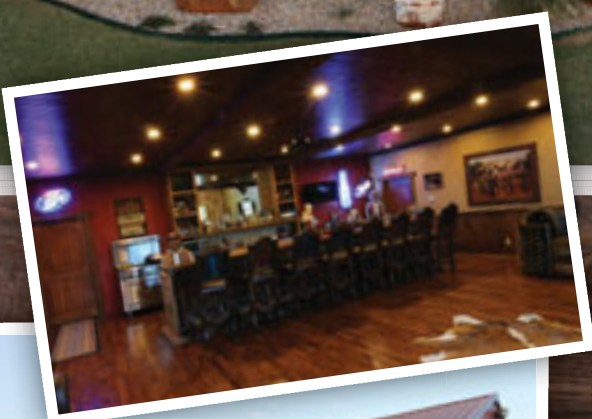


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A great blue heron at Boca Chica Beach near the U.S.-Mexico border

FEATURE

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Story and photos by Julia Robinson

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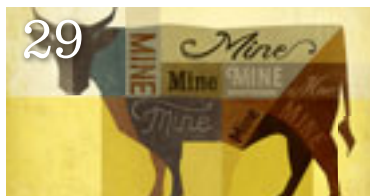
Observations

Five Finds on the Beach

By Melissa Gaskill

NEXT MONTH

Naturally Protective Texan by Nature—a conservation-minded organization founded by Laura Bush—aims to “keep Texas, Texas.”



HERON: JULIA ROBINSON. BUTTERFLY: AMY TSENG | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



ON THE COVER A clean, groomed beach and colorful umbrella await visitors in Port Aransas. Photo by Julia Robinson

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Thursday Night Legend

Growing up in Abilene, we were integrated from junior high onward, so this was educational [*Thursday Night Lights*, February 2018], and I look forward to the book.

I was delighted to see mention of Alphonse Dotson, who played for Houston Yates, Grambling State and the Oakland Raiders. We met Alphonse at the tasting room for his amazing Dotson-Cervantes wines. What a talent and a true gentleman. If you find yourself in Pontotoc and the tasting room is open, stop in to meet a Texas legend.

LINDA NESMITH | AUSTIN
PEDERNALES EC

Texas Pride is OK, Too

A recent letter to the editor from Luke D. Jessup was hurtful [*OK With Us*, February 2018]. He states that he dislikes all things Texas and never says why. I was born in Texas and have lived in other places, but my heart is in Texas.

JUDY PICKEL | MAGNOLIA
SAN BERNARD EC

I have to say, Luke from OK, you prefaced your letter most distinctly. I understood your feelings when I saw your location, and I'm assuming the contempt stems from the Texas-Oklahoma football rivalry. I have a coworker who is a devout Longhorn fan, and I've often sat and listened to him tell his tales with spirited vigor.

That aside, your note was refreshing to read. I don't harbor any hate or ill feelings toward any of our 50 states, but I'm certain the good ol'

Remembering Those Thursday Nights

I remember going to segregated football games as a child but forgot what night they were played on [*Thursday Night Lights*, February 2018]. The players in their uniforms along with the game noises from the band, people yelling and visiting, and announcers calling the plays all made for a fun night.

It is always good to learn about a part of Texas history that we forgot and how far we have come in becoming a truly integrated nation.

CYNTHIA L. MATLOCK | TROUP
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC



USA is strong enough to weather our love-hate sibling relationships without flinching.

ANTHONY PIWETZ | VICTORIA
NUECES EC

Spreading the Love

Nancy Johnson [*Open Hearts*, February 2017] has done a wonderful job in spreading the need for sending a little love



to these special children with heart defects. It truly touched me that such a small act could impact so many lives. Several years ago, a dear friend of ours lost their baby girl to a heart condition. The Driscoll Children's Hospital in Corpus Christi took such good care of not only the baby but the family as well.

I have begun crocheting hats for Nancy. Each time I work on a red hat, I think about and pray for the baby who will wear it. Thank you for bringing her mission to all of your readers.

NORMA GAYLE | CONCAN
BANDERA EC

Old Theaters Revived

Great article about the Globe Theatre [*Saving the Globe*, January 2018]. I wish you could have mentioned the Lyric Theater in Flatonia. Much like

the Globe, it sat idle—from 1967 until 2007. Finally, on April 7, 2017, it hosted its first film, *Secondhand Lions*, with tickets at the old cost of only 35 cents.

JAMES LONGMIRE | FLATONIA

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HAPPENINGS

Painting the Heavens Blue

The skies over Waco will rumble **APRIL 7-8** when the Blue Angels bring their precision aerobatics to the **HEART OF TEXAS AIRSHOW** at Texas State Technical College.

The team of U.S. Navy pilots and their F/A-18 jets perform around the world, flying at speeds approaching 700 mph and sometimes just 18 inches apart.

The Blue Angels were formed right after World War II when Chester W. Nimitz, chief of naval operations, ordered the creation of a flight demonstration team to showcase and promote naval aviation. Nimitz, born in Fredericksburg, commanded all land and sea forces in the Pacific during the war.

The show will include a C-130 nicknamed “Fat Albert,” the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Parachute Demonstration Team (known as the Black Daggers) and other flying performances. In the 72 years since the Blue Angels formed, more than 500,000 people have seen their shows.

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NATIONAL LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

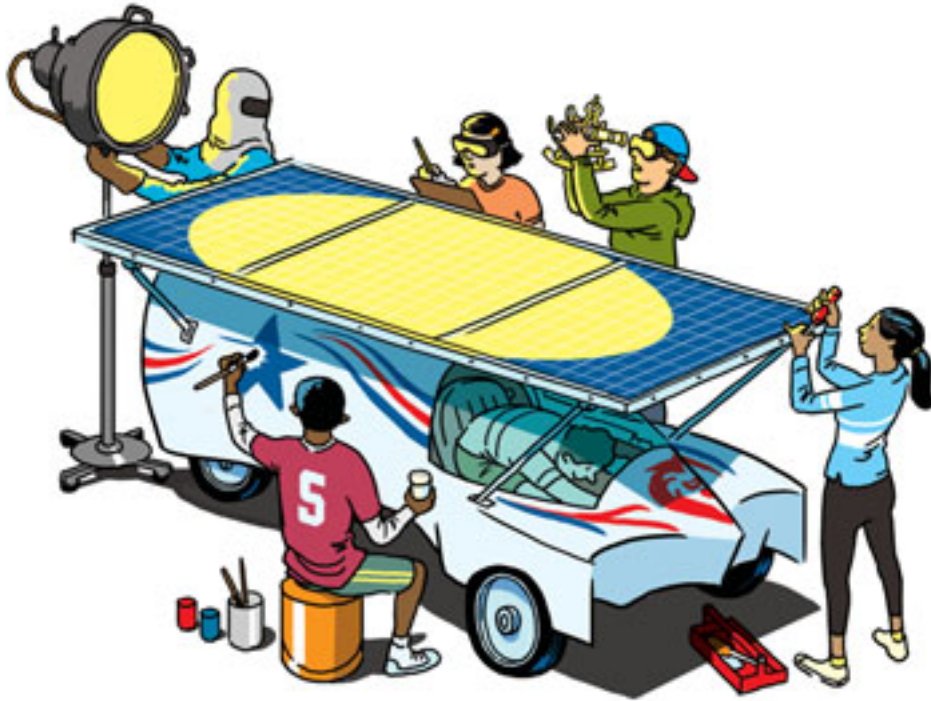
IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

National Lineman Appreciation Day, April 9 this year, celebrates the highly trained workers who keep the electricity flowing to our homes in the face of all kinds of nasty conditions.

Days after Hurricane Harvey struck last August, mosquitoes took over the Texas Coast. “These mosquitoes were huge. They were like small hummingbirds,” says journeyman lineman Corey Turner, above, a foreman at Victoria Electric Cooperative. “They’re just all over our faces—in your eyes, in your ears. They go in our mouth, up our nose. We ate plenty. I promise you that.”

What is it about linemen that makes them willing to deal with challenges like mosquitoes and foul weather as part of their job?

“I think if you get in this line of work and you commit to it, I think you finally get it in your head: You know what, I’m a lineworker. I’m going to do this,” Turner says. “We’ve got people with no lights. And as long as there’s people with no lights... you’re not going to go home and feel good about yourself.”



CO-OP PEOPLE

Solar-Powered Speedsters

DEDICATION, COMMITMENT AND INTEGRITY have propelled a team of Greenville High School students to multiple championships, says Joel Pitts, a Farmers Electric Cooperative member and advisor of the school's solar car team, which hopes to notch another win at this year's Solar Car Challenge, July 17-23.

Since 2012, the Greenville Iron Lions have designed and built solar-powered cars to compete in the annual race that attracts high school teams from across continental North America and the Caribbean. Greenville's first win came in 2016 in a cross-country race from Fort Worth to Mendota Heights, Minnesota, where it beat the nearest competitor in its division by more than 121 miles. The following year, in closed-track events at the Texas Motor Speedway, it placed first in two divisions.

The Iron Lions are currently re-engineering some aspects of their car, which they hope will lead the pack in this year's 1,400-mile race, from Fort Worth to Palmdale, California. "I think our chances are really good," Pitts says.

But competition goes beyond getting to the winner's podium, he says. It's also about providing students with lifelong skills and fostering their growth through problem-solving. "Because ultimately, this project is not so much about winning than it is about the learning process."

CO-OPS IN THE
COMMUNITY

RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY

Tragedy struck the small town of Sutherland Springs on November 5, 2017, when a gunman opened fire on the First Baptist Church, killing 26 men, women and children. Within hours of the shooting, thoughts, prayers and material support for the victims and their families poured in from across the country. Of course, the call to action was loudest for those closest to the catastrophe, including Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative.

GVEC employees sprang to action by contributing equipment to help power care stations for first responders and grieving families. In the weeks that followed, co-op employees donated \$4,270, which GVEC matched dollar-for-dollar, to victims' families. The \$8,540 total went into an account to be distributed evenly among those affected.



"When we learned of the tragedy in the Sutherland Springs community, there was no question we needed to move to action," says Darren Schauer, GVEC general manager and CEO.

ALMANAC

Texas' Shore Thing



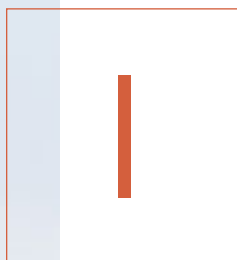
Padre Island National Seashore turns 50 this month. On April 8, 1968, Lady Bird Johnson dedicated the park, the longest seashore in the national park system.



THE TEXAS COAST, BATTERED BY HURRICANE HARVEY IN SOME

BACK
= *to the* =
BEACH

SPOTS, PERSEVERES AND LURES BEACH DWELLERS AND VISITORS ALIKE



I have always wanted to touch the very edges of Texas—to stand on the corners of this great state to see what I could see. After Hurricane Harvey, the mission became a quest to see what's still standing along the Gulf after the largest storm in state history.

When Harvey made landfall August 25, 2017, in the San Patricio EC service area, the Category 4 storm ravaged the central coast before dumping biblical torrents of rain on Houston, Beaumont and some East Texas co-ops. The Texas Gulf Coast has seen more than 40 hurricanes in the past century, but Harvey tops the list of damage inflicted, with estimates of \$125 billion, far outpacing second-place Hurricane Ike's \$30 billion in 2008.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

My Gulf Coast trip begins in early January at the point where the Rio Grande merges into the Gulf of Mexico. I drive through Brownsville, past Magic Valley Electric Cooperative, and I play hide-and-seek with bits of a border wall as I drive south on Boca Chica Boulevard, State Highway 4.

I stop at the historic marker for the Battle of Palmito Ranch. This remote patch of coastal marsh, salt prairie, mesquite and palm is the site of the last land battle of the Civil War. More than a month after Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Union troops advanced to retake Brownsville from the Confederates they thought were retreating. The battle of advances, retreats and skirmishes lasted a few hours, but the Union lost more than 30 soldiers. The Confederates won the day, but the war was already lost.

Just a few miles farther, the Gulf of Mexico opens up, wide and sunny. I take a right onto Boca Chica beach, and in another mile or so, the Rio Grande is shallow and muddy. Black skimmer terns congregate in the middle of the river while herons and egrets stalk the shallows. I wave across the water, a dozen short yards to Mexico, where families and fishermen enjoy their day at the beach. A family visiting from Toronto drives up from the Texas side, curious to see the much-debated border. We sit and watch the birds, the cast of fishing nets, the steady breeze off the Gulf, then slowly drive back down the beach.

It's three hours north on U.S. 77 to Padre Island National Seashore, where I pitch a tent for the night on South Beach. This 70-mile stretch of coastline is the longest undeveloped barrier island in the world. You need four-wheel drive to make it past the five-mile marker, but even a couple of miles down, the beach feels isolated. I find a flat spot at the base of the dunes and settle in for a gorgeous sunset. A half-mile away, I spot a family who ascends the dunes and marvels at the color and expanse of the Texas sky. The Gulf waters turn a shadowy blue as the heavens take on pastels of pink, purple and orange.

A family feeds sea-gulls near Historic Pleasure Pier on Galveston Island.

In the morning, I take my coffee on a bench of driftwood and watch a great blue heron wade through the waves in search of breakfast. At the national seashore's Malaquite Visitor



A path leads to the Gulf at Padre Island National Seashore, which protects 70 miles of coastline.

Center, I find a ranger-led birding tour starting on the expansive deck. Patrick Gamman, chief of interpretation, tells me they dodged a bullet with Harvey. “I expected to come back and see nothing of the visitor center, but Harvey moved just a little bit north and hit Rockport instead.” The park reopened three days after the storm with minor damage to the bayside campgrounds.

2018 marks the 40th year the park has been protecting and releasing sea turtles. Kemp’s ridley hatchlings emerge from late June through mid-July and crawl their way into Gulf waters. This is the only place in Texas where five of the seven species of sea turtles can be found.

Just 20 miles farther north, Mustang Island was not so lucky. Harvey destroyed the bathhouse and damaged roads, jetties and campgrounds. Port Aransas, Corpus Christi and Rockport also suffered major damage. Now, four months after the storm, piles of debris line the roads as families and businesses gut their wind- and water-damaged structures. Everyone is in a hurry to be up and running by spring break.

In Port Aransas, Harvey’s winds peaked at 132 mph, and the damage increases in size and scope. No one is untouched, but everywhere there is renewal. The salty smell of the Gulf is interrupted by roofing tar and sawdust. The sounds of hammers and power tools punctuate the cries of gulls. A new fleet of shiny, candy-colored golf carts awaits beachgoers.

The Port Aransas Museum complex includes a kit house erected in the early 1900s that has survived

Patrick Gamman, below left, chief of interpretation, says Padre Island National Seashore dodged a bullet with Hurricane Harvey. In Port Aransas, right, a business recovers along Alister Street.

“WE’RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT. IF THERE’S A NICE PART, IT’S THAT WE ALL PULLED TOGETHER AND THAT WE’RE PRETTY TOUGH.”

seven hurricanes, including the 1916 storm that wiped out much of the city. Rick Pratt, museum director, says staff prepared the buildings then evacuated and hoped for the best.

“Once we got back into town, we got a lot of volunteers together and we worked 85 or 90 straight hours,” Pratt says. The group removed 3 inches of mud in the boat shop and salvaged what tools they could. “We’re open. We’re not repaired, but we’re open.

“We’re all in the same boat. If there’s a nice part, it’s that we all pulled together and that we’re pretty tough.”

Historic photos lining the walls show resilient islanders recovering from previous storms, the surf culture of the 1960s and 1970s, and the fishing industry that goes back to the 19th century.

Farley Boat Works, an extension of the museum a few blocks away, suffered structural damage and flooding. The active boat-building workshop honors the history of the Farley family, which produced hundreds of wooden skiffs and other craft from 1915–1970. Boat works manager Frank Coletta gives me a short tour of the workshop. A dirty waterline marks the peak of the flood 2 feet above the floor. They already have replaced tools and reopened classes where kids and adults can make model boats, kayaks, stand-up paddleboards and full-sized skiffs.





A surfer leaves the water
after a late afternoon
session in Galveston.

Drinking coffee on a picnic table outside are volunteers Steve Potter and George McDermid, winter Texans from Michigan. The two have been helping build and repair boats at Farley for several years. “If God had intended boats to be made of fiberglass, he would have planted fiberglass trees,” explains McDermid. “Plastic boats are for nothing,” agrees Potter. “Working with wood gets in your blood. We started coming down here in 2002.”

North of Port Aransas, the coastal oaks are stripped of leaves

ornate architecture and stained-glass windows give the aura of a royal residence.

Nearby Reedy Chapel and Ashton Villa witnessed another great moment of American history. On June 19, 1865, Union Gen. Gordon Granger read aloud, according to some accounts, from the balcony of the villa General Order No. 3, which announced the total emancipation of all slaves, more than two years after it was first issued by President Abraham Lincoln. The order was read

again on the steps of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, later called Reedy Chapel.

Down on the seawall, teenagers rush to the Historic Pleasure Pier for rollercoasters and bumper cars. As the sun sets over the water, the lights from the midway splash across the quickly darkening waters.

Back on the mainland, I head to Beaumont to visit the



The Port Aransas Museum, left, contains artifacts from the island's settlement and rich surfing and fishing history. A fisherman, below, casts a net from the Mexico side of the border into the Rio Grande delta as it pours into the Gulf of Mexico.

and limbs. A huge pile of debris lines the median of State Highway 35. The pile is crushed down daily, but the mountain is substantial and still growing as rebuilding continues.

In Rockport, the Fulton Mansion State Historic Site is closed for repairs to the roof while the education center and interactive exhibits remain open. This stately home from the late 1800s has seen many storms over the years and will see many more to come. At nearby Goose Island State Park, the 1,000-year-old live oak called the Big Tree survived the winds and rain even as dozens of younger trees fell.

Galveston is famously the site of the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history, when the hurricane of 1900 came ashore as a Category 4. The residents had little warning of the approaching storm that destroyed most of the town and killed at least 6,000 people. The Galveston Historical Foundation shows a 30-minute documentary called *The Great Storm* at Pier 21 Theater with photos and voices narrating eyewitness accounts.

The Moody Mansion and Gresham's Castle offer visitors a glimpse of Galveston's gilded era in the East End Historic District. The Gresham family welcomed hundreds of survivors into their home, later called Bishop's Palace, after the 1900 hurricane. The





The Moody Mansion, left, in Galveston survived the great hurricane of 1900. The Spindletop Gladys City Boomtown Museum, below, recreates a small, turn-of-the-century town during the oil boom of Beaumont in 1901.

birthplace of the Texas oil boom. The Spindletop Gladys City Boomtown Museum memorializes the day in 1901 when the Lucas geyser erupted over 100 feet in the air from the salt dome flats. The population of Beaumont quintupled in a few short months. Land that didn't sell for hundreds of dollars in 1900 suddenly sold for tens of thousands.

The replica oil town has 15 buildings, blacksmith demos, a barbershop and saloon, gunfights and a geyser blast of water that recreates the Lucas gusher of 1901.

Swamps and bayous become more prevalent the closer you get to the Louisiana border. I drive through what was the epicenter

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to watch a video of this trip to the coast and see more photos.

of Harvey floodwaters—more than 60 inches of rain fell in Nederland near Beaumont—to get to Sea Rim State Park. This 4,000-acre marshland offers 5 miles of beachfront and 10 miles of unique paddling trails.

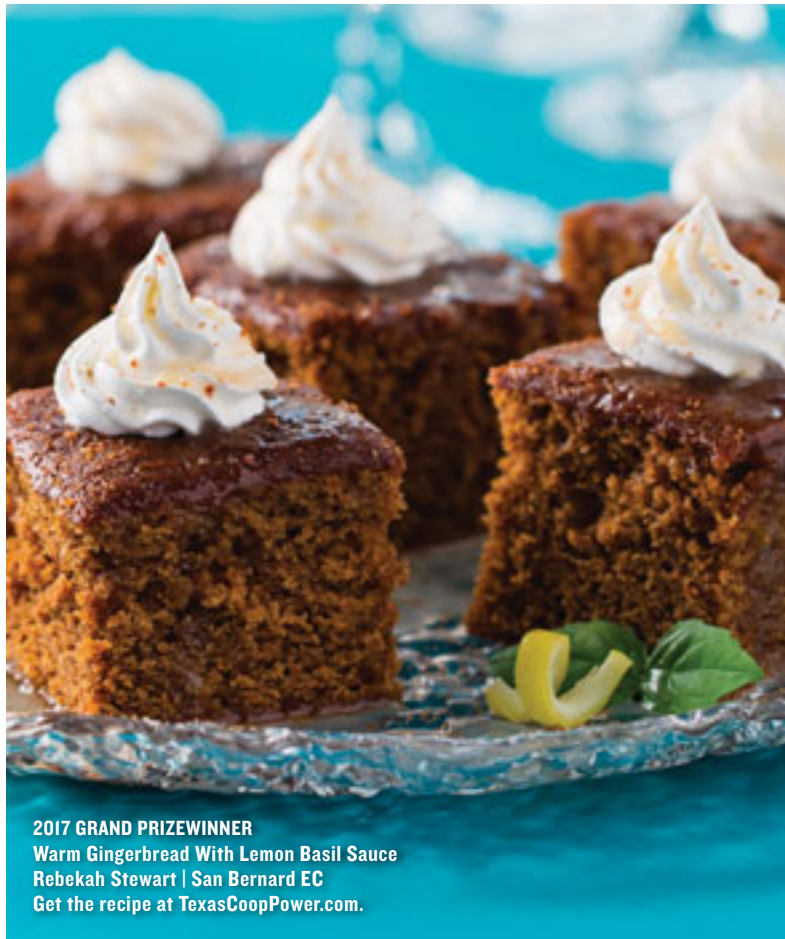
I take a stroll on the ¾-mile Gambusia Nature Trail, a looping boardwalk suspended a few inches above a marsh lagoon. Seaside sparrows and sedge wrens vie for bugs in the waning afternoon light. An alligator slinks through the shallows, momentarily stopping my heart.

I end my Texas coast journey on the beach again, more than 300 miles from the Rio Grande. I have seen miles of debris and hollowed-out homes but also the resilience and perseverance of thousands of Texans.

Learn more about Julia Robinson at juliarobinsonphoto.com.



The boardwalk of the Gambusia Nature Trail runs for three-fourths of a mile above the salt marsh at Sea Rim State Park near Sabine Pass.



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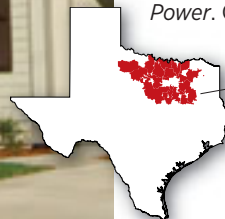
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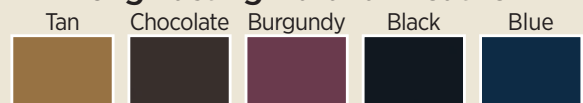
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Honoring Those Who Keep the Lights On



MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER/CEO JERRY BOZE

HELP WANTED: APPLICANTS MUST BE COMFORTABLE working 40 feet in the air for long hours in all types of weather and dangerous conditions while providing

excellent customer service.

That doesn't sound like a job many of us would sign up for, but fortunately for Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative and its members, we have a team of folks who embrace that challenge—our linemen.

On Monday, April 9, Lineman Appreciation Day, TVEC will join cooperatives from across the nation in recognizing the employees who keep the lights on.

Electric linemen do not often receive the recognition they deserve. Linemen across our service territory work every day building and repairing lines to ensure the overall reliability of the system. They are the unsung heroes who stand at the ready

to respond to outages caused by storms, accidents and anything else that may knock out power. They are the ones who, through their tireless efforts, help ensure the system reliability of your member-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperative.

Our linemen, as well as linemen from all across the nation, truly deserve this special day of recognition.

We recognize all electric linemen and crew members for the services they perform around the clock, often in dangerous conditions, so that our members can enjoy the conveniences and safety electricity provides.

Perhaps you have seen them rising in their bucket trucks in howling winds and torrential rains, or in freezing, icy condi-



DON JOHNSON/TVEC

tions—working around the clock near high-voltage power lines until electricity is restored to every member in our co-op community.

In addition to aiding members in our service territory, lineworkers always are willing and eager to volunteer when other communities are in need after a major outage, such as when Hurricane Harvey compelled crews from all over the state—even the Texas Panhandle—to assist their coastal counterparts.

On April 9, please join us by taking a moment to personally thank a lineman for the work he or she does.

Got Power? Thank a Lineman.

Lineman
Appreciation Day
April 9



Bragg, Childress Win Youth Tour Trips



Madelynn Bragg

Writing essays for school may be routine, but for area high school students writing to win a trip to Austin and Washington, D.C., the high stakes seemed to bring out their best.

Madelynn Bragg, a junior at Eustace High School, and Christopher Childress, a home-schooled senior, rose to the top of our entries on the strength of their essays about “the importance of electric cooperatives in today’s world.”

Childress focused on the long history of how co-ops brought modern life to rural residents, and how that still resonates in today’s world.

“My grandfather still remembers when electricity was brought to his family’s farm in Houston County,” he wrote. “It was life changing for his family just like electricity is today for others with seemingly endless electronic tools and appliances available.”



Christopher Childress

Bragg wrote about how the democratic control that the co-op business model provides is a key differentiator from investor-owned utilities.

“Historically, and still today, the story, purpose and investments of electric cooperatives serve as a reflection of democracy,” she wrote. “They were created by and for the people ... and they invest in the future of communities.”

For Texas participants, the Youth Tour trip begins in Austin for some state history lessons, followed by a week in Washington, D.C. with more than 1,500 other teens from around the nation.

Youth Tour began at the suggestion of then-senator Lyndon B. Johnson, who in a 1957 speech noted that youth should go to the capital to “actually see what the flag stands for and represents.”

Thank You, TVEC Members!



We’d like to thank you for participating in the recent TVEC member survey. Your feedback helped us score a 90 in the American Customer Satisfaction Index ACSI*, placing TVEC a full 15 points higher than the energy utility sector average.

Even though ACSI recognizes “customer” satisfaction, TVEC members are, in fact, owners. That’s an important distinction. And it’s why we strive to provide a level of service that’s second to none.

Naturally, we’re honored. But it won’t go to our heads. We’ll remain the dependable source of electricity our members never have to think twice about.

*The American Customer Satisfaction Index is a uniform and independent measure of household consumption experience. As an economic indicator, the ACSI tracks trends in customer satisfaction and provides benchmarking insights of the consumer economy for companies, industry trade associations, and government agencies. The ACSI was developed at the Stephen M. Ross Business School at the University of Michigan, and is produced by ACSI LLC. Scoring comparison based on www.theacsi.org/acsi-benchmarks/benchmarks-by-sector.



Do I Really Need To Call?

YES! DON'T MAKE A JUDGMENT CALL; MAKE AN 811 CALL. HOMEOWNERS OFTEN MAKE risky assumptions about whether or not they should get their utility lines marked, but every digging job requires a phone call—even small projects.

I am only planting a small flower bed or bush.

Did you know that many utilities are buried just a few inches below ground? You can easily hit a line when digging for simple gardening projects, like planting flowers or small shrubs. Make the call to 811 anytime you're putting a shovel in the ground to keep yourself and your community safe.

I am just installing a mailbox.

Buried utility lines are everywhere. Installing mailboxes and fences are examples of projects that absolutely require a call to 811 to know what's below before digging. Hitting a line can knock out service to your home and neighborhood or result in fines, damage and serious injury. Don't make a judgment call—make the call to 811 every time you dig.

I am digging in a spot that was previously marked.

Erosion and root system growth can alter the depth and location of buried lines, or your utility companies might have completed work on their lines since the last time you dug—so you must call 811 before you dig—each and every time.

I hired a contractor or landscaper to do the digging project.

Be sure to check with your contractor or landscaper to make sure the call to 811 gets made before digging begins—whether it means you making the call or your contractor doing so. Never let digging work begin without the call to 811. It's not worth the risk.

I am only digging in a small area and don't want my entire yard marked.

If you are planning to dig only in a small portion of your yard, you can outline the area in white paint or white flags available at home improvement stores to ensure that only the utilities in that part of your yard will be located and marked. Be sure to let your 811 operator know about your plans, and he or she will help ensure the proper area is marked by utility locators.



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Did You Know?

April is Keep America Beautiful Month, recalling Lady Bird Johnson's rich legacy of protecting and beautifying our national lands and her advocacy for the wild, natural beauty of Texas in particular.



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Power Tip

Smart landscaping can lower your electric bills. Shade for your air conditioner can trim 10 percent off your cooling costs. Trees on the east and west sides of your home also provide beneficial shade to help keep your home cooler.



Expanding Your Home?

Steer clear of power lines

YOU'VE HAD AN EYE ON THE PERFECT SPOT FOR YOUR GETAWAY CABIN. THE VIEW—well, it's breathtaking! But if you try to build your dream home too close to a power line, you may regret it before you have a chance to enjoy it.

Electric co-ops have found new homes where the roof came within 8 feet of an existing power line, or where a swimming pool or barn was built beneath a line. When you think about hauling in materials and working in those areas and folks using the pool or getting too close to the roof, it's pretty scary.

Whether you're a contractor or a do-it-yourselfer, always use caution when working near power lines. Never get closer than 10 feet to an overhead line.

Electricity flows through metal, wood, water and many other conductive materials, including human beings—all in an effort to reach the ground. Small birds can sit on power lines unhurt because they don't create a path to the ground. But you and your ladder do.

A line doesn't have to be touched to spark danger—electricity can jump, or arc, from a power line to a person or equipment that gets too close. When equipment comes into contact with power lines, it becomes energized and dangerous.

If an object, such as a scaffold, must be moved near overhead power lines, have someone specifically watching to make sure a minimum 10-foot clearance is maintained between the power lines and the object.

If your vehicle comes into contact with an overhead power line, don't leave the vehicle. As long as you stay inside and avoid touching outside metal, you should avoid an electrical hazard. Warn others to stay away and call for help. If you need to exit the vehicle to summon help or because of fire, jump out without touching any wires or the exterior of the vehicle, keep your feet together and hop to safety.

Overhead power lines are not insulated. Touching a power line or an object in contact with one can result in serious injury—even death. Please contact Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative if you need to work near power lines so that we can help you stay safe.

Managing Rights-of-Way the Right Way

AT TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE our goal is to provide safe, reliable and economical electric service to our members. Managing trees and other vegetation around our facilities and in rights-of-way is key to achieving that goal.

Trees may seem harmless on a calm, sunny day. But add a bit of wind on a stormy night and those towering pillars might threaten your home's electric supply. We perform routine maintenance of trees and other vegetation throughout the system to help prevent outages.

Maintenance includes pruning trees, removing hazardous trees, mowing and cutting brush, and applying herbicides. These activities all are designed to minimize adverse environmental impacts and fully comply with applicable laws and regulations. They are essential to maintaining reliable electric service for our members and to provide for the safety of both your family and the general public.

A clear right-of-way is so important that tree-trimming and rights-of-way maintenance programs are required for a cooperative to receive its safety accreditation from our national association.

TVEC is committed to providing safe and reliable power, and our vegetation management program is an important part of fulfilling that promise.



THE TVEC CHARITABLE FOUNDATION recently awarded 11 grants totaling \$27,500. Recipients of the grants include:

**Crandall ISD Education Foundation
\$3,000**

The Crandall ISD Education Foundation awards grants to CISD teachers for innovative programs.

**God's Helping Hand Food
Program, Mabank
\$5,000**

God's Helping Hand is a food assistance organization based at First United Methodist Church of Mabank and serving families and individuals in need in the Cedar Creek Lake area.

**Eustace Intermediate Backpack
Program
\$3,000**

Eustace Intermediate School's "Building Better Bulldogs" backpack program provides food and hygiene items for students in need.

**Friends of the Van Zandt County
Library
\$2,000**

The Van Zandt County Library provides a 7-week summer reading program for ages 3-12 including entertainment and prizes to encourage young readers.

**The Men and Ladies of Honor,
Wills Point
\$500**

The Wills Point chapter of Men and Ladies of Honor provides a 2-year mentorship and teaching program for boys and girls during the formative teenage years.

**Family Peace Project, Athens
\$3,500**

The Family Peace Project provides residential and non-residential support for families in crisis. Services include emergency food and personal care assistance, peer support groups, crisis intervention, life skills training and much more.

**Men Unleashed, Athens
\$3,000**

The mission of Men Unleashed is to bring men from all walks of life together in order to model and support a brotherhood of positive, inspirational leaders in our communities.

**The King's Rein, Larue
\$2,000**

The King's Rein provides equine therapy programs and support for those in need, targeting drug and alcohol rehabilitation, domestic violence, sex trafficking, mental disorders and other needs.

**Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas
\$500**

The Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas serves more than 3,000 girls with camp activities at Camp Bette Perot, located near Palestine.

**Forever Families, Kemp
\$3,000**

Forever Families is an organization dedicated to helping mothers and children in crisis including domestic violence, homelessness and incarceration.

Win \$25 Just for Reading

Somewhere, hidden on Pages 18-23, is a TVEC account number. Read closely. If the account number is yours, contact the Member Services Department by April 30 to receive a \$25 credit on your electric bill. Don't miss out—you could be a winner!



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Van Zandt Memorial Brings In Visitors With Full-Scale Displays

For anyone passing through the intersection of state highways 19 and 243, it is hard to miss the F-4 Phantom fighter jet poised in perpetual flight on the southeast corner.

With a little bit more time, you can pick out a U.S. Coast Guard vessel and Vietnam-era UH-1 “Huey” helicopter. But for those who make the time to stop and explore the grounds of the Van Zandt County Veterans Memorial, the spot really shows itself as a unique collection of items meant to celebrate every branch of the U.S. armed forces.

In a retail space adjacent to the memorial, a small museum and gift shop is open five days a week and all of it is lovingly maintained by a group of dedicated volunteers. 51083002

“We had 5,000 visitors last year, at least the ones we know of,” said Ron Carroll, who serves as the president of the memorial’s board of directors. “And we don’t owe anything, which is not something I could have said four years ago, so we have come a long way with fundraising.”

The jet aircraft is actually on loan from the U.S. Air Force, but the other items have been purchased and installed using donations and fundraiser proceeds.

“This is a result of the vision of Red Montgomery, who died last year,” Carroll said. “He started it and worked with the state and city to let us put it here. It has really been a community effort with participation from everyone to make it what it is.”

Carroll noted the importance of passing on a sense of history to the next generation, and how the memorial can be a place of education as well as remembrance.

For more information about the memorial, visit vzcm.org.



Van Zandt County Veterans Memorial Board President Ron Carroll accepts an Operation Round Up grant check from TVEC PR Representative Kari Wilmeth.



Founded in 2013, the TVEC Charitable Foundation is an independent, nonprofit organization. The foundation was created to serve the community and help improve the quality of life for residents in our service area. **The foundation is funded entirely by donations from TVEC members who participate in Operation Round Up.** For more information, please call 1-800-766-9576 or visit tvec.net.

10TH ANNUAL

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Rousting the Rustlers

Cattle raisers' organization employs special rangers to fight centuries-old crime

BY LADAWN FLETCHER

THE THIEVES ARE BRAZEN. COWS, HORSES, sheep—any livestock—can be swiped and sold relatively quickly at full market value. Depending on what is stolen, it can be days and sometimes weeks before the rightful owner even notices. But when the theft comes to light, one of the first calls to be made is to the special rangers.

The special rangers, not to be confused with Texas Rangers, are a select group of law-enforcement agents licensed by the states of Texas and Oklahoma and dedicated solely to agriculture crimes.

Hal Dumas, a special ranger since 1993, has seen a lot in the decades since he joined the force. It is a far cry from his days as a Houston police officer or as the sheriff of Wharton County. His uniform on any given day is crisp jeans, a white shirt and the hat he places beside him on the sofa as he talks. The only tells that confirm his special status: his badge and the gleaming black gun holstered to his side.

"Almost all of what we do as a special ranger is cold cases," says Dumas. Theft and fraud to be exact.

Catching cattle thieves is why the force was created in 1877 by the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. Cattle raisers, tired of losing their profits to rustlers, banded together to create this specialized and dedicated force.

To this day, the 30 agents who roam the rural roads of Texas and Oklahoma are funded by the TSCRA, not by either state's government. The rangers investigate crimes not just for members but for any rancher or farmer who experiences theft.

Dumas has his work cut out for him. He supervises Region 5, which includes Milam and all counties east of it, up to Leon County. His region and Region 6 to the north contain 70 percent of the cattle in the state and 70 percent of the sale barns.



Cattle raisers not familiar with the special rangers often call the local sheriff when their equipment or livestock is stolen. The special rangers work closely with other law enforcement agencies.

"We work with sheriff's departments all the time," Dumas says. "Usually that is what we are doing, assisting another agency. We have the information on all the cattle sold in the state. They are a great help to us, and we're a great help to them."

There are more than 120 sale barns in Texas, and on any given day, some of them are open for business. Buyers and sellers from surrounding counties converge in metal buildings on dusty lots and, with little more than a handshake and exchange of checks, make deals to transfer ownership of livestock.

In some cases, Dumas says, if a bad check or similar issue has delayed payment, the rangers give buyers a chance to pay before stepping in. Some of these cases involve millions of dollars.

"We filed a case several years ago that ranged from Crockett to Caldwell, and we recovered close to 30 pieces of equipment

worth close to a half-million dollars," Dumas says breezily.

Livestock can be worth even more.

There have been multimillion-dollar deals where the buyer will purchase cattle from an organization that sells to individuals or puts cattle in a feedlot, Dumas explains. They buy as many as 10 or 15 truckloads and pay for them on time. If they get slow on paying or they go bankrupt, then the special rangers might have to get involved.

As old-fashioned as cattle rustling sounds, modern technology helps to catch the bad guys. Branding, the most effective way to identify cattle, was at one time identified via microfiche. Now each special ranger is equipped with a tablet and has instant access to databases across the state. Surveillance cameras on property also sometimes help.

Dumas believes cattle thieves will always be among us. Technology helps stop them or catch them, but he has old-fashioned advice for the modern rancher. "Brand your cattle."

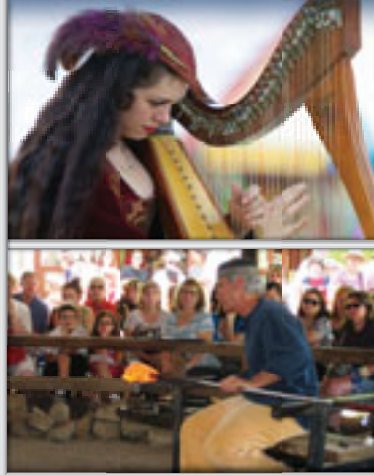
LaDawn Fletcher is a Houston-area writer.

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Breakfast Pastries

WHAT BETTER WAY TO WAKE UP THAN to the aroma of freshly baked pastries? Whether it's fragrant banana muffins, buttery scones or the sheer delight of a high-rising, oven-baked pancake, breakfast pastries are a delicious way to make any day feel special. This month's winners are ideal for celebratory brunches ('tis the season for bridal showers and graduation parties), but they're also easy enough to prepare on a weekday. A family favorite is this cinnamon-scented quick bread that combines a moist, tender texture with a crackly, almond crust. Consider baking two and freezing one to brighten up a future morning.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Snickerdoodle Loaf

BATTER

- 2½ cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 3 eggs, room temperature
- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ cup whole milk yogurt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon almond extract

CINNAMON SUGAR

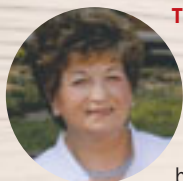
- 3 tablespoons light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ cup sliced almonds

1. **BATTER:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and cinnamon.
3. In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add the sour cream, yogurt and extracts and beat until well-combined. Add the dry ingredients and mix until the batter just

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Recipes

Breakfast Pastries



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

HELEN COUNTS | GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Counts' Puff Oven Pancake is also known as a Dutch baby, a large, fluffy pancake that's whisked together in minutes and bakes into a billowy show-stealer. Vary the toppings to suit your mood or occasion.

Sprinkle with Parmesan or Gruyère for a savory bite, or top with fresh fruit and powdered sugar.

Puff Oven Pancake

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- Powdered sugar
- Fresh fruit or berries

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
2. In a large mixing bowl, briefly beat the eggs. Whisk in milk, flour, sugar and salt until fairly smooth (do not over mix). Cover the batter and let stand for 30 minutes.
3. Place the butter in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet, or similarly sized

baking dish, and heat in oven until melted. Swirl skillet to coat the bottom and sides with melted butter.

4. Pour batter into skillet and bake 15–20 minutes, or until it rises very high and is billowy on the edges and golden brown.

5. Remove from heat and cool for 5 minutes. Place fruit in the center crevice of pancake and dust with powdered sugar. ▶ Serves 4–6.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

comes together (do not over mix).

4. Pour half the batter into the pan and smooth the top with a rubber spatula.

5. CINNAMON SUGAR: In a small bowl, whisk together the brown sugar and cinnamon. Sprinkle half the cinnamon-sugar mixture evenly over the batter in the pan.

6. Pour the rest of the batter over the cinnamon sugar and smooth the top.

Sprinkle the remaining cinnamon sugar over the batter and top with the almonds.

7. Bake 50–60 minutes or until a tester inserted in the middle of the loaf comes out mostly clean. Remove from oven and cool for 10 minutes before running a knife around the sides of the pan and turning out the loaf onto a wire rack to cool completely. ▶ Serves 6–8.

COOK'S TIP Wrapped in plastic wrap or foil, this bread will keep 3–4 days.

Spiced Banana Muffins

JILEEN PLATT | BOWIE-CASS EC

An unexpected blend of spices and a moist texture set these banana muffins apart. Adding a bit of whole-wheat flour lends a satisfying texture and balances the sweetness. For a crunchy topping, sprinkle cinnamon and coarse sugar over the tops of the muffins before baking.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon cardamom
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1½ cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 5–6 ripe bananas, mashed
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Apply cooking spray to 2 muffin tins or line with paper baking cups.

2. Whisk together flours, baking soda, spices and salt in a medium bowl.

3. In a separate mixing bowl, cream butter and sugars. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Add bananas,

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\$100 Recipe Contest

September's recipe contest topic is **All Hail the Cookie Jar**. What fresh-baked goodies do you stock in your cookie jar? The deadline to send recipes is **April 10**.

ENTER ONLINE at 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.

oil and vanilla; mix well. Add the dry ingredients and mix until moistened, being careful not to over mix.

4. Spoon batter into muffin tins. Bake 15–17 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.

5. Remove from heat and cool muffins in tins for 5 minutes. Invert and finish cooling, right-side up, on a wire rack.

► Makes 24 muffins.

Cranberry Scones

CHRISTINE HENDERSON | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

These tender crumb scones are easy to assemble. For optimal texture, use very cold butter. “These are great fresh from the oven or split open and spread with butter, honey, or my favorite—whipped cream,” Henderson says.

- 3 cups flour**
- ½ cup plus 3 tablespoons sugar, divided use**
- 1 tablespoon baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon baking soda**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**

- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter**
- 1 egg, beaten**
- 1 cup buttermilk**
- ½ teaspoon almond extract**
- 1 cup dried cranberries**
- ½ cup chopped walnuts (optional)**
- 1 tablespoon finely grated orange zest**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Coat a baking sheet with cooking spray or line with parchment.

2. Whisk together the flour, ½ cup sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a large bowl. Using a fork (or your fingers) cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Mix in egg, buttermilk and almond extract until it forms a slightly moist batter. Stir in cranberries, nuts and orange zest.

3. Using a spoon, scoop 3-inch rounds of batter onto baking sheet (keeping them about 2 inches apart). Sprinkle remaining sugar over each scone. Place baking sheet on center oven rack and bake 15 minutes or until lightly browned.

► Makes 12 scones.



Top of the Morning

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TOAST AND SLATHER Top toasted quick breads, poundcake or muffins with cream cheese, lemon curd, seasonal jam or lightly sweetened ricotta cheese.

INFUSE SYRUP Gently heat pure maple syrup with blackberries, raspberries or blueberries (fresh or frozen), and include a cinnamon stick and/or vanilla bean. —PD

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



▲ **CAROL POPE**, Bowie-Cass EC: Tad Hobbs of Hooks shares a gentle touch with his horse, Gingersnap.



▲ **KANDICE LAMMERT**, Heart of Texas EC: "Lucas Lammert, age 4, mutton bustin' at the HOT Fair in Waco"



▲ **DAVID PENA**, Pedernales EC: "My son loved the sound the spur made as he walked."



▲ **JULIE KLAMMER**, Pedernales EC: Mylie Pearl, 3, wears chaps and a cowgirl hat for a Texas birthday party.



UPCOMING CONTESTS

AUGUST	SCHOOL'S OUT	DUE APRIL 10
SEPTEMBER	WEDDING FUNNIES	DUE MAY 10
OCTOBER	CLOCKS	DUE JUNE 10

All entries must include name, address, daytime phone and co-op affiliation, plus the contest topic and a brief description of your photo.

ONLINE: Submit highest-resolution digital images at TexasCoopPower.com/contests. **MAIL:** Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We do not accept entries via email. We regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.

◀ **BECCA BRIDGE**, South Plains EC: These 1952 cowgirls—Jane Powell Bridge, left, and sister Pat Powell Hightower—are ready for the rodeo.

Pick of the Month Cajun Heritage Festival

Port Arthur April 7

(409) 835-2787, cajunheritagefest.com

Food, drink and music mark this annual festival, which takes place as the coastal community of Port Arthur continues to recover from Hurricane Harvey. The Category 4 hurricane, which struck Texas on August 25, 2017, caused \$125 billion in damage and dropped 4 feet of rain on Port Arthur and 5 feet on neighboring communities.



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April 7

Kilgore Gregg County Walk Like MADD, (903) 534-6000, walklikemadd.org

Terrell Big Band Hangar Dance & Dinner, (972) 551-1122, bftsmuseum.org

8

Crockett Ernie Haase & Signature Sound, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

11

San Angelo [11-14] Just Between Friends, (325) 716-7356, sanangelo.jbfsale.com

13

Georgetown [13-14] Quilt and Stitchery Show, (512) 658-6973, handcraftsunlimited.com

Neches [13-22] 1836 Chuckwagon Race, (903) 721-9111, 1836chuckwagonrace.com

14

Cedar Park Austin Walk for PKD, (508) 981-3011, walkforpkd.org/austin



April 14
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Hearne Crossroads Hometown Festival, (979) 279-5372, crossroadshometownfestival.com

San Saba Music Series Presents Jason Boland, (325) 372-5144, visitsansabatexas.com

Schulenburg Sausagefest, (979) 743-4514, schulenburgsausagesfest.com

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Waco Rootstock: A Texas Wine Festival, (254) 848-4343, rootstockwinefest.com

Chappell Hill [14-15] Official Bluebonnet Festival of Texas, (979) 836-3696, visitbrenhamtexas.com

19

San Angelo [19-21] Regional Cavalry Competition, (325) 657-4444, fortconcho.com

Waxahachie [19-22] Crossroads of Texas Film Festival, (469) 309-4045, crossroadsoftx.com

20

Edinburg Got Faith Concert Series, (956) 358-2755, gotfaithmusic.com

Carthage [20-21] Piney Woods Quilt Festival, (903) 646-1791, carthagetexas.us/main-street

Henderson [20-21] Antique Tractor Show, (903) 889-2671, visithendersontx.com

Grandview [20-22] Antique Alley Texas, (817) 666-5024, antiquealleytexas.com

21

Calvert Calvert 150: A Texas Celebration Fit for a Queen, (979) 364-2323, calverttx.us

Hillsboro Hill County Master Gardeners Plant Sale, (254) 582-4022, hill.agrilife.org

Brazoria [21-22] Migration Celebration, 1-844-842-4737, migrationcelebration.com

Dripping Springs [21-22] Redbud Artisan Market, (512) 858-7892

Whitney [21-22, 27-29] *Doublewide, Texas*, (254) 694-5105, lakewhitneyarts.org

April 20-21
Henderson
Antique Tractor Show



22

Wilson VFD Fundraiser Dinner and Auction, (806) 778-7326

26

Freeport [26-28] RiverFest, (979) 233-6061, freeportriverfest.com

Fredericksburg [26-29] Hill Country Film Festival, 1-866-224-7714, hillcountryff.com

27

Clute [27-29, May 4-6] Little Theater's Production of *Hamlet*, (979) 265-7661, brazosportcenter.org

May 6

Wylie Wylie 500 Pedal Car Race, (972) 516-6016, wylietexas.gov

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Where Birders Perch

World Birding Center spans nine sites along Rio Grande Valley

BY EILEEN MATTEI

FROM SOUTH PADRE ISLAND ALONG THE Rio Grande to Roma, 134 miles to the west, nine World Birding Center sites entice serious birders and amateur naturalists with extraordinary, year-round watchable wildlife. Easily accessible, the WBC includes three state parks and six urban nature preserves where it is possible to enjoy one-on-one encounters with birds, butterflies, Texas tortoises and semi-tropical, thorny, flowering Mother Nature.

Beginning birders count red-crowned parrots, great kiskadees and green jays among the Rio Grande Valley's large, loud and colorful species that make it easy to enjoy wildlife watching. Veteran birders come from around the world to spot birds not seen anywhere else. World Birding Center habitats range from tidal wetlands to thorn-scrub forests. Brimming with native plants, the sites attract an abundance of semitropical and migratory birds. This inspires locals to grow native plants to nourish and shelter wildlife.

The WBC's easternmost location is on South Padre Island, and the other eight sites lie within a few miles of Interstate 2 and Highway 83, which traverse the lower RGV.

At **South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center**, you can observe birds up close because the birds here don't spook easily, says Javier Gonzalez, park naturalist. In contrast, he adds, the alligators living in the freshwater wetland tend to shy away from noisy groups. "The adjacent salt marsh lets you compare the differences in habitats and wildlife," Gonzalez says. "With only one trail and one boardwalk, you share experiences with people you meet and learn from each other."

Thirty-six miles inland, **Resaca de la Palma State Park's** diverse habitats include



a wetland that weaves through the park's 1,200 acres. As guests roam the park's grassland, thorn scrub and old-growth ebony forests, they are likely to spot Altamira orioles, groove-billed anis, green jays and kingbirds.

The **Harlingen Arroyo Colorado** site of the WBC encompasses the 54-acre Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and the 40-acre Harlingen Thicket. Volunteer Texas master naturalists have collaborated to transform parts of the park into an indigenous habitat densely packed with native plants.

Scattered through **Estero Llano Grande State Park's** 230 acres of grassland and woods are ponds that host alligators, black-bellied whistling ducks, roseate spoonbills and wood storks. A wildlife-watching pavilion overlooks Ibis Pond and serves as the ideal starting point for the popular owl prowls and night hikes.

In addition to the birds and butterflies crowding the gardens, the **Old Hidalgo Pumphouse Museum** boasts an up-close perspective on the massive steam-driven pumps that drew water from the Rio Grande to irrigate farm fields starting in 1909.


Quinta Mazatlan, a historic 1930s adobe mansion, takes center stage at McAllen's

urban wildlife habitat. Resident semitropical birds perched along the trails blend in with 38 bronze sculptures of leafcutter ants, bats, owls, horned lizards and javelinas.

At **Edinburg Scenic Wetlands**, two large ponds and several small ones act like magnets for kids, wading birds, songbirds, foxes and dragonflies. "We're an educational nature center, an urban oasis for watchable wildlife rather than a native forest," says Marisa Oliva-Rodriguez, who manages the 40-acre site. "The idea is to get kids outside and enjoying it." Park admission includes use of binoculars and playsets with dip nets.

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park is renowned for hawk watches during seasonal migrations, while **Roma Bluffs'** observation deck high above the Rio Grande looks out over the river and islands and into Mexico. Every step on the World Birding Center trail delivers wildlife encounters in this lively, semitropical environment.

Eileen Mattei, a member of Nueces and Magic Valley ECs, lives in Harlingen.

 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see more photos from the World Birding Center.

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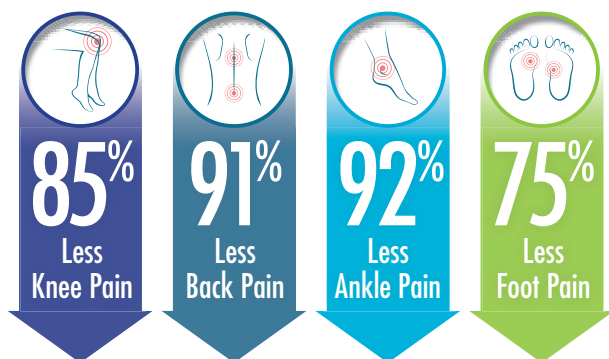
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