

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

¡VIVA CONJUNTO!

The soul music of South Texas
reaches far and wide

Trinity Valley EC
Local News
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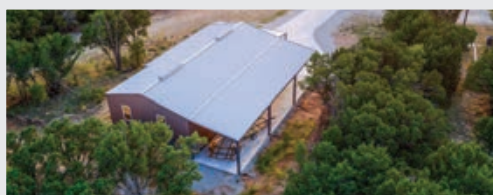
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Eduardo Garza of Mission was one of the big winners at the 2019 Big Squeeze youth accordion competition.

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ON THE COVER Flaco Jiménez brought the conjunto accordion to Amsterdam in 1989. Photo by Frans Schellekens | Getty Images

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Scrumptious and Healthy

I am tickled to death to welcome Megan Myers as the new food editor [*New Year's Resolution*, January 2020]. I have eaten healthy most of my life and am excited to be able to consult *Texas Co-op Power* for new recipes.

The January meals look scrumptious, so I am already a fan.

ELAINE FRIEDBERG | BRENHAM
BLUEBONNET EC

When I was in college, I had to subsist on the meal plan since money was tight. A vegetable that was often served in the cafeteria was Brussels sprouts. I absolutely hated them.

As I have gotten older, I have learned how important it is to eat fresh vegetables.

I can't say enough good things about Megan Myers' recipe for Spicy Glazed Brussels Sprouts. It was easy, and even my husband enjoyed the tasty vegetables.

NANCY GLASSCOCK | SONORA
SOUTHWEST TEXAS EC



Brews and Pews

Back Pew Brewing in Porter is located on acreage that once belonged to a little country church [*Texas Feels a Draft*,

Courthouses as Art

As an artist and student of Texas courthouse architecture, I loved Sheryl Smith-Rodgers' article about architect James Riely Gordon [*Gordon's Gold*, January 2020]. Gordon's iconic structures make some of the most interesting subjects for my Texas courthouse drawings [Wise County, right].

I suspect that there was a rivalry between counties for who could commission the grandest structure, and Gordon was certainly proactive promoting his vision of civic buildings.

NORMAN BEAN | MARTINDALE | BLUEBONNET EC



January 2020]. The church interior has been redesigned into a taproom for customers.

The owners invited the priest from St. Isidore Episcopal Church and the congregation to come and help bless their brewery.

MARY VAZQUEZ | MONTGOMERY
MIDSOUTH EC

Tamalada Tradition

We used to do *tamaladas* with my mom and all eight daughters [*The Call of the Tamalada*, December 2019]. Sadly, we lost Mom [a] few years ago, and this year we lost one of our sisters, but the tradition continues even as our circle gets smaller.

BETTY KEIPER | VIA FACEBOOK

At the risk of coming across too picky, I would like to point out that the singular of tamales is not *tamale*; it is *tamal*. In Spanish, when a word ends in "l," it

will be pluralized by adding "es."

MIKE MCEWEN | JACKSONVILLE
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

Editor's Note: Yes, in Spanish, the singular is *tamal*, originally tamalli in the Nahuatl language. However, the word has been adapted into English as *tamale*.

Letters About Letters

Having grown up in a ranching family, I knew how to change a tire and drive stick shift early on [Letters, January 2020]. Having taught high school 37 years, I always told my students they needed to know those two things, even if they never needed to use them.

CHARLOTTE CASSIN | BATESVILLE
MEDINA EC

A reader proposes a "dues requirement in Texas for VFDs." Emergency services districts may

be created where all property owners—not just those who feel like it—contribute, and many volunteer fire departments receive funding via the ESD mechanism. Voters must approve the proposed district and tax rate.

RON BOERGER | BRUSHY CREEK
PEDERNALES EC

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Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

The Box Tops Are Back

A theater from the 1940s brings a soul band from the 1960s to a 2020s Texas audience.

The **BOX TOPS** of Memphis, Tennessee, who released a string of hit singles in the late 1960s, are back on the scene and play a show **MARCH 13** at the Brauntex Theatre in downtown **NEW BRAUNFELS**.

The Box Tops' heyday was short-lived, but they became a sensation with hit singles *The Letter*, *Cry Like a Baby* and *Soul Deep*.

The Brauntex has a storied history, opening a month after the bombing of Pearl Harbor with a showing of *Birth of the Blues*, starring Bing Crosby and Mary Martin. Today, it is a regular stop for touring and Texas acts.

INFO ► (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org/tickets.html

WEB EXTRAS

► Find more happenings online.



BOX TOPS, 1968

FLASHBACK

175 Years Ago

Congress passed a joint resolution annexing Texas on March 1, 1845, and on December 29 that year, Texas joined the union as the 28th state.



SPORTS SECTION

RANGERS ARE MADE IN THE SHADE

Plenty of Texas Rangers fans will tell you it was the best catch they've ever seen. During a game at then-Ameritrust Field in Arlington on July 1, 2006, Mike Lamb of the Houston Astros sent a shot barreling toward the wall in center field. The Rangers' Gary Matthews gave chase, leapt and snagged the ball with his back to home plate, twisting in the air to rob a home run.

"People are always bringing it up," Matthews told the *Los Angeles Times* a year later. "A few days ago, I was on deck in Cincinnati, and I heard a guy in the crowd say, 'That's the best catch I've ever seen.' "

Over the course of 26 seasons, sunny Globe Life Park in Arlington saw scores of big moments, including a perfect game pitched by Kenny Rogers on July 28, 1994.

But when the Rangers take the field for the start of the season March 31, players—and fans—will no longer have to contend with the sun. The new \$1.1 billion Globe Life Field, just across the street, features 40,000 seats under a retractable roof.

BY THE NUMBERS



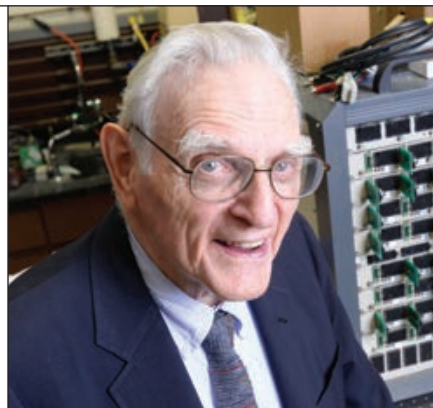
Did you know?

The rubber band was patented 175 years ago. British inventor Stephen Perry received his patent March 17, 1845.

More than 30 million pounds of rubber bands are sold in the U.S. every year.



The largest rubber band ball ever made used
700,000 *rubber bands and*
stood 6 feet, 7 inches tall.
It was made by a Florida man. Some things
aren't always bigger in Texas.



TECH KNOWLEDGE

Powering the World

The average Texan retires when they're about 64 years old.

John Goodenough passed that mark back in 1986, the same year he joined the University of Texas, after decades spent developing lithium-ion batteries.

He hasn't stopped.

Now, Goodenough, who's 97, is the oldest person to win the Nobel Prize—for his battery breakthroughs that power the smartphones, laptops and cars we use every day. He shares the prize with two other scientists.

Of course, Goodenough is still going. He still works 8-10 hours a day, according to his assistant at UT, and just last year announced a breakthrough: non-flammable, glass powder-based lithium-ion batteries with twice the energy density of traditional lithium-ion cells.

Maybe he'll retire at 100. We hope not.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Why do dogs always . . .



► Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Your answers can be silly, serious, deep or superficial. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or post them on our Facebook page. Please include your city and co-op.

Below are some of the responses to our January prompt:
I knew I was grown up when ...

I could kill my own spiders.
SYLVIA WILLIAMS | NEW BOSTON | BOWIE-CASS EC

I sat at the dinner table and realized my feet touched the floor.
GEORGE MCNEW | SPRING BRANCH | PEDERNALES EC

I realized I could eat ice cream for breakfast if I wanted.
ROBIN HODGES | BANDERA | BANDERA EC

To see more responses, read Currents on our website.



SOUL MUSIC OF SOUTH

BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

CONJUNTO, BUILT UPON A POLKA RHYTHM, TURNS ACCORDIONS AND 12-STRING GUITARS INTO A UNIQUE SOUND AND SUBCULTURE



Darren David Prieto played the accordion in Carnitas Uruapan, a meat market on the west side of San Antonio, one Sunday morning in 2016 while customers lined up for tamales and carnitas. Back then, the market hosted a weekly residency with accordionist Santiago Jiménez Jr., younger brother of accordion legend Flaco Jiménez. The gig was practice for Jiménez, but for Prieto, it was an apprenticeship and a steppingstone to a career performing the soul music of South Texas.

Jiménez introduced the shy teenager from New Braunfels, then 16, as “*mi protegido*”—his protégé—and, blushing, Prieto nodded toward Jiménez and added, “*Mi profesor*.” This unlikely venue and early start time was a very big deal for the slight, quiet young man because as part of a new generation of conjunto accordionists, it was his opportunity to learn from a master.

As Jiménez played his diatonic button accordion, accompanied by a sideman strumming chords on a 12-string guitar called a *bajo sexto*, pounding out a rhythm to propel the sounds from Jiménez’s accordion, the meat market’s owner occasionally walked out from behind the counter to harmonize with Jiménez in vocal duets. “Margarita, Margarita,” they crooned, faces inches from each other. Sit-ins from the neighborhood were part of the weekly routine. Grammy Award winner Max Baca of Los Texmaniacs walked into Carnitas wearing a football jersey and shorts rather than his western stage outfit and sat in with the band, playing bajo sexto.

**Opposite: Joel Guzmán at the Alamo.
Above: Teenage conjunto performer
Darren David Prieto in 2015.**

TEXAS

GUZMÁN: JOHN DYER. PRIETO: COURTESY TEXAS FOLK LIFE

AT A TIME WHEN MOST AMERICAN
ROOTS MUSIC'S POPULARITY
IS ON THE DOWNSWING,
CONJUNTO'S ROOTS
ARE SPREADING.



Conjunto's bouncy rhythm, typically a polka, is why it is also known as *música alegre*, happy music. Like blues and country, conjunto—pronounced coh-noon-toe—is indigenous, only regionally specific to South Texas, with mostly Spanish lyrics. In South Texas, and anywhere conjunto's influence extends, the term is applied to both sound and subculture.

Conjunto has two key instruments: the diatonic button accordion, which, like a harmonica, changes notes as air is pushed or pulled past vibrating reeds, and the bajo sexto, which provides the rhythm and backbeat. Most modern conjuntos also include drums, guitar and bass.

At a time when most American roots music's popularity is on the downswing, conjunto's roots are spreading. Public school programs in La Joya, Los Fresnos, Brownsville and other towns across the Rio Grande Valley have added conjunto to their curricula,

and bajo sexto classes are taught weekly at the Conjunto Heritage Taller and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. "We get them from 8 to 80," said Rodolfo Lopez, Conjunto Heritage Taller director. "Conjunto is us, *la gente*. This is a unique music form." Kids from the *taller* (workshop) have dominated the statewide Big Squeeze youth accordion competition sponsored by Texas Folklife since its inception in 2007.

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to learn where to see and hear conjunto music. And check out our playlist.

Conjunto was born in the late 19th century when German immigrants introduced the button accordion to South Texas. In part because of its rural roots, it was known as cantina music. Conjunto made its commercial debut in the 1920s and '30s, when Columbia and Bluebird joined other labels in the fledgling recording business, setting up



Clockwise from opposite page: Santiago Jiménez Jr., who gave accordion lessons to Prieto. Los Texmaniacs have taken conjunto as far as China. With her 12-string guitar, Lydia Mendoza became the first female star of Mexican American music. San Antonio's Eva Ybarra is known as the Queen of the Accordion. Narciso Martínez was one of the recording pioneers of conjunto.

studios in rooms at San Antonio's Gunter and Bluebonnet hotels as well as at local WOAI radio to record musicians solicited by talent scouts. Conjunto accordionists were recruited to San Antonio alongside bluesman Robert Johnson, western swingsters Bill Boyd & His Cowboy Ramblers and the Tex-Czech sounds of Adolph Hofner as well as Texan Mexican singer Lydia Mendoza.

The instrumentals by those conjunto accordionists sounded Mexican with additional Bohemian, Czech and German elements, reflecting the influence of the immigrant communities of South Texas.

Texas conjunto recording pioneers Bruno Villarreal from Santa Rosa, Narciso Martínez of La Paloma and Santiago Jiménez of San Antonio all eavesdropped on Czech, German and Polish dances in South Texas and incorporated what they heard into their own music.

Conjunto follows neither mariachi nor ranchera traditions, nor is it *norteño*, the accordion style popular in northern Mexico. "It's a melding of European music and the Mexican bajo sexto," Rodolfo Lopez explained, noting that Czech *redowas*, Bohemian *schottisches*, waltzes and polkas all came from Europe. "We just added our jalapeño chilepin flavor to it."

Flaco Jiménez, the older of conjunto pioneer Santiago Jiménez's two sons, expanded awareness of the genre in 1973, appearing on the album *Doug Sahm and Band*, featuring the rock musician from San Antonio and an all-star lineup that included Bob Dylan. Sahm sought out and played bajo sexto with Flaco Jiménez in his back-



Esteban “Steve” Jordan began playing accordion at the age of 7.

yard on San Antonio’s west side. “He could groove,” Jiménez said.

Flaco Jiménez would ultimately take conjunto accordion around the world, recording with Ry Cooder, Peter Rowan, the Rolling Stones, Dwight Yoakum and Emmylou Harris before joining the Tex-Mex supergroup Texas Tornados.

Esteban “Steve” Jordan of Elsa, a dashing figure with an eyepatch known as the Jimi Hendrix of the accordion, also worked as a conjunto innovator. One record label described Jordan’s style as *acordeón psicodélico*. If Jiménez was the standard-bearer, Jordan was the experimentalist—always pushing the envelope until his passing in 2010.

Another notable exporter of conjunto accordion is Joel Guzmán of Buda, who performs with his wife, Sarah Fox, as Aztex; plays and records with country rocker Joe Ely; and joined Paul Simon on his Homeward Bound tour. One of few professional female accordionists, Eva Ybarra earned a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2017.

Conjunto is no longer exclusively a Texas thing. Japan has several conjuntos who were inspired by Flaco Jiménez’s appearance in their country with the Texas Tornados. Dwayne Verheyden from the Netherlands mastered Jiménez’s playing style, then mastered Spanish to better communicate with Jiménez and conjunto audiences. After his performance at the Tejano Conjunto Fest in San Antonio in 2014, fans patiently lined up to have their picture taken with him, as if he was the Justin Bieber of conjunto.

Conjunto’s crossover appeal comes to life in the music of Conjunto Los Pinkys, an Austin band led by octogenarian Isidro

Samilpa; a middle-aged Polish import from Saginaw, Michigan, named Bradley Jay Williams; and Mark Weber, an accordionist from San Antonio. Another crossover success is Stevie Ray Vavages of the Tohono O’odham Nation in Arizona, who learned the bajo sexto playing the native sound called chicken scratch.

Darren Prieto is part of the next wave.

Typical of most Texas kids, he grew up listening to rock, country, jazz and hip-hop. Not typical of most Texas kids, he chose to play accordion when he was 14. “I was always with my grandfather,” he explained. “Around our house, conjunto music was always on. I listened to all types of conjunto, from Los Pavo Reales to Ruben Naranjo.” The summer before he entered high school, Prieto picked up his grandfather’s accordion, just as his own father once had. By that September, he’d learned some polkas. “I started falling in love,” Prieto said.

Those Sunday morning performances on the small stage at Carnitas Uruapan, where he learned from Santiago Jiménez Jr., stoked Prieto’s creative fire. “He helped me learn to get over stage fright, how to talk to the crowd and even how to be a humble musician,” Prieto said.

The gigs at Carnitas Uruapan stopped in 2018 when the owner retired. But Prieto remains tight with Jiménez. “You can hear a little bit of Santiago Jiménez Jr.’s style in my own playing,” Prieto said. “Playing conjunto music is so fun. It isn’t like any other music. It has that beat that makes you want to dance. It makes you feel alive.”

Writer **Joe Nick Patoski**, a confessed conjunto addict, lives outside Wimberley and is a member of Pedernales EC.

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TEXAS' MAIN SQUEEZE

Chris Rybak continues a tradition brought to Texas by European settlers in the 1800s. Inset: Rybak as an 11-year-old.



BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

THE ACCORDION HAS BEEN A BELOVED MUSICAL INSTRUMENT SINCE IT GOT HERE

Of all the musical instruments brought to Texas by German, Czech, Polish and Moravian immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the accordion made the most unexpected inroads among Mexican, Cajun and Creole communities who embraced it as their instrument of choice. Generations later, squeezeboxes still move Texans.

Chris Rybak, known as the Accordion Cowboy, who hails from Hallettsville, explains that when he picked up the instrument 30 years ago, at age 11, accordion-playing bandleader Lawrence Welk was a big thing. “But that also made accordion not so cool,” he says, adding that now it’s heard in jazz, rock and a wide variety of other musical genres. “It doesn’t have to be just your grandpa’s oompah anymore.”

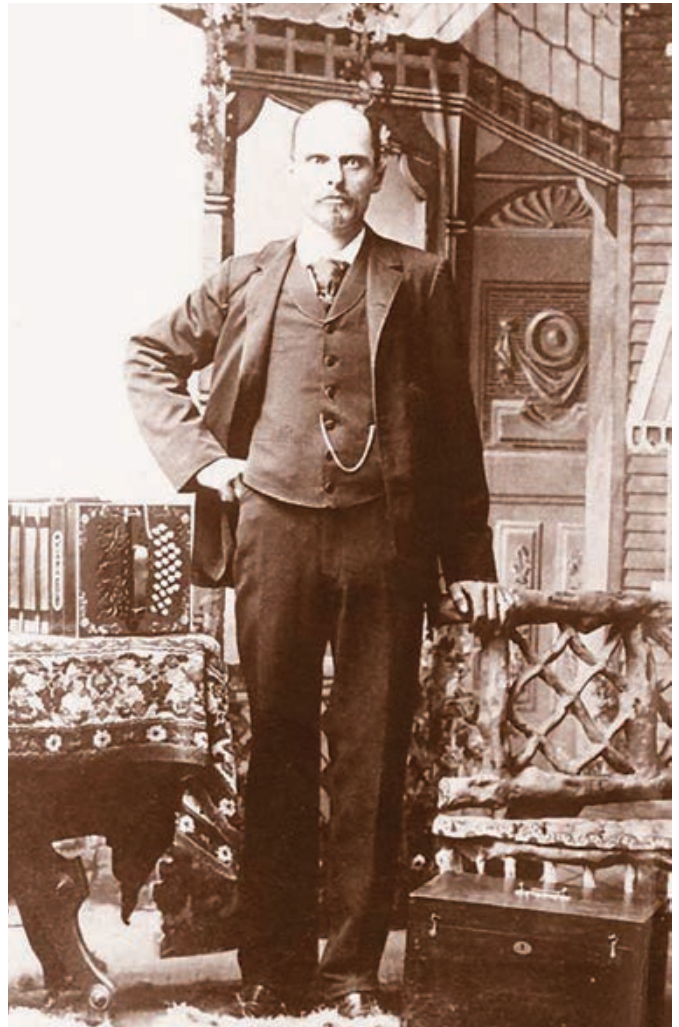
Packing the full-bodied sound of an entire band into one instrument, the accordion, invented in Europe in the 1820s, provided entertainment at dances of all kinds as Texas was settled. Without the need for electricity or amplification, its sound carried farther than stringed instruments.

The accordion was a key instrument for western swing bands in the 1930s and ’40s. It remains the most versatile musical instrument going in Texas, straddling regions and borders and injecting its sound into rock, country, blues, jazz and zydeco. It’s the defining instrument of conjunto, the folk music of South Texas, and the faster-paced *norteño*, a folk music of northern Mexico that is similar to conjunto.

Without the accordion, there would be no Mark Halata at Wursthfest, no Brave Combo playing WestFest, no Ennis Czech Boys working the National Polka Festival, no Fritz Hodde and the Fabulous Six performing at an SPJST hall.

The European-style accordion, the traditional large instrument with piano keys on the right-hand side that functions like a glorified organ, is favored by the Bohemians, Czechs, Poles and Germans of South and Central Texas; some Zydeco bands around Houston and southeast Texas; and Fort Worth’s Ginny Mac and Austin’s Debra Peters. It can weigh upward of 30 pounds.

Conjuntos and some zydeco bands favor the smaller, diatonic model of accordion with buttons on both sides that change notes as you push and pull and has considerably faster action. Texas Cajuns play an even smaller, simpler diatonic model with fewer buttons.



Accordionist and band leader Emil Schuhmann of Fayette County in the 1890s.

Rybak explains that Czech, German, German-Polish, Tejano and Cajun music each embody a distinct style. “On the other hand, when you go to a conjunto place,” he says, “the band will

throw in a few Czech songs. And vice versa. The accordion is distinctive, and it can cross boundaries and cultures.”

The universality of the accordion is celebrated at the Accordion Kings and Queens at the Miller Outdoor Theatre in Houston on the first Saturday in June, a production of Texas Folklife. All the bands onstage feature accordions as the lead instrument, but the performers sing in English, Spanish, French, German, Polish and Czech, reflecting each group’s ethnic background. Despite those differences, everyone dances the same on the dance floor, moving in a counterclockwise direction.

These days, Rybak says he mostly uses a digital accordion, which has changed his instrument much the way a digital keyboard changed piano playing. He can create blaring trumpets to open the Johnny Cash standard *Ring of Fire*.

“I would say for most shows, I play 70 or 80% with a digital accordion,” he says. “And that’s what the new generation really loves, too. They can do anything on it.”

Although Joe Nick Patoski gave up piano accordion for violin at age 7, he owns a button accordion autographed by Flaco Jiménez.

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— The New York Times



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Why We Encourage You To Conserve Energy



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/CEO JEFF LANE

YOU MAY WONDER WHY WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO USE electricity efficient . After all, we're in the business of selling kilowatt-hours—so why would we want our customers to use less electricity?

Unlike other utilities, your cooperative isn't in business to make a profit; it's in business to serve you in the most efficient reliable and cost-effective way possible. Each co-op is collectively owned by the people it serves and shares its members' interest in keeping costs down.

We strongly encourage energy conservation for a number of reasons. First, it's common sense. Although fossil fuels are still relatively abundant, they are finite. Depleting these natural resources too quickly contributes to environmental degradation and means there will be less fuel for future generations.

Conserving energy also saves money in two ways: Using less electricity decreases your electric bill, and when many consumers lower their usage, it saves your cooperative money as well.

That's because electric co-ops must keep enough power on hand to supply all members' highest usage. So if electricity can be conserved, less overall power is needed, new power sources may not have to be tapped as soon as they would otherwise and the construction of costly new generating plants can be postponed.

As our electric system continues to grow, we must maintain an adequate supply of

power. Your conservation effort , combined with the efforts of fellow members, can ensure the cooperative's stability and continued growth. 72792001

Here at Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, we seek to keep your electricity affordable by automating operations where possible and by setting reasonable budgets that do not sacrifice reliability or service. We have no control, however, over the market price of fuels needed to generate electricity.

We'll continue to offer tips for conserving electricity and using it efficiently , even though we're in the business of selling it. You can count on TVEC to continue looking out for you.



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Time To Spring Forward

Remember to set your clock forward one hour March 8 for daylight saving time.



CATHERINE LANE | ISTOCK.COM

Power Tip

Spring is nearly here! Now is the perfect time to test your AC and check its evaporator coil, which should be cleaned annually for optimal efficiency.

Catch Up! with the Co-op!

Regional meetings set for member updates and feedback

An active and engaged membership is key to a successful co-op, and we love to hear from you! Over the next few months, Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative will host four evening meetings to share co-op information and get member feedback on how the co-op is doing and what is important to you going forward.

The town-hall style meetings will take place in the evening at TVEC's Kaufman and Athens office, and will include a light meal followed by updates on co-op business from General Manager/CEO Jeff Lane.

Co-op leaders will also be on hand to answer questions and listen to feedback as we work to be responsive to members' needs.

"We love the interaction we get at the TVEC Annual Membership Meeting, and we hope that having these meetings in our office locations will allow us to hear from some people who may not have been able to make it to that event in the past," Lane said. "By adding these smaller meetings, I hope we will be able to directly address any suggestions, concerns or questions for more members."

Because of limited meeting space, members need to RSVP for their preferred meeting date.

Reserve a place by contacting TVEC Member Services at (800)-766-9576 or emailing

memberrelations@tvec.coop.

We look forward to seeing you!



BE PART OF IT

Athens

TVEC District Office
909 W. Larkin St.

Thursday, April 2, 6:30-8 p.m.

Tuesday, May 12, 6:30-8 p.m.

Kaufman

TVEC Headquarters
1800 E. Hwy. 243

Thursday, April 16, 6:30-8 p.m.

Tuesday, June 2, 6:30-8 p.m.

**Space is Limited, Please
let us know you are coming!**

Phone: 800-766-9576

Email: memberrelations@tvec.coop

Thank You, TVEC Members!



We'd like to thank you for participating in the recent TVEC member survey. Your feedback helped us achieve an ACSI (American Customer Satisfaction Index*) score of 88, placing TVEC almost 15 points higher than the 2019 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.

We are honored to be your trusted energy source, and we will continue to work hard to improve in all areas of service and reliability for you, our member-owners.

*The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI®) is the only national cross-industry measure of customer satisfaction in the United States. Each year, the ACSI uses data from interviews as inputs to an econometric model for analyzing customer satisfaction with more than 400 companies in 46 industries and 10 economic sectors. ACSI data have proven to be strongly related to several essential indicators of micro and macroeconomic performance. To learn more about the American Customer Satisfaction Index, visit www.theacsi.org.

TVEC Department in Focus: Engineering

TURNING CONCEPTS AND THEORY

into something concrete and workable takes equal parts brainpower and art, but for the engineers who work at Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, it is just another day at work. When you throw in the importance of electricity in the everyday lives of more than 50,000 co-op members, there can be a real satisfaction in getting that job done well.

“I love seeing something built, the finished product when we have planned it, designed it and we’ve made a solution that our linemen in the field have the most options to keep things running,” said Tim Craig, TVEC’s manager of engineering. “It really is a matter of working together with the ones who actually use this equipment on a day-to-day basis, and seeing things become a reality.”

TVEC’s engineers are tasked with ensuring the growth, change and technological innovation that is a constant in the electrical industry is seamlessly incorporated into an electrical grid that is more than 80 years in the making.

“We do long term studies to look at what the system needs to accommodate. Can what we physically have in the field work for what is coming?” Craig said. “It takes a long time to get pieces in place, and there is a lot of planning to get things into the system to sectionalize new areas and build in things that will help minimize outages or service interruptions going into the foreseeable future.”

Behind the scenes, the engineers have a lot of work to do as well. The math may always stay the same, but advances in electrical equipment, mapping technology and even the tools used to build the lines means working methods change over time. For example, the use of bucket trucks to access poles and install equipment has changed how each component can be attached, but some poles must still be climbed. Linemen need a standard for attaching transformers and wires that can be safely done by both methods. It is up to the engineers to come up with the solution.

The same is true for changes in the electrical industry overall, like the addition of residential solar generation systems.

“When we were setting up our system to accept solar and other distributed gen-



From Left: The TVEC Engineering Department consists of Shirley Brandon, Tim Craig, Derek Stowers and Victor Hart.

eration, there were a lot of regulatory issues and documentation that we were involved with,” Craig said. “Now that system is up and running and we welcome members to add solar to their energy mix if it makes sense for them. But we also need to make sure that those systems are safe for our workers and the general public since they are producing electricity that could potentially energize downed or damaged lines that are turned off on our end. Anything coming into our system has to coordinate with our safety equipment.”

With nearly 24 years on the job, and a combined 50 years of local experience for his staff, Craig is confident that TVEC members get the benefits of local knowledge combined with professional expertise that co-ops are known for.

“A good, practical understanding of our system and also knowing the area and having eyes on the system all the time ... even knowing people who live on our lines and where buildings are located, that increases our service level,” Craig said. “Our group has great people working to make the infrastructure we share the best it can be for all of our members.”

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 March 31 to receive a \$25 credit on your electric bill. Don't miss out—you could be a winner!



Save Energy in Your Home Office

TODAY, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE working from their homes instead of commuting to offices. If you're one of them, consider revamping your home office with energy-efficient features.

► **Turn off your computer when you're finished working for the day.**

It's tempting to leave your computer on for quick access, but it's unnecessary to leave it on 24/7. If you will be away from work for more than two hours, shut it down.

► **Enable the power management features on your computer.** These are the features that automatically put your computer into standby mode when not in use.

► **Turn off printers, copiers, scanners and other equipment when not in use.** Plug them into one power strip to turn them off with one flick of the switch. If you often forget to turn them off, use a power strip with a timer to power down each night.

► **When buying new equipment, look for the Energy Star logo on computers and printers.** Choose equipment that does double duty—like a printer that also scans and copies, for instance. That way, you'll have fewer devices to plug into the wall.

Crandall HS Students Win Youth Tour Trip



Crandall High School students Darlene Gonzalez and Aman Hogan-Bailey will be headed to Washington, D.C. in June for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour.

FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, two Crandall High School students received top marks to win a trip to Austin and Washington, D.C. as part of the Government-in-Action Youth Tour from Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative. CHS junior Darlene Gonzalez and senior Aman Hogan-Bailey will participate in a long tradition of electric co-op youth converging on the U.S. Capitol for the educational tour, a program inspired in 1957 by then-U.S. Sen. Lyndon Johnson who expressed a desire for young people to “actually see what the flag stands for and represents.”

Texas students begin the Youth Tour in Austin, with a tour of the state capitol and other landmarks. Joining with about 160 other co-op representatives, the students then head to Washington for a week of discovery among the capital's historic sites, museums and government institutions.

“They call this the trip of a lifetime and that is absolutely accurate,” said Bobbi Byford, TVEC's director of corporate relations, who has acted as chaperone on the trip on seven occasions. “It is

always fun to see how these students are transformed by the experience of visiting Washington, D.C. and getting what may be their first taste of what opportunities they may have after school is over.”

Both students noted that they had not previously been to Washington, with a common interest in touring the museums of the Smithsonian Institution.

“As a student whose passion is steeped in the natural sciences, the most intriguing site would have to be the Smithsonian,” Hogan-Bailey said. “In terms of sheer quality, the vast amount of history Washington harbors is uncontested, so I consider all sites in D.C. to be valuable reservoirs of knowledge.”

In total, more than 1,800 students from across the nation participate in the Youth Tour each year. Along with some typical sightseeing and tourism, teens have an opportunity to meet legislators and participate in a wreath ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. For more information, visit tvec.net and texasyouthtour.com.



TAME YOUR Trees

We love our trees, but when branches are too close to power lines, they can cause power outages, fire hazards and other safety concerns. Here are some rules to follow:

If a tree or a large branch is touching—or falls on—an electric line, call your electric cooperative immediately.

Never trim trees that grow close to power lines; that's a job for professionals. Call your electric cooperative for assistance and guidance.

Use extreme caution when doing any overhead trimming. Branches often fall in unexpected places.

Don't allow children to climb trees or build treehouses close to power lines.

Plant appropriate distances from all power lines.

When planting a tree, consider how tall the tree will grow. At maturity, trees should be at least 10 feet away from power lines.

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.



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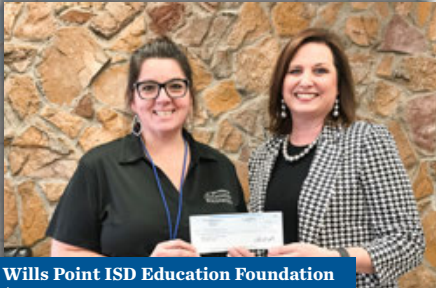
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THE TVEC CHARITABLE FOUNDATION recently awarded six grants totaling \$20,250. Recipients of the grants include:



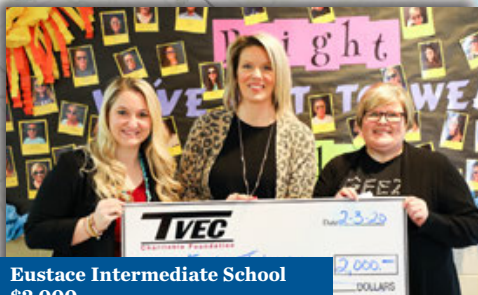
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Shining Light Food Ministry
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Henderson County Food Pantry
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Founded in 2013, the TVEC Charitable Foundation is an independent, nonprofit organization. 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.

Twist in the Wind

Dust devils, common in West Texas, turn up wherever atmospheric conditions are just right

BY E. DAN KLEPPER

AS I CROSSED THE SERENGETI IN A MUD-covered Land Rover, a dust devil suddenly appeared in the dirt road ahead, as if summoned by wizardry.

“Kimbunga!” my guide shouted in Swahili.

The rogue dervish spun up from the red volcanic soils that cover the grassland plain. It traced our route, leading the way down bumpy ruts, drawing us farther into a wild and mysterious place. There was something transformative about the way it spun the landscape into a scene from my West Texas home, a similar basin-and-range topography abundant with its own special wild things.

Whether it's an East African kimbunga or a West Texas dust devil, whirlwinds occur wherever and whenever conditions are right. The formula calls for specific circumstances: a dramatic change in temperature caused by warm air that creates an updraft as it rises from the ground through cooler air above. Add a light wind that encourages horizontal rotation and forward momentum, and a whirlwind is born.

Studies suggest that these spinning columns of air occur all the time in the first several hundred feet of atmosphere above the Earth's surface. We're able to witness this phenomenon when the updraft is strong enough to lift sand, soil and ash from the ground to form a visible vortex—a dust devil—that can rise several hundred feet. The warmer air rising creates a void for more warm air to replace it, then cools in the upper layers before exiting the chimney. The cooled air sinks around the outer chimney walls, helping

to stabilize the dust devil. Altogether, these factors produce a self-sustaining engine that transports air forward, around, and up and down like a moving, spinning elevator. A tornado, on the other hand, forms from the updraft of a supercell thunderstorm.

Disruption, a common denominator of change, is usually responsible for the dust devil's demise. Once a whirlwind's careful balance of upward and circular movement is disrupted, by a slight decrease in surface temperature, a sudden rush of cold air sucked into the warm void or a topographic bump along the travel route, the dust devil quickly collapses like a magician in a puff of smoke. The magic is real but fleeting.

Magic is an apt descriptor for whirlwinds, particularly if you consider “magic” a romantic word for science. Whirlwinds do not discriminate, and they lift anything that isn't heavy enough to remain on the ground. You'll find sand devils among dunes, steam devils around power plants, coal devils in mining country and snow devils on ski slopes. With luck, you might also see a hay devil forming over fresh-cut fields of summer.

They also occur on Mars. Dust devils were first photographed on Mars by orbiters, part of NASA's Viking program in the 1970s. Since then, Mars rovers Pathfinder and Spirit have documented dust devil activity. The red planet is a hotbed of atmospheric instability, spawning about two dust devils per square mile per day, on average. According to scientists, Martian dust devils play an integral



role in the planet's weather and climate, dispensing particles into the atmosphere, where they help retain heat, which can measure 68 degrees at the equator.

Martian dust devils have also assisted in their own research. Whirlwinds have lifted dust from solar panels and instrumentation on NASA probes, which can be hampered by particulate buildup. Any passing dust devil simply cleans up like a housekeeper, allowing the technology to function at full capacity.

That day on the African veld, the kimbunga was the first of many we would see as the afternoon heated up, as if someone had slowly let loose a box full of whirligigs

to race across the landscape. I felt the country's kinship to West Texas a few more times until a herd of giraffes appeared on the horizon, a clear sign that I was traveling across an unfamiliar continent.

In many ways, East Africa is as different from home as Earth is from Mars. But a life of travel often leads to enlightenment, suggesting that no matter how strange or alien a place may appear, you can always find something in common, whether it's a dust devil or otherwise on the opposite side of Earth or millions of miles away, on another planet.

Photographer, author and artist **E. Dan Klepper** lives in Marathon.



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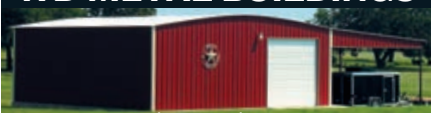


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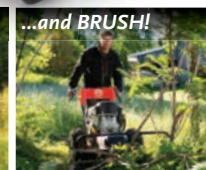
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The Dirt on Soapy

Onetime Texan cleaned up as a nefarious con man and syndicate boss

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

THOUGH HIS LEGEND IS most associated with skulduggery in Colorado and Alaska, Soapy Smith spent his teenage years in Round Rock and began his career as a swindler in Fort Worth.

Before he was Soapy Smith, he was Jefferson Randolph Smith II, son of a wealthy Georgia family that lost everything after the Civil War and moved to Round Rock in 1876. Smith and a cousin reportedly witnessed the shootout there that killed outlaw Sam Bass in 1878. But the crime-doesn't-pay lesson inherent in the Bass incident was apparently lost on Smith: His two years in Round Rock were his last as a law-abiding citizen.

Jefferson Smith morphed into Soapy Smith following his most famous swindle, the "Prize Package Soap Sell." He'd set up a display featuring bars of soap on a street corner, establish a friendly patter with passersby and then wrap some of the soap with paper money. He then rewrapped the bars in plain paper, mixed them in with the others and sold them for 50 cents—about \$12 in today's money.

Someone—a ringer—always bought a bar of soap, unwrapped it and found money. The excitement spread to passersby who took the bait and bought up the whole pile of soap. Only Smith cohorts

ever bought a bar with money. He ran this swindle for decades.

Fort Worth was Smith's first operational base. He assembled a skilled gang, and they pooled their money, paid off cops and bribed politicians to overlook their nefarious activity. Jeff Smith V, Smith's great-grandson and biographer, wrote that Soapy's particular gift was organization.

"Alone, these men were forced to be drifters, moving from one town to the next, as Jefferson had done," Jeff Smith wrote. "Jefferson united the men, and together as an organization, they were almost unstoppable. ... In the late 1870s Jeff became so powerful and known for his crimes that laws were enacted at Fort Worth especially due to him. It was time for Jeff to move on."

Though the gang opted for Denver and points north, Smith maintained contact with Texans for the rest of his life. His younger brother, Bascom, was arrested in 1883, when he was 14, for trying to set fire to a Belton hotel, and two sisters lived in Bell County.

Jefferson "Soapy" Smith stands at the bar in a Skagway, Alaska, saloon.

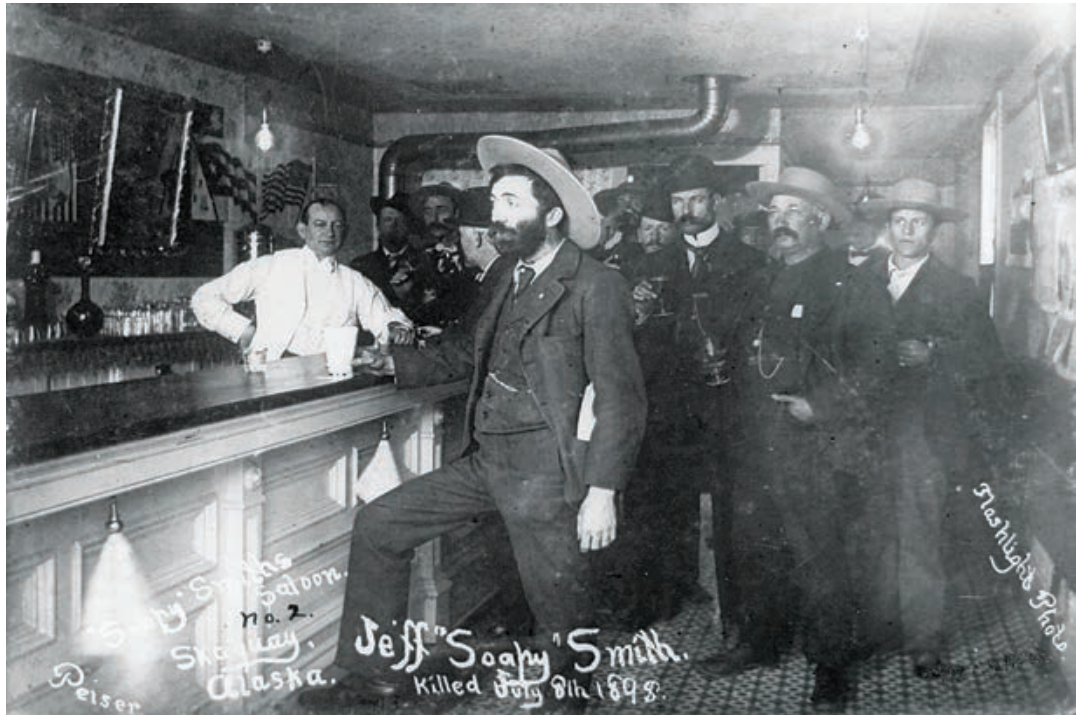
Smith's reputation as King of the Frontier Con Men prompted him to seek dishonest work beyond Colorado. He traveled to Skagway, Alaska, gateway to the Klondike gold fields.

In Skagway, citizens formed a vigilance committee to run Smith and his confederates out of town. Smith responded by announcing his own committee to run the original committee out of town.

The tipping point came when a theft of \$2,000 was pinned on a Smith associate, and Smith wouldn't give up the robber or return the money. A group met at the Juneau Wharf on July 8, 1898, to discuss their next move. An armed and intoxicated Smith confronted the meeting. His enemies claimed his last words were, "My God, don't shoot!"

Twenty years to the month after Sam Bass was gunned down in Round Rock, Soapy Smith met the same fate in Alaska.

Clay Coppedge, a member of Bartlett EC, lives near Walburg.



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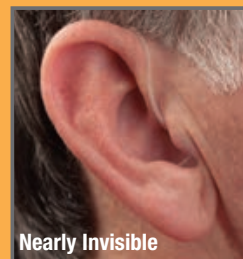
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Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More

FROM A SIMPLE FISH FRY TO SHELLFISH harvested from the Gulf, Texas' bounty of seafood is one of the state's great pleasures and a wonderful blank slate for applying layers of flavor.

Chef Maggie Perkins, a food writer and former farmer, frequently uses Texas seafood in demos at farmers markets and in cooking classes. Perkins took inspiration from Texas' coastal ingredients and combines them with her Creole roots for this approachable dish.

It's easy enough to prepare on a weeknight but still impressive should guests pop by. The key is to be patient in making the roux—cook it fully to achieve a beautiful, deep color.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Shrimp Étouffée

- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 small green or red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 large ribs celery, chopped
- 3 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained and chopped
- 2 cups shrimp stock
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- 2 pounds medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- ¼ cup chopped green onions
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Cooked rice, for serving
- Hot pepper sauce, for serving

1. In a large heavy skillet or Dutch oven, melt butter over medium heat. Increase heat to medium-high and whisk in flour until incorporated fully. Whisk continuously until roux is the color of peanut butter, about 10 minutes.

2. Add onion, bell pepper, celery and garlic, mixing into roux. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until vegetables are softened and onion is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Recipes

Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

DEANNA PAYNE | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

This easy yet flavorful recipe is perfect for entertaining, as it comes together quickly. Payne learned of it through a chef at a private club in Corpus Christi, where it was often served as an appetizer. Scoop the crab onto toast points or simply enjoy on its own; it's equally delicious chilled. When serving, squeeze the paprika-dipped lemon slices over the crab for a citrusy kick.

Gulf Lump Crabmeat Sauté

- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 pound lump crabmeat, picked through for shells
- ½ cup slivered almonds, toasted
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Lemon slices
- Paprika
- Salad greens or toast points, for serving

1. Melt butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and sauté until golden, 2–3 minutes.
2. Add crabmeat and stir-fry until all meat is very hot, 3–5 minutes, stirring carefully to keep crab pieces intact.
3. Stir in almonds and parsley, adding salt and pepper to taste. Heat through 1 minute and ladle onto a preheated serving platter.
4. Garnish with lemon slices dipped in paprika. ▶ Serves 8 as an appetizer.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

transparent, about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes and stir to combine well.

3. Increase heat to medium-high and slowly stir in the stock. Continue to stir until sauce is smooth and bubbling and has thickened. Stir in seasoning.

4. Bring to a low boil, stirring, then reduce heat to medium. Cook, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes.

5. Fold shrimp, parsley and green onion into sauce and cook until shrimp is opaque, about 3 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings, adding more Creole seasoning, salt and pepper as needed. Serve over rice with hot pepper sauce on the side. ▶ Serves 8.

COOK'S TIP In lieu of shrimp stock, use seafood stock, chicken stock, clam juice, water or any combination thereof.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com.

Crawfish Bread

GERI HUPP | DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

This unexpected side dish is a wonderful addition to a larger seafood spread. Look for the crawfish tail meat in the freezer section of your grocery store. Try experimenting with a variety of cheeses.

- 1 package (6 ounces) cornbread mix
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- ⅓ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper, plus more to taste
- 12 ounces fully cooked crawfish tail meat, thawed
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 can (15.25 ounces) corn, drained
- 3 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup diced green onions
- ½ cup diced white onion
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together cornbread mix, baking soda, Creole seasoning and cayenne pepper.
3. In a large bowl, stir together crawfish, cheese, corn, eggs, onions and bell pepper. Fold in dry ingredients until well incorporated. Mixture will be thick.

New
\$500
prize!

\$500 Recipe Contest

August's recipe contest topic is **Cool Foods**. Ease this month's swelter with some no-stove-or-oven-needed dishes. Send us your best. The deadline is **March 10**. Readers whose recipes are featured will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

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.

4. Spread batter into an ungreased 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Bake 30–40 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool slightly before cutting, then serve warm. ▶ Serves 12.

Gulf Coast Corn Chowder With Shrimp and Pico de Gallo

SHERRY SCOTT | PEDERNALES EC

Chowder is always a winning way to enjoy seafood. This version uses potatoes, corn and plenty of toppings. “While visiting South Padre Island one fall, we were experimenting with seafood recipes and came up with this delicious option that has become a requested favorite,” Scott says.

- 1 poblano pepper
- 4 slices bacon
- ½ cup (⅓ stick) butter
- 1 cup diced white onion
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 pounds potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks

- 2 cups vegetable broth
- 1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 tablespoons seafood seasoning (such as Old Bay)
- 2 cups 2% milk
- 1 can (5 ounces) evaporated milk
- 2 cups corn, thawed if frozen
- 1½ teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 avocado, diced, for garnish
- Pico de gallo, for garnish

1. Roast the poblano over an open flame until all skin is charred black. Place charred pepper in a plastic bag until it cools. Rinse the pepper under running water to remove charred skin.
2. Cook bacon until crisp. Drain and set aside.
3. Melt butter in a stockpot over medium heat. Add poblano, onion, garlic, and a pinch of salt and pepper and sauté until onion is translucent, about 3 minutes.
4. Add potatoes and broth and bring to a boil, then reduce heat and sim-

mer until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.

5. While potatoes are cooking, heat a pot of water to boiling. Add shrimp and seafood seasoning, reduce heat to a simmer and cook 2–3 minutes. Remove shrimp from water, set aside and keep warm.

6. When potatoes are done, slightly mash some of the potatoes in the pot, leaving some chunks. Whisk ¼ cup of broth from the pot into milk, then add milk and evaporated milk to stockpot.

7. Stir in corn and oregano, and add salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce heat and simmer until corn is heated through, about 15 minutes.

8. To serve, place 6 shrimp in each bowl. Add chowder, and garnish with crumbled bacon, avocado and pico de gallo. ▶ Serves 4-6.

COOK'S TIP You can substitute 1 can (4 ounces) roasted hatch peppers for the poblano.



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On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

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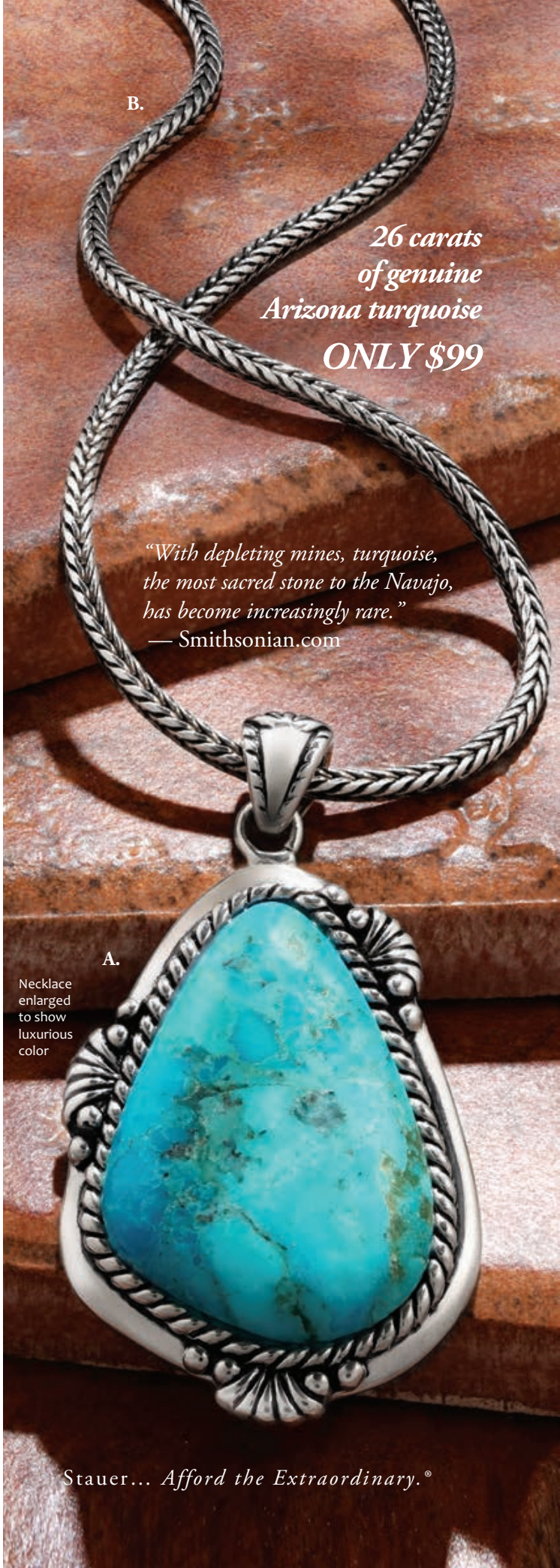
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WEB EXTRAS ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ **JENNIFER RIECK**, Medina EC: Billy Rieck Sr., Rieck's husband, in his soap box derby car in 1948.

▼ **JOSE GARZA**, Magic Valley EC: "Twenty-one-month-old Jordan takes his first pony ride and loves it."



▲ **LYNN LEISTER**, Guadalupe Valley EC: "Harper's first mutton bustin' ride at Yorktown Western Days."

▶ **PAUL GARCIA**, Medina EC: Garcia's granddaughter got to take control momentarily during a youth program flight at the Castroville airport.



▲ **JUDY TRUESDELL**, Farmers EC: Kids race old-time pedal cars down Wylie's Ballard Avenue.



UPCOMING CONTESTS

| | | |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| JULY | EXPLORATION | DUE MARCH 10 |
| AUGUST | ON THE WATER | DUE APRIL 10 |
| SEPTEMBER | SHAPES | DUE MAY 10 |

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

Pick of the Month RISE for Families Chili Cook-Off

Leander March 28

(512) 736-8887, riseforfamilies.org

RISE for Families offers families of children with special needs free assistance in learning about the resources available to them. This event features a cook-off judged by Leander firefighters, children's activities, a silent auction, live music and vendors.



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March

7

Lake Jackson Youth Fishing Day at Sea Center Texas, (979) 292-0100, visitbrazosport.com

Rosanky Rosanky Christian Academy Annual BBQ Dinner Fundraiser, (512) 360-3109, rosankychristianacademy.com

Clarendon [7-8] Whistle-Stop Trade Days, (806) 206-6815, facebook.com/whistop

9

Fredericksburg [9-14] Spring Break at the Pioneer Museum, (830) 990-8441, pioneermuseum.net

12

New Braunfels T.G. Sheppard & Kelly Lang, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

13

Dallas [13-15] Dallas Quilt Show, (214) 766-2212, quiltersguildofdallas.org

March 14
Bellville
Classic Car
Stampede



Ingram [13-29] *No Body Like Jimmy*, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

14

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Seguin Eastern Star Stew Dinner & Country Store, (720) 394-8514

Fort Worth [14-15] Funky Finds Spring Fling, (903) 665-7954, funkyfinds.com

20

Round Top [20-21] Herb Society of America: Pioneer Unit Herbal Forum Plant and Gift Sale, (979) 421-9980, herbsocietypioneer.org

West [20-21] West, Central Texas Ceramic Expo & Handcrafted Items, (254) 716-5227, westceramicshow.com

21

George West Patsy Torres as Patsy Cline, (361) 436-1098, dobie-westtheatre.com

Kerrville Camerata San Antonio: *Blueprint*, (210) 492-9519, cameratasa.org

Lakehills Lakehills UMC Annual Fish Fry and Auction, (830) 751-2404, lakehillsumc.org/fishfry

Woodville [21-22] Festival of the Arts and Dinner on the Grounds, (409) 283-2272, heritage-village.org

27

Tyler [27-28] Quilters' Guild of East Texas Annual Quilt Show, (903) 747-7072, qgetx.org/quilt-show.html

Sabinal [27-29] Wild Hog Festival and Craft Fair, (830) 486-8549, sabinalwildhogfestival.com

28

Huntsville Herb Festival at the Wynne Home, (936) 891-5024, texasthymeunit.org



April 2-4
Edinburg
UFO Festival

30

Canton [30-April 4] Van Zandt County Fair, (903) 292-6250, vzfair.org

April
2

Brenham Texas A&M Singing Cadets, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Edinburg [2-4] UFO Festival, (956) 383-6246, edinburgarts.com

3

Cuero [3-4] Heirloom Stitchers Quilt Show, (361) 550-9388, cuero.org

4

Port Arthur [4] Cajun Heritage Fest, (409) 835-2787, cajunheritagefest.com

Quintana [4-May 6] Spring Fling, (979) 480-0999, gcbo.org/spring-fling

Submit Your Event!

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event online for May by March 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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Sharpening My Knowledge

Poking around the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean

TEXAS IS KNOWN FOR WIDE-OPEN SPACES. On the 19th-century range, cowboys could ride from dawn to dusk without seeing a sign of civilization. Then came the invention of barbed wire, creating fences that made it near impossible to drive cattle. On a recent trip to the Panhandle, I found myself entangled in the history of the so-called devil's rope.

On Route 66, about 75 miles east of Amarillo, I discovered the perfect place to stop and stretch my legs while simultaneously pondering the weird and wonderful: the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean.

While cruising McLean's red brick streets and beyond, I noticed a beige building with two large orbs adorning its entrance. As I got closer, I realized these were actually rusted bundles of barbed wire, rolled up like yarn.

"How could any museum covering something as strange and specific as barbed wire be interesting?" I thought. I quickly realized how wrong I was. The museum was cavernous, with every inch of wall and countless educational panels filled with information, artifacts and stories. I decided to poke around and begin my education.

Barbed wire was invented after the Civil War, and hundreds of types received patents as inventors looked to outdo one another and create the next best thing. There's single twist, double twist, ribbon wire, diamond wire, sawtooth wire and one called the Dodge Star that can fetch upward of \$500 a foot from the right collector. Joseph Glidden of DeKalb, Illinois, came up with the design, which used two strands of wire twisted together to hold the barb spurs in place, that became the most popular in the country.

The museum in McLean displays 2,000



Chet gets right to the point at the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean.

to the sort of metal cockleburs that ripped through so many pairs of my childhood jeans.

In addition to barbed wire, the museum boasts other really cool exhibits. There's a full-size cowboy wagon set against a painted diorama of the Texas sky. There are countless tools used for tasks from digging fence posts to mending busted barbs. There's even a number of barbed wire sculptures that include a scorpion, armadillo and cowboy hat. I can only imagine how many pairs of gloves the artists must have gone through. Also set in a corner is a sobering exhibit about how humans have used barbed wire against one another in times of war.

When it was first introduced, almost everyone in Texas hated barbed wire. It sectioned off the prairie, cutting cowboys off from grazing and watering their cattle wherever they pleased. At night, renegade groups would go on fence-cutting sprees


types of wire. The number blew my mind because, in truth, I had never paid any attention

that resulted in bloodshed, and not just from pricking their fingers. It got so serious in the 1880s that Gov. John Ireland and the Texas Rangers had to step in and quash the violence.

Soon, Texans began to accept fencing as a way of life. Barbed wire was cheaper than wooden fencing. It helped ranchers control the breeding of their cattle, and it helped farmers grow crops without the threat of wandering herds mowing everything down.

As I learned, barbed wire truly changed the Texas frontier, and very few Texans understand its impact—something this small museum hopes to change, one visitor at a time. I also learned that sometimes the strangest roadside stops lead to the best road trip education.

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

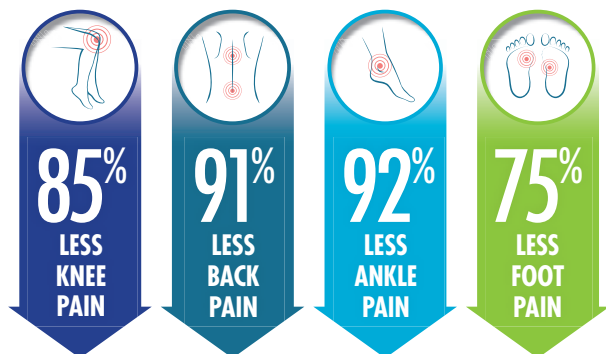
 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video from the Devil's Rope Museum. To learn more about the fence-cutting wars, read *Barbed Wire, Barbaric Backlash* in our January 2014 issue.

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