, cook bacon in a large, deep-sided skillet over medium heat until crisp, then remove and drain on a paper towel. Drain all but one tablespoon of bacon drippings from pan.
3. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Add butter to the skillet with the bacon drippings, stirring to melt, then add chicken. Cook until tender and no longer pink, 8–10 minutes.
4. Mix together flour and ranch dip mix, then sprinkle evenly over the chicken and stir to coat. Stir in the milk and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened and bubbly.
5. Stir in cheddar and half of the reserved bacon, stirring to melt the cheese completely. Add the pasta and stir to mix well. Serve with remaining bacon sprinkled on top.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

SOUPS AND STEWS DUE AUGUST 10

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The best reader recipe wins \$500. Enter at TexasCooPower.com/contests by August 10.



Texas-Style Chorizo Frittata

MATTHEW PEÑA
PEDERNALES EC

Breakfast for dinner is always a great way to get kids involved in the kitchen. Matthew, 16, came up with this recipe to help out his parents on a busy day using ingredients they already had in the fridge.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ onion, chopped

- 1½ cups chopped bell pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound Mexican chorizo
- 9 eggs
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 8 ounces Oaxaca cheese, sliced

OPTIONAL GARNISHES

- Chopped parsley
- Sour cream or Mexican crema
- Sliced avocado
- Pico de gallo

COOK'S TIP For a spicier frittata, add sliced jalapeños or hot sauce to the egg mixture before baking.

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Heat a 10-inch ovenproof skillet over medium heat and add olive oil. Stir in onion and bell pepper and sauté until tender. Add garlic and cook an additional 3 minutes, stirring often to prevent garlic from burning. Remove vegetables to a bowl and set aside.

3. Crumble the chorizo into the skillet and sauté until fully cooked, breaking up any large chunks. Remove from heat and drain excess oil if needed.

4. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, cheddar, parsley, salt and pepper. Add egg mixture and sautéed vegetables to the cooked chorizo in the skillet. Stir to combine and distribute ingredients evenly. Add Oaxaca cheese evenly on top of frittata.

5. Place skillet in oven and bake 20 minutes, making sure the frittata has fully set. Garnish with parsley, sour cream or Mexican crema, sliced avocado, and pico de gallo.

SERVES 6

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Head Honcho

The barbacoa at Vera's in Brownsville rises to the occasion

BY CHET GARNER

TO MANY TEXANS, Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish explorer who shipwrecked near Galveston Island centuries ago. For folks in Brownsville, *cabeza de vaca* (head of the cow) has a much tastier meaning. And you won't find a more authentic version of real-deal cow head *barbacoa* than at Vera's Backyard Bar-B-Que.

Before lunch, I asked owner Armando Vera for a look at his pit because you can learn a lot about pit bosses by seeing the tools they use. Vera's pit was unlike anything I've seen. It's literally a pit in the ground, about 4 feet deep and full of blazing logs. It looked like a gateway to Hades.

Vera explained that an open pit is the traditional way to cook Mexican-style barbacoa. An entire cow head is wrapped in foil, placed in a hole and covered with burning logs for 10–12 hours. Vera's is the only place in Texas that still cooks barbacoa underground, the traditional way that Vera's father used when he started the business in 1955.

Even though I found the sight of the head to be less than appetizing, I decided to judge the barbacoa with my mouth instead of my eyes. The menu included almost every part of the head: *lengua* (tongue), *ojos* (eyes), *jeta* (jaw) and *cachete* (cheek). I ordered a bit of everything, along with homemade tortillas and salsa.

With each bite, the image of the full head faded, replaced by savory flavors of perfectly smoked meat, tangy salsa and pillow tortillas. The barbacoa offers flavor, smoke and texture that you can't get cooking it in an oven or over a stove. The experience at Vera's prompted me to do something I never expected to do in my lifetime: I ordered a second helping of *lengua*. ■

ABOVE Chet isn't sure he sees eye to eye with the cow head in front of him.

TCP WEB EXTRA Chet finds that barbacoa, much like his musings, is tongue in cheek in his latest video. See all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Call or check an event's website for scheduling details.

AUGUST

04

South Padre Island [4–7]
U.S. Lifesaving Association National Championship, (956) 761-3000, sopadre.com

05

Levelland [5–8] SPOTC Dog Agility Trials, (806) 894-4161, malleteventcenter.com

Palestine [5, 7, 19–21, 26–28] Palestine Diesel Roundtrip, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

06

South Padre Island [6–8] Ladies Kingfish Tournament, (956) 761-4412, sopadre.com

07

Bellville Farmers Market, (979) 865-3407, discoverbellville.com

Corpus Christi Summer PolkaFest, (361) 215-9163, facebook.com/chssouthtexas

Frankston Neches River Wilderness Race, (903) 245-9490, necheswildernessrace.com

Graham Cars & Stars Car Show, (940) 550-8468, grahamcarsandstars.org

McKinney Sips of Summer, (318) 527-9221, mckinneysipandstroll.com

Palestine Dogwood Jamboree: If That Ain't Country, (903) 723-6291, dogwoodjamboree.com

Temple Dig It Family Day, (254) 298-5378, downtowntemple.com

Bandera [7, 14, 21, 28] Cowboys On Main, (830) 796-3045, banderacowboycapital.com

Allen [7, 21, Sept. 4] Radha Krishna Temple Chess Club Tournaments, (860) 605-3683, radhakrishnatemple.net/chess-tournament

Palestine [7, 14, 21, 28, Sept. 4] Market Day, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

Palestine [7, Sept. 4] Saturdays on Main, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

09

Palestine [9, 16, 23, 30, Sept. 6] Trivia Night at the Pint, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

12

Palestine [12-14] Palestine Steam Roundtrip, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

Addison [12, 26] Vitruvian Nights Live, (972) 590-8866, udr.com/vitruvian-park

13

San Antonio Iliza Shlesinger, (210) 223-8624, tobincenr.org

South Padre Island [13-14] Shallow Sport Owners Tournament, (956) 761-3000, shallowstournament.com

Fredericksburg [13-15, 20-22] Always ... Patsy Cline, 1-888-669-7114, fredericksburgtheater.org

14

Lake Jackson Farmers Market, (281) 924-0596, lakejacksonfarmersmarket.com

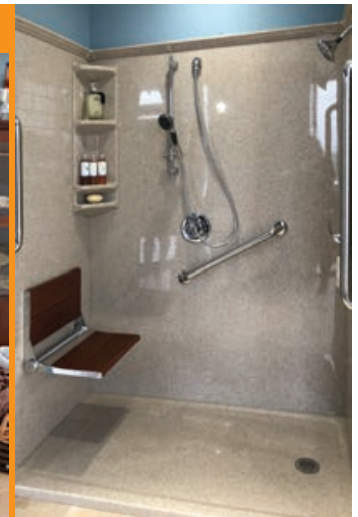
Leming Battle of Medina Symposium, (830) 480-2741, facebook.com/atascosahistory

MORE EVENTS >

TCP Submit Your Event

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AUGUST EVENTS CONTINUED

14

Temple Farmers Market, (254) 298-5378, downtowntemple.com

New Braunfels [14-15] Hill Country Comicon, (830) 221-4011, hillcountrycomicon.com

McKinney [14, 22] Zip Line Day, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org/ropescourse

Boerne [14, 28] Bluegrass Jam, (210) 445-1080, theagricultural.org/bluegrass-jams

20

Crockett Exile, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

Fredericksburg [20-22] Trade Days, (210) 846-4094, fbtradadays.com

Ingram [20-22, 27-29; Sept. 3-4] Nobody's Perfect, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

21

Arlington Chris Stapleton's All-American Road Show, (817) 533-1972, arlington.org

Boerne Moondance Outdoor Concerts: Big Cedar Fever, (830) 249-4616, cibolo.org

Palestine Summer Concert Series: Carson Jeffrey, (903) 724-4385, visitpalestine.com

Castroville [21-22] St. Louis Day, (830) 931-2826, saintlouisdalay.com

26

Kerrville Symphony of the Hills: Homecoming, (830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

Fredericksburg [26-29] Gillespie County Fair, (830) 997-2359, gillespiefair.com

27

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

Tyler [27-29] Texas Rose Breed Horse Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

28

Austin Bat Fest, (512) 441-9015, roadwayevents.com/event/bat-fest

Brenham Lee Greenwood, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com/events

Bryan BCS Library Friends Book Sale for Young Readers, (979) 209-5600, friendsbcs.org

Columbus Country Market, (979) 732-8385, columbusfmtx.org

Lakehills Last Saturday Market, (254) 979-1073, lakehillssaturdaymarket.com

Waco Karem Classics Car Show, (254) 855-3722, karemshriners.com

SEPTEMBER

02

La Grange Fayette County Fair, (979) 968-3911, fayettecountyfair.org

04

Driftwood Sip & Stroll, (713) 299-1728, sunrisebeachvfd.org

Bulverde [4, 11, 18, 25, Oct. 2] Saturday Night Rodeo, (830) 980-2226, tejasrodeo.com

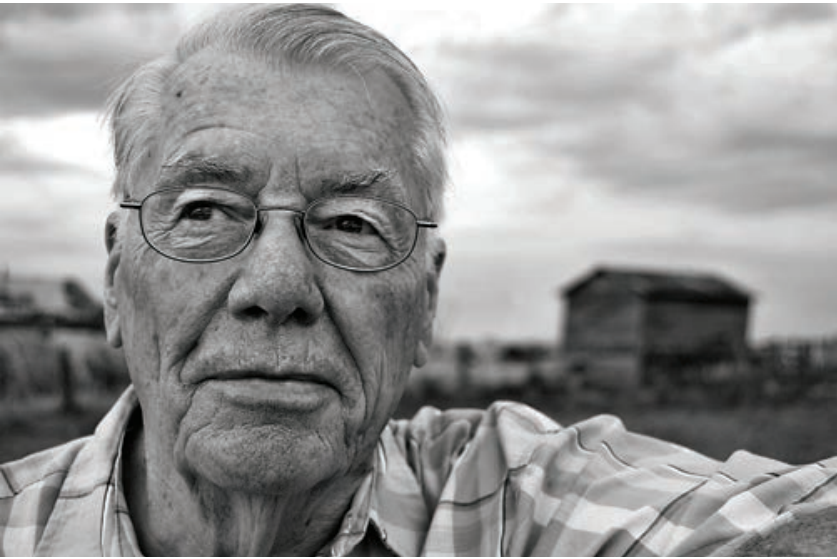
05

New Berlin Sausage Festival, (210) 343-9570, facebook.com/nbtxsausagefest

Portraits

Deep lines and wrinkles tell a person's story, but a twinkle of the eye or sly smile makes us wonder what more there is to tell. Whether carefully posed or caught spontaneously, these Texans have great heads on their shoulders.

BY GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

PAUL HOLLAND
PEDERNALES EC

James Hinkley, an artist and longtime resident of the Panhandle who now lives in Leander.

PATSI TINDEL
LAMAR ELECTRIC

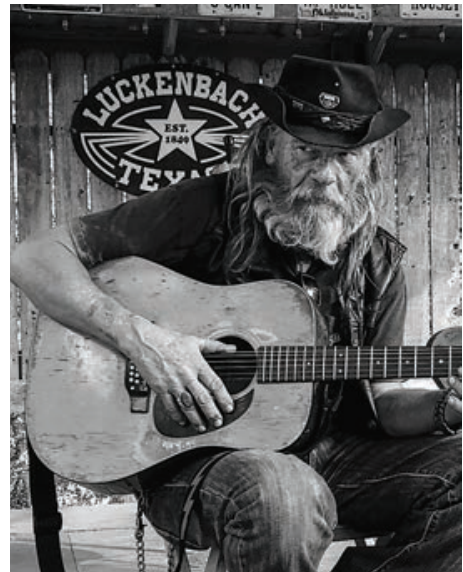
"This gentle giant is known for his outstanding barbecue."

MICHELE TECH
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

"We never miss a chance to stop in Luckenbach. Life is good there."

JANA SIMMONS
JASPER-NEWTON EC

"Hayes Knudsen loves his chickens and finally got one."



Upcoming Contests

- DUE AUG 10** Bridges
- DUE SEP 10** Fired Up!
- DUE OCT 10** Public Art

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Focus on Texas on our website for more Portraits photos from readers.



Pools in the Pasture

Summers on a ranch promise swimming in stock tanks

BY BRENDA KISSKO

WHEN YOU GROW UP on a ranch in West Texas, you learn early about the finer things in life. You eat oysters (of the mountain variety), you hire a full-time lawn service to maintain every acre of your spread (some call it grazing cattle), and you even get your own pair of jeans with free designer rips. And of course, *dahling*, we always had a pool.

Granted, the cows thought those live-stock tanks were for them, but I believed my dad put those tanks all over the ranch just so us girls could take our pick of swimming locations for the day. The water was always ice cold and as pure as it comes, straight from the ground. If we were thirsty, we'd just stick our tongue under the fill pipe for a gulp of goodness straight from God to our mouths. I swear it was better than Fiji Water or Topo Chico.

That's how we spent our summers, my mom, sister and I—with the pickup backed up to a stock tank, pulp fiction in hand, George Strait serenading us from the stereo speakers. No sunscreen allowed because cows don't really like drinking oxybenzone. Any time we had a slumber party, swimming was on the agenda, followed by rolling in a huge pile of cottonseed.

If the tank hadn't been cleaned out in a while, we'd just grab chunks of the moss (picture the Grinch's snot) and throw it to the ground below. Totally cool. But not if you tried to do a handstand and came up with it all over your face. Gross.

My favorite tank—I mean pool—was at my grandparents' ranch. My aunt freed her pet goldfish in it before going off to college at Texas Tech, and—no kidding—those suckers grew to be a foot long and multiplied like rabbits. All us grandkids loved learning to swim there, racing from side to side and seeing who could catch the most fish with our hands. I'm sure their great-great-great-grand-fishes are still swimming around in the tank today.

I think Kevin Bacon did his part to bring tank swimming back in style. In *I Love Dick*, an Amazon series set in Marfa (another one of my favorite places), he ends the pilot episode with a skinny-dip in a tank with a gorgeous view of the mountains. That's some good living right there.

As I'm writing this, I'm trying to remember the last time I swam in a live-stock tank. Sure, I've done rooftop pools, lazy rivers and hot tubs right off the ski slope, but it's been far too long since that good old-fashioned, back-to-my-roots dunk in a redneck infinity pool. Good thing summer's not quite over. ■

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