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October 2023



06

It's Rocket Science (And so Much More)

High school students learn to problem-solve by building giant, powerful rockets.

*Story by Mark Wangrin
Photos by Scott Van Osdol*

ON THE COVER
The 88-year-old hands of Jimmy Tobolka await their next chance to rope a calf.
Photo by Julia Robinson

ABOVE
Time for McGregor's rocket class to learn whether all its hard work will fly.
Photo by Scott Van Osdol

10 Still in the Saddle Again

Calf roping at 80? Competition—and camaraderie—have no upper limits in the senior rodeo circuit.

Story and photos by Julia Robinson

04

Currents

The latest buzz

05

TCP Talk

Readers respond

16

Co-op News

Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

25

Footnotes in Texas History

It Still Reigns
By W.F. Strong

26

TCP Kitchen

Beans
By Vianney Rodriguez

30

Hit the Road

Puffy Taco Trailblazer
By Chet Garner

33

Focus on Texas

Photo Contest: Helping Out

34

Observations

Noteworthy Grace
By Spike Gillespie



'The Right Thing To Do'

SHORTLY AFTER Mark and Cheryl Brown bought 200 acres near Ammannsville, halfway between Houston and San Antonio, they turned to conservation.

They gave their land a break from grazing, worked on grassland restoration and began networking with fellow landowners on the benefits of habitat management.

"Changing that mindset where people want to be a part of the land rather than dominate the land—it just seems like the right thing to do," says Mark, a member of Fayette Electric Cooperative.

It's been rewarding—for Mother Nature and the Browns.

More than 250 species of native plants thrive on their land, as do bird species with dwindling populations. And in May, the Browns received the Leopold Conservation Award—the state's highest honor for private land conservation—for their prairieland restoration and community outreach.



Concern for Community

Texas electric cooperatives donated nearly \$750,000 to at least 360 volunteer fire departments across the state in 2022. We celebrate that community involvement during October, which is National Co-op Month.

TCP Contests and More

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FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I collect ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our August prompt: **Back to school means ...**

Making new memories with my best friends, getting to meet new people, learning and experiencing new things.

ELVIRA PULIDO
MAGIC VALLEY EC
MISSION

An uninterrupted second cup of coffee.

PHYLLIS SUTTLE
MIDSOUTH EC
IOLA

New shoes, cooler weather and FOOTBALL!

MIKE WEBER
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
GRANBURY

Mother buying each of us boys two pair of Levi's blue jeans for the new school year. (We used them as work jeans at the farm the following summer.)

MANUEL G. TREVIÑO
MEDINA EC
PEARSALL

Visit our website to see more responses.

AUGUST 2023 Charming the Alamo

“There’s a new Alamo cat? Ruby is my favorite part of Alamo history, so good to see they’re continuing the tradition.”

CINDER SCOTT
VIA FACEBOOK



STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

Good To Hear

Thank you for the audio about Larry McMurtry in *A Page of the Past* [August 2023]. It was much easier and enjoyable to listen to the story than to try to read the small print with my old eyes of 75 years.

Becky Parks
Bluebonnet EC
Maxwell

A Long and Winding Labyrinth

About 20 years ago, my husband built a labyrinth on top of a hill on our 17-acre hobby farm west of Trent [*Circles of Life*, August 2023]. He integrated it into the natural landscape of the hill, resulting in a multilevel path.

The entire labyrinth is approximately a mile walk. At the time it was built, we were told it was the largest one in North America. Visitors can reach us at dancingwithherbs@gmail.com.

Cyndi Hughs
Taylor EC
Trent



LAURA JENKINS

In Defense of Mockingbirds

The mockingbird was chosen by the Legislature to be the state bird of Texas in 1927—chosen because of its courage to protect its home and family even in the face of death [TCP Talk, August 2023]. It stands tall without fear to protect its brood, much like those who fought for Texas independence. That’s why it was chosen.

We have witnessed the mockingbird attacking snakes and hawks. It would serve us all well to take note of the parenting skills, courage and intelligence of these awesome birds.

Tim and Tammy Layman
Coleman County EC
Ballinger

Legislators in 1927 described the mockingbird as “a fighter for the protection of his home, falling if need be, in its defense, like any true Texan.” Need any more be said?

David Snipes
HILCO EC
Aquilla

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

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IT'S ROCKET SCIENCE

(AND SO MUCH MORE)



High school students learn to problem-solve by building giant, powerful rockets

In the predawn hours one Friday in May, a yellow school bus hurtles down U.S. Highway 281 with 19 students, one teacher and a lot of uncertainty.

A few things are known. The juniors and seniors from McGregor High School are heading to the town of Stonewall in the Hill Country. They will launch three rockets they have designed and built based on their own research and calculations—part of a curriculum called SystemsGo, developed by a local STEM teacher in 1996.

And that's where the uncertainty begins.

The science, technology, engineering and math students have never done this before. The year before, a funding mishap robbed them of the chance. This school year, they've done and redone the math, studied and applied the physics, checked the aerodynamics, and then built the rockets based on what they've taught themselves, measuring 100 times if they measured once. Because of the nature of rockets, they haven't been tested outside of computer simulations.

If that isn't enough, weather forecasts call for afternoon thunderstorms in Stonewall, which means their launch window could be compressed.

And it doesn't help that most haven't slept much. Some worked through the night. Others were bothered by an overnight storm; others consumed by what-ifs.

And there are a lot of what-ifs.

Moments after stepping down the bus steps at the Stonewall Chamber of Commerce, where five other classes from five other schools are already gathered, teacher Johnathan Whatley is approached by one of his students. Mario Suarez is wearing a T-shirt with "Never Waste Talent" on the back and a sheepish grin.

"We have a predicament," he says. Of course they do.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A.J. Jimenez carries a McGregor High School rocket off the bus on launch day. Aaron Olivera checks parachute lines. McGregor rocket club students huddle during the competition. A rocket launches during a SystemsGo event in Stonewall. RIGHT The thrill of a successful launch for members of the McGregor class.

STAGE 1 | Getting Off the Ground

Dozens of high schools participate in the SystemsGo rocketry curriculum, which culminates in competitive launches at the end of the school year. Teachers leave the rocket building and problem-solving up to the students.

Whatley's go-to response is, "That's interesting. What do you think?" The idea is for the students to figure things out on their own, which is how SystemsGo got started.

Brett Williams was a marine fisheries expert at Texas A&M University at Galveston. When he retired in 1996, he became a science teacher at Fredericksburg High School.

"I didn't have lab equipment," Williams says. "I didn't really have anything. I didn't have a curriculum. I was making it all up as I went."

Today—27 years later—65 schools across Texas and New Mexico launch more than 150 rockets each spring at test sites in Texas and New Mexico as part of SystemsGo, Williams' brainchild.

These aren't toy rockets. These are full-fledged 7-foot-long projectiles, some carefully configured to carry a 1-pound payload as close to a mile high as possible or break the sound barrier. The most advanced few among them carry a payload of university research to an altitude of 50,000 feet.

STAGE 2 | Preparing the Mission

A few miles down the road from McGregor is Crawford, home of SpaceX's rocket testing facility. Occasionally, Whatley's class hears the loud roar of ignition.

Last year's class even got to visit. They saw the facilities



McGregor's Kirsten Galle, left, and Isaiah Thomas prepare a rocket. Teacher Johnathan Whatley calls Galle "a mathematical whiz."



and were allowed off the bus just once—to see close-up the first rocket the company landed safely.

"That was the 100th rocket they'd launched," Whatley says. "That's not a cautionary tale, it's a tale of hope. Here are professionals who have it blow up on them. And then they succeed."

After graduating from Baylor University in 2014, Whatley applied for a coaching job at McGregor, also agreeing to teach the rockets class after he was hired.

"It made me really excited for just the possibilities of different types of education," he says. Some students—even the brightest ones—don't learn to think for themselves, and some need to be challenged, he says. So that's what he does.

The fall semester focuses on the basics of flight. During the first weeks of class, Whatley dumps an assortment of rocket parts on a large table and asks the students to build a small rocket that's fitted with a beginner's rocket engine and launched.

"They make some pretty terrible stuff," Whatley says. "They think the more fins the better. They get creative. Like why not? But that's them failing—but then learning from their mistakes."

Their second goal, Whatley says, "is to build a stable rocket." That's the one they'll try to fly in Stonewall.

STAGE 3 | The Race to Launch

It turns out the predicament Suarez mentions is minor. They forgot a section of plastic tubing vital to fueling. "It's a chance to work on your social skills," Whatley says to Suarez. The implication is clear: Ask around.

The group is an amalgam: football players, makers, math nerds and more. But all plan to attend college, many in technical fields.

"This class definitely reshaped the way I went about doing school," says Suarez, who wants to be a hair stylist. "Before, I would slack in classes. But whenever I got to rockets, I understood that you can't do that. There are deadlines that need to be met."

For Williams, there's more than just hard work, or even serendipity, at play with SystemsGo. He recalls cold calling a rocket parts company only to unexpectedly catch the CEO at lunch, reading an article about the program as he ate. He was a yes.

And there was a real long shot—dialing the Pentagon from the middle of nowhere, hoping to find someone to ask about borrowing some launch technology. He reached a general's adjutant, who was in Fredericksburg the week before for a presentation. Impressed, he connected Williams to the general, who said, "I know I'm supposed to say no, but this guy tells me I have to say yes." And he did.

STAGE 4 | Launch, Recovery, Retrospection

The storms do not materialize in Stonewall. After much back and forth with officials examining the rockets, a few close calls, and frantic recalculations, all three McGregor rockets pass muster: They launch and fly straight and high.

None earns an award, though one just misses reaching the 1-mile threshold. The students don't know that as they bus back to McGregor, stopping at the Chick-fil-A in Marble Falls for a celebratory feast.

Once back, the teams do their post-launch analyses, looking at what they did right and what they didn't. Uncertainty will be met with experience next year, when the nucleus of 11th graders returns for a chance to improve.

Schematics will be honed. Math will be tightened. Construction will be polished.

Next May, the sky's the limit (weather permitting). ■



HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

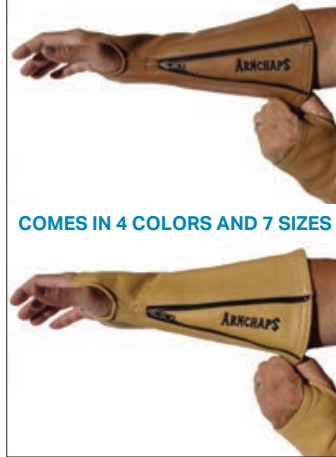
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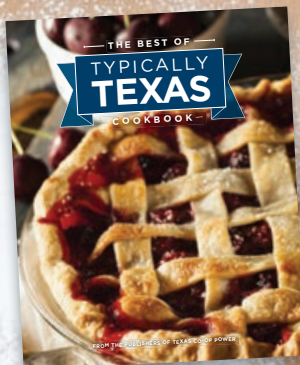
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Still in the Saddle Again



CALF ROPING AT 80? COMPETITION—AND CAMARADERIE— HAVE NO UPPER LIMITS IN THE SENIOR RODEO CIRCUIT

Competitors pace their horses before a barrel racing event on a warm October day at Circle T Arena. It's the statewide finals, and competitors are wearing their finest—spotless boots, hats and tack. Their high-strung mounts trot back and forth at the dusty arena in Hamilton, about 70 miles west of Waco, awaiting their call times.

When the clock starts, horse and rider burst from the gate in a blaze of energy and graying hair. Precision turns, pivots and raw speed streak through the arena. Cheers of support rise from the grandstands: "You got this, Grandma!" and "Let's go, Gram!"

It's all over in a few blinks.

Billie Bright, 63, takes the win with a time of 15.8—only 2.5 seconds slower than the current national champion, who is about 35 years younger. Not bad for an oldster. Four-time National Finals Rodeo world champion Hailey Kinsel, 29, holds the fastest barrel time—13.34 seconds.

Today's statewide finals are one of the 23 events the Texas Senior Pro Rodeo Association, celebrating 45 years in 2023, hosts for competitors 40 and older. Rex Sandifer's father, Morris, was one of the founding members of the organization in Waco in 1978.

"There were lots of amateur rodeos at the time, but it's just difficult as a 40-year-old to compete against 20-year-olds," Sandifer says. So Morris and a few other aging cowboys organized calf roping events for the older crowd. That grew into steer dogging, bareback and bull riding. "And all of them said, well, why don't we just go in and make a rodeo association out of it?"

The TSPRA put on full rodeos, including bull and bronc riding, in the 1980s. "There were probably two or three of those guys that were pretty good bull riders, and then the rest of the guys were people who wished that they were bull riders earlier in their lives," Sandifer says with a laugh.

The decision was made to drop the more dangerous events from the schedule but not because they didn't have competitors. "It was hard to get producers to haul animals for eight or 10 people," says Sandifer, a member of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

Today, many of TSPRA's 300-plus members are former pro rodeo riders, ropers and barrel racers from Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Ages range from the association minimum into the 80s, and competitors are grouped by age. But some old-timers can still beat the young whippersnappers, and many older members choose to compete in multiple younger divisions.

"Some people join and think it's going to be easy because it's all old-timers, but we have cowboys and cowgirls that are still going to circuit finals and winning open rodeos," says Beverly Shoaf, secretary of the TSPRA board of directors.

Bright, a member of Taylor Electric Cooperative from Baird, has been competing in rodeos for 50 years and is one of the top barrel racers in the 60-plus division. She has had to refine her approach.

"For me, at my age, I've learned that I can't ride just every horse that comes around," she says. "I have to look for a



OPPOSITE J.J. Jolley of Stephenville whips around a barrel during the Texas Senior Pro Rodeo Association finals last October in Hamilton. ABOVE Karen Little of San Saba gets a hug from her grandson Asher.



"It's real important to have these rodeos because if you ever quit, you're done." —REX SANDIFER

horse that moves a little smoother and doesn't throw a whole lot of torque."

Earlier in her career, Bright could spend hours training on horseback, but these days, she rides for half an hour before giving her knees a break. "We have to have a lot of core strength to do what we do at our age," she says. "Your hand-eye coordination needs to be real sharp. And if you don't compete fairly often, like every two weeks or so, you get slower and slower."

But Bright says other skills have only improved. Her ability to read animals gives her a competitive advantage that came with age. "You can anticipate nearly what a horse is fixing to do from each step that they take," she says. "Each stride that they take, they're telling you something if you're really listening."

Tomm Owens, vice president of the TSPRA board and a member of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, didn't join the association until he was 50.

Rex Sandifer of Elgin prepares his lasso. His father, Morris, was one of the founders of the senior circuit in 1978.

"I was competing in [pro] events when I was 35, 40, 45. I was one of them that held out," says Owens, who's trying to convince his friends to join. "Their pride just won't let them be old yet."

For Owens, aging into a new bracket is part of the fun. "You kind of get excited again," he says, "because you're going to be the youngest in the group, and you're hoping you're one of the best."

Like Bright, he says his experience gives him a competitive advantage—but for a different reason. "Mentally it's easier as I get older. I don't get as frustrated when things don't go right," Owens says. "You learn not to let the little things bother you."

But he admits that the physical aspect only gets tougher. "Once you get out of shape, it's really hard at 55–60 to get back into shape," he says. "I do 20–30 minutes of stretching every morning and then some situps and pushups."

Jimmy Tobolka is living proof that bodies in motion tend to stay in motion. At 88, he's TSPRA's oldest member and still competes in the 80-plus breakaway, where a mounted rider ropes a running calf.



ABOVE Pat and Jimmy Tobolka of Caldwell are regular TSPRA competitors. Jimmy, at 88, is the circuit's oldest member. LEFT Doug Richards of Bedias closes in on a calf.



"Once you start doing it, it's hard to get quit doing it, you know?" he says. "It's helped keep me going all these years."

One of the youngest members of the association is Seth Smithson, the president of the board, who turns 40 in December. "I think it's a breath of fresh air from the hustle and bustle," he says. The 2023 TSPRA statewide finals are October 19–21 at Circle T Arena in Hamilton. "You come hang out with the older crowd and watch these guys compete and see how great they are with their horses, and you can definitely learn a thing or two."

The TSPRA's prizes aren't much—trophy saddles and buckles—but that's not the main reason any of these competitors are here.

"Nobody's going to get rich at our rodeos," Owens says. "So much of it is just being able to see all the guys you used to rodeo with, cook steaks out back at the trailers and eat a meal Saturday night with maybe 10 or 15 people at every other trailer. That's a big, big part of it."

But no one can question the enthusiasm and the dedication these athletes have for their sport—for continuing to hone their craft, even as their bodies falter.

"We're all just very grateful to still be able to throw a leg over a horse," Bright says. "And when you have that gratitude of still being able to do it, nobody's moaning and groaning about winning." ■

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It's how you have your say on the Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative Board of Directors every year and on statewide and federal issues and leaders every spring and fall. It's just part of being an American and a co-op member.

But as election season ramps up again this month, I want to tell you about an important new way to stay engaged in the political process to help ensure the future for electric cooperatives.

TVEC is part of a network of more than 830 co-ops across the U.S. that serve more than 42 million Americans. And now those folks are joining together through Voices for Cooperative Power, a grassroots network of co-op members created to help our elected officials better understand the many ways your electric co-op supports you and your community.

Much of the focus in Washington, D.C., these days is on large utilities in big cities, and as you know, co-ops like TVEC are fundamentally different.

We're a local business that employs local people to power our community. We're not motivated by

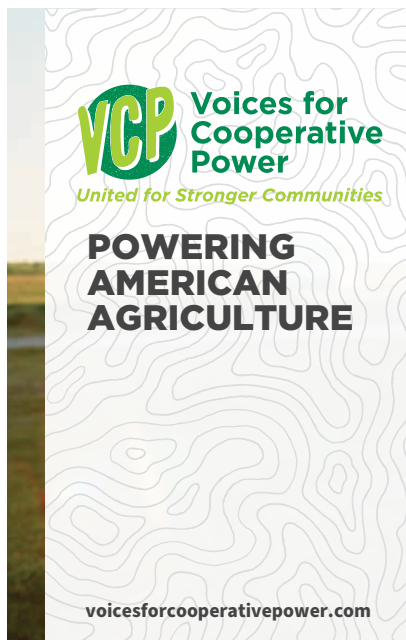
profits but by people—our friends and neighbors—which is why energy affordability and reliability and economic development mean so much to us.

We could use your help putting a human face on the opportunities and hurdles facing America's electric cooperatives. With tens of millions of small-town folks just like you, VCP hopes to build influence among the halls of power—but we need your help to get there.

By visiting voicesforcooperativepower.com and joining the VCP movement, you can receive updates on the issues that matter most to you and, when needed, information on how to contact your elected officials and government agencies on proposed legislation or regulations that impact your co-op.

That way, you'll be ready October 23, when early voting starts across Texas this year. When we go to the polls with the cooperative principle of Concern for Community in mind, we instantly impact our political system.

It's a system designed to produce a government "of the people, by the people, for the people"—just like your co-op. Help us make sure your voice and your friends and neighbors are represented by going to voicesforcooperativepower.com. ■





October Is National Co-op Month

FALL IS A BUSY TIME, and October is a particularly eventful month with school, community and sports activities in full swing. It's also when all cooperatives celebrate National Co-op Month.

When Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative celebrates Co-op Month, it really means we're celebrating you!

Our core business purpose is to be your electricity provider, but the larger mission of the co-op is to help make our corner of the world a better place.

Concern for Community is one of seven guiding principles that all co-ops share. Like our wires running through our service territory, our concern for friends and neighbors flows through all of our decisions—because being a co-op means being a responsible partner and good neighbor.


TVEC works to help our community thrive through initiatives led by our employees and local board that's composed of neighbors who live right here in our community. Because we're local, we understand our community's unique needs and strive to help meet them.

We're proud to support local youths through the Government-in-Action Youth Tour and scholarship programs. Through your giving we are able to support many great organizations through Operation Round Up. And our education and safety outreach programs are active in schools throughout the area.

Above all, as a co-op, we put our members' priorities first. As your trusted energy partner, we know that saving energy and money is important to you. We have numerous programs in place to help, so give us a call if you have questions about your energy bills.

TVEC is continually examining ways to operate more efficiently while continuing to provide the highest level of friendly, reliable service you expect and deserve. After all, we were built by the members we serve. We're your local co-op. ■

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

CONTACT US

1800 E. Highway 243
Kaufman, Texas
Local (972) 932-2214
Toll-Free 1-800-766-9576
Web tvec.net

Board of Directors

Howard Tillison, Chairman, District 6
Carolyn Minor, Vice Chairwoman, District 1
Jo Ann Hanstrom, Secretary, District 4
Jeff Priest, District 2
Paul Weatherford, District 3
Edward Reeve, District 5
Jack Endres, District 7

General Manager/CEO

Jeff Lane

24/7

Outage Hotline Numbers

For information and to report outages, please call us.

TOLL-FREE
1-800-967-9324

AUTOMATED ASSISTANCE
1-800-720-3584

ABOUT TRINITY VALLEY EC

TVEC operates in Anderson, Dallas, Henderson, Hunt, Kaufman and Van Zandt counties.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Kaufman District Headquarters

1800 E. Highway 243, Kaufman

Athens District Office

909 W. Larkin St., Athens

Cedar Creek District Office

1012 W. Main St., Ste. 102
Gun Barrel City

Wills Point District Office

582 N. Fourth St., Wills Point

Lobby Hours

8:15 a.m.–4:45 p.m.

VISIT US ONLINE

tvec.net



2023 TVEC Annual Membership Meeting

★ 6 p.m. October 5 ★
Canton Civic Center



Success Checklist



SmartHub will help you save time and money by managing your account at any time from anywhere. Here is a checklist to put you in control of your account from day one. Please reach out if you have any questions.

❑ What you will need for registration

- An **email address**
- Your **current account number**. You will be able to find your account number on your latest bill. You can also call our customer service team at **1-800-766-9576**.

❑ Download the SmartHub app

Follow these instructions if you would like to use SmartHub on your mobile device.

- Open up the Apple or Google Play app store (depending on your device)
- Search for "SmartHub" in the app store and install the app on your device.
- You can find instructions on our SmartHub support site at tvec.net/smarthub.



❑ Register your account in SmartHub

The first thing you will need to do is register your account in our new SmartHub system.

- Mobile: Click the "Don't have an account? Register now" link on the app's log in page.
- Web: Visit our SmartHub support page at tvec.net/smarthub and click on Register button.
- You can also find instructions on that page.

❑ Auto pay re-registration (if enrolled)

If you use our auto pay program with a debit/credit card or bank draft, you will need to re enroll.

- On either web portal or app, click on Bill & Pay.
- Click on Auto Pay Program link.
- If you use your bank's payment service to schedule payments, you will need to verify your [NAME] account number to ensure payments are routed properly.

❑ Consider trying paperless billing

Save time by getting your bills instantly through SmartHub and save the cost of printing and mailing your bill.

- You can activate paperless billing during your account registration.
- Web portal: Under the My Profile menu, click on Update my Paperless Settings submenu.
- Mobile: Select Settings and Paperless Billing.

❑ Set up notifications

Choose how you receive notifications from SmartHub (email or SMS)

- Under the Notifications menu, click Manage Contacts to add email and/or text numbers.
- Enter verification code to activate.
- Click on Manage Notifications to set up email and/or SMS alerts using the contact info you entered.

Need assistance? We are here to help!

memberrelations@tvec.coop

1-800-766-9576



ATTENTION

IMPORTANT PAYMENT INFORMATION

NO ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED BETWEEN OCTOBER 23RD-29TH

Mail-in payments, cash, and checks will still be accepted in our lobbies.

As we convert over to our new SmartHub payment system it will require us take our current electronic payment system offline temporarily.

More information regarding our new SmartHub payment system launching October 30th will be available soon!



No late fees or disconnects for non payment during this time.

Visit tvec.net/smarthub for more information!

SmartHub is Almost Here, Now What?

October 30 will bring a raft of changes in how we communicate with you. Here is what you need to know.

BY DON JOHNSON, MEDIA AND CONTENT SUPERVISOR

THE END OF OCTOBER MAY BRING some ghosts and goblins to your door, but none of those things are quite as scary as a complete change of business software. If you had a look behind the scenes, your co-op employees have spent most of the last few months working hard to learn a whole new system while keeping all of the regular operations humming.

Thankfully, we will be fully converted to SmartHub on October 30, and we are confident that within a short time your member experience will be better than ever.

Here are the things that will be changing and how you can ease into the SmartHub environment.

- **October 23-29**—Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative electronic payment systems will be offline during this week. Check and cash payments will still be accepted, but bank transfer, credit card and other electronic payments will not be taken. This includes payments via the myTVEC mobile app and the online member portal. Disconnects and late fees will not be processed during this week.

- **New Account Numbers**—Look for more information regarding your new TVEC account number in coming weeks. Most members will be able to use their original account number for their initial SmartHub setup, but all members will get a new account number.

- **New Bill Design**—You will see a new, more informative and easy-to-read billing statement starting with November's bills; however, there will be some changes regarding payment

information that is on file. If you have had automatic payments set up, or credit cards on file with our member services team, those will need to be reset.

If you are on paperless billing, you will need to select that option again. And if you aren't already paperless, this is a great time to make that change.

- **TVEC.NET Website**—On October 30, our website will also be all new, with a SmartHub login available right from the homepage. The new site will be more user-friendly, especially for mobile users.

- **Outage Texting Number Change**—On October 30 our outage texting number will change to match our local number, (972) 932-2214. The change has been required by mobile carriers, who are phasing out support for five-digit short code numbers. If you have already signed up for outage texting, you will be able to simply begin using the new number. If you are not signed up yet, look for more information in the days ahead on how to get going with the easiest way to report and stay updated during outages.

- **SmartHub Mobile App**—The myTVEC mobile app will not work after October 29. Look in your mobile app store for SmartHub in the utilities category. We will send out further information this month about getting logged in for the first time.

Change can be hard, but we are looking forward to the ways we will be able to serve you better! ■



Fall Checklist: Check for Safety, Maintenance Issues

THE BLISTERING SUMMER heat isn't far behind us, but it won't be long until heating season arrives and the house is full of company for the holidays.

Head off a y potential problems by scheduling maintenance and safety checks for your home's heating and electrical devices now. **Here's where to start.**

Furnace. A qualified tech should do a twice-a-year check of your system: once in the fall for heating and again in the spring for air conditioning. Before you need to turn on the heat, make sure yours is in good working condition. The tech can spot problems before they ruin your system or cause a malfunction while your house is full of company.

Thermostats. If your home doesn't have a programmable thermostat, you could be paying more to heat and cool your home than you should. Programmable thermostats automatically turn the heat up or down, depending on your family's schedule.

Ground-fault circuit interrupters. A licensed electrician can install GFCIs in your bathroom, kitchen and laundry room; around hot tubs and pools; and under windows. All those areas have the potential to get wet, and a GFCI will shut off the electricity to an appliance that does. In addition, it can interrupt a circuit if it's overcharged.

Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. If you don't have them near all the bedrooms in your home, it's time to install them. Then check them twice a year to make sure they're still working and that they have fresh batteries.

Overloaded outlets. You can overload an electrical circuit by plugging in appliances that use a lot of electricity—like a range, dishwasher, refrigerator or even some entertainment systems and exercise equipment—into a circuit designed for a smaller load. Ask a licensed electrician to inspect your home for potential circuit overloads. ■

Win \$100 Just for Reading

Somewhere, hidden on pages 16–23, is a TVEC account number. Read closely. If the account number is yours, contact the member services department by October 31 to receive a \$100 credit on your electric bill. Don't miss out—you could be our winner.



TVEC
TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Energy Quiz



ERCOT set a new peak Texas demand record in August. What was new record?

- A • 40,000 MW**
- B • 56,502 MW**
- C • 85,435 MW**
- D • 75,223 MW**

Win **\$100!**

Send your answer and contact information to **contest@tvec.coop** or contact TVEC Member Services by October 31. One \$100 bill credit winner will be chosen from all correct replies. Look for the correct answer in a future **Texas Co-op Power**.

September Energy Quiz: Transmission Line Voltage

THOSE GIANT TOWERS lining up through the countryside can carry a lot of power, but just how much depends on the design of each type of line. Typically, the higher and more robust structures carry higher voltages. For the sake of our quiz, typical voltages include D, All of the Above: 69,000, 138,000 and 345,000 volts.

Congratulations to the August Energy Quiz winner, Topaz Greenwood, of Heartland.

Look for the winner of this month's contest in the December issue of **Texas Co-op Power**. ■



SINENKY | ISTOCK.COM

Q&A: Breaking Down Energy-Saving Claims



TVEC ENERGY
MANAGEMENT ADVISER
CHRIS WALKER, BAP

WHEN IT COMES TO saving energy, it can be challenging to separate fact from fiction. Here are answers to some common conservation questions.

Q: Is it true that turning lights off and on uses more energy than just leaving

them on?

A: Not true. Turning off lights definitely reduces energy use. Turn off LED and incandescent bulbs every time you leave the room. The situation is a little different with compact fluorescent bulbs. Turning them off does save energy but can shorten the life of the bulb. The rule of thumb for CFLs is to turn them off any time they won't be used for 15 minutes or more. 60181054-002

Q: Would replacing my old windows with new, more efficient ones really cut my energy use in half?

A: No. While replacing inefficient windows with new, energy-efficient windows can cut heat loss through windows in half or more, windows typically account for only about 25% to 30% of your space heating costs. The amount of energy you use for heating and cooling is likely one-third to one-half of your total energy use, so replacing your old windows might only reduce your total energy costs by about 10%. When you consider the high cost of new windows, you may not recoup your investment for 15 or 20 years.

Q: Burning wood in my fireplace should lower my heating costs, right?

A: Possibly, but certain conditions need to be met. The wood should be dry and burned efficiently in a properly installed, properly placed, high-efficiency wood stove or fireplace insert.

Otherwise, it's likely you'll lose as much heat through your chimney as you're distributing throughout the house.

Q: My kids claim using the dishwasher is just as efficient as washing dishes by hand. Are they right?

A: Yes. In fact, it's usually more efficient. Properly used dishwashers actually use less water while doing a better job, and as a bonus, they will save you more than 200 hours a year. For maximal energy savings, make sure your water heater is set to about 120 degrees and use the most efficient wash/dry settings.

Q: I've heard it's better to heat individual rooms with an electric space heater and keep the doors closed to trap the heat. Is this true?

A: It's possible to save money with an electric space heater if you use it only a few hours a day and reduce your home's thermostat setting by a couple of degrees. Space heaters can cause fires, so they need to be used wisely and should never be left unattended. Heating your entire home with space heaters is inefficient and dangerous.

Q: Should I close the vents in rooms that aren't being used?

A: Most experts advise against this because closing supply registers forces your furnace to work harder. They advise keeping all vents and doors open. If your system supplies too much heat to some rooms and too little to other rooms, you should talk to a heating and air conditioning professional about modifying your ductwork.

Q: Does the age of my home determine how energy efficient it is?

A: Newer homes tend to be more efficient because energy codes have improved, but every home can have hidden energy issues, no matter its age. ■



Payment Options Savings Opportunities

As a nonprofit, member-owned cooperative, saving money together means we all win. By choosing the lowest cost payment option that makes sense for you, all members win by keeping the co-op's cost as low as possible.

Why Choose Bank Draft or E-Check?

- Provides the lowest transaction costs.
- Automated bank drafts the easiest way to pay—set up online or by contacting TVEC Member Services.
- Manage payments in the SmartHub app beginning October 30.

Want to help more? Sign up for electronic billing to reduce mailing costs.

TEXAS DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Hurricane Preparedness Guidelines

Hurricane season is June 1–November 30

Preparedness Checklist

- ▶ **Make an evacuation plan.** Find activated evacuation routes at drivetexas.org or by dialing 1-800-452-9292. Call 211 to find out if you live in an evacuation zone.
- ▶ **Sign up for emergency alerts.** Make sure your mobile device is enabled to receive wireless emergency alerts.
- ▶ **Prepare an emergency supply kit.** Learn how to build an emergency kit at ready.gov/build-a-kit.
- ▶ **Review your home insurance policy.**
- ▶ **Register with the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry** at stear.tdem.texas.gov or by dialing 211 if you live in an evacuation zone and:
 - Have a disability or medical needs and do not have a car or other vehicle to use in an evacuation.
 - Have a disability or medical needs and do not have friends or family to help in an evacuation.

Information collected for STEAR is confidential

Hurricane Preparedness Online Resources

Texas Division of Emergency Management: tdem.texas.gov
 Texas Department of State Health Services: texasready.gov
 American Red Cross: redcross.org
 U.S. Department of Homeland Security: ready.gov
 Office of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott: gov.texas.gov

DIVISIÓN DE ADMINISTRACIÓN DE EMERGENCIAS DE TEXAS

Preparación para huracanes

La temporada de huracanes es del 1 de junio al 30 de noviembre

Lista de verificación de preparación:

- ▶ **Haga un plan de evacuación.** Encuentre rutas de evacuación activadas en drivetexas.org o marcando 1-800-452-9292. Llame 211 para averiguar si usted vive en una zona de evacuación.
- ▶ **Regístrese para recibir alertas de emergencia.** Asegúrese de que su dispositivo móvil esté habilitado para recibir alertas de emergencia inalámbricas.
- ▶ **Prepare un kit de emergencia.** Aprenda como construir un kit de emergencia en ready.gov/build-a-kit.
- ▶ **Revise su póliza de seguro de hogar.**
- ▶ **Regístrese con el Registro de Asistencia de Emergencia del Estado de Texas** en stear.tdem.texas.gov o marcando el 211 si vive en una zona de evacuación y:
 - Tiene una discapacidad o necesidades médicas y no tiene un auto u otro vehículo para usar en una evacuación.
 - Tiene una discapacidad o necesidades médicas y no tiene amigos o familiares para ayudar en una evacuación.

La información recolectada para STEAR es confidencial

Recursos en línea para la preparación para huracanes

División de Administración de Emergencias de Texas: tdem.texas.gov
 Departamento de Servicios de Salud del Estado: texasready.gov
 Cruz Roja Americana: redcross.org
 Departamento de Seguridad Nacional de los Estados Unidos: ready.gov
 Oficina del Gobernador de Texas Greg Abbott: gov.texas.gov

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Your Generosity in Action

Operation Round Up Spotlight: Texas Health Wellness for Life

OCTOBER HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS with breast cancer awareness programs. But for the Texas Health Wellness for Life team, preventative healthcare solutions is a year-round project.

“Our mobile health units travel to underserved areas to meet women in need where they live, work and worship,” said Vanida Lambert, a Texas Health annual giving specialist. “Last year 136 mammograms were administered in Kaufman County, increasing our



The Wellness for Life mobile unit includes state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment in a patient-friendly setting.



From left, Laura Melton, TVEC public relations supervisor, presents an Operation Round Up grant to Texas Health Wellness for Life team members Tina Reed, Sandy Talkington, Bertha Castellon and Vanida Lambert in Kaufman.

service numbers by 155 in the area from the prior year.”

With a well-equipped and staffed mobile health unit, Texas Health Wellness for Life eliminates transportation issues that might keep some members of the community from seeking care. The program currently focuses on mobile mammography and well woman exams for low-income, uninsured or underinsured women. In the future, there is a potential to expand the program to men’s health issues and other needs.

As the population rises, so do the health care needs of the community.

“The increase in services over the last two years is due, in large part, to the incredible generosity of community supporters like the Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative Operation Round Up program,” Lambert said. “The combined giving of co-op members adds up to making a big difference in providing life-saving services.”

To donate or learn more about the Texas Health Wellness for Life program, visit texashealth.org/wfl or contact Lambert at vanidalambert@texashealth.org. ■

August 2023 Operation Round Up Awards

Grants

Tool Community Food Pantry -
\$5,000
In His Hands Children’s Home -
\$5,000

Food and Bill Assistance

Helping Angels of Kaufman
County - \$2,500
Henderson County Help Center -
\$2,500

October is

BOGO

Bonanza Month!



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San Antonio

210-961-9990

West Texas

432-257-3640

Dallas/Fort Worth

469-606-5229

TopWindowSolution.com

¹Subject to availability, on a total purchase of 4 or more. Buy 2 windows or doors and get the second 2 windows or doors, of equal or lesser value, 50% off – applied to lowest priced window and/or door products in purchase. BOGO 50% off discount valid during first appointment only. Cannot be combined with other offers. To qualify for discount offer, initial contact for an appointment must be made and documented on or before 10/31/23 with the purchase then occurring on or before 11/10/23. ²No payments and deferred interest for 12 months available from third-party lenders to well qualified buyers on approved credit only. No Finance Charges will be assessed if promo balance is paid in full in 12 months. Products are marketed, sold and installed (but not manufactured) by Renewal by Andersen retailers, which are independently owned and operated under Central Texas Windows & Doors LLC, d/b/a Renewal by Andersen of Austin and San Antonio. North Texas Windows & Doors LLC, d/b/a Renewal by Andersen of Dallas/Fort Worth and West Texas. See complete information and entity identification at www.rbaguidelines.com. ©2023 Andersen Corporation. ©2023 Lead Surge LLC. All rights reserved.



TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



It Still Reigns

At 50, Elmer Kelton's 'The Time It Never Rained' remains 'a book of the heart'

BY W.F. STRONG

WE SHOULD ALL BE grateful that Elmer Kelton was a poor cowboy. When he was a young man, the now-famous writer said his inability to rope and ride well pushed him toward reading and then writing. Had he been a better cowboy, he told a reporter in 1984, "I'd still be working out on some ranch on the Pecos River."

It's been 50 years since *The Time It Never Rained*, Kelton's classic novel, was published. Many Texas literary critics consider it one of the best novels written by a Texan about Texas. It was also Kelton's favorite book and what he called his signature work—of the nearly 50 novels he wrote before he died in 2009.

The novel received the Spur Award

and the Western Heritage Award.

The book is not your run-of-the-mill Western. There are no shootouts. No one dies. Wallace Kaufman, who taught at Duke University, wrote that the novel should rank "with Faulkner's work as the local made universal."

Author Shelley Armitage grew up in the 1950s in the Texas Panhandle, when and where the novel takes place.

"To see oneself and one's landscape so accurately and aesthetically rendered was life-changing—as it remains today: a book of the heart," Armitage says.

Mike Cox, author of 14 books on Texas and the West, notes that Kelton covered the terrible 1950s drought for the *San Angelo Standard-Times* and began

writing fiction on the side.

"He used what he knew about the dry spell for *The Time It Never Rained*, a novel I don't believe he ever expected to become a classic," Cox says. "I predict that as the West continues to get drier and drier due to global warming, his book will become even more important."

For prolific author Wyman Meinzer, Texas' official state photographer who once shared a book signing with Kelton, his "words conjured memories of blinding dust storms, dry stock tanks and a land void of palatable grass."

Jac Darsnek, the man behind the much-loved *Traces of Texas* accounts on social media and a ubiquitous traveler and photographer of Texas, was 17 when he discovered the novel. He still draws inspiration from Charlie Flagg, the novel's admirable protagonist, whom Kelton created from his own cowboy father.

"Elmer Kelton's tale of hardship and endurance and main character Charlie Flagg's astonishing self-reliance resonated within me in a place I never knew I had, and his descriptions of ranch life spoke to my inner Texan," Darsnek said. "Decades later, when confronted with some obstacle or tough choice, I'll ask myself, 'What would Charlie Flagg do?'"

Steve Davis, curator of the Southwestern writers collection at the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University, says *The Time It Never Rained* is one of the most important Texas novels and a masterful example of eyewitness literature.

"Kelton was on the front lines when the great drought devastated the land and people he knew intimately," Davis says. "His resulting novel, richly observed and deeply empathetic, stands as the truest, most profound portrait of that era." ■

Beans

Versatility turns this kitchen staple into a star

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

A quick and easy mixture of green, black and red beans tossed in a delicious, tangy dressing, this three-bean salad is great the day you make it, but it's even better to enjoy the next day for lunch.

Three-Bean Salad

4 teaspoons salt, divided use
12 ounces fresh green beans,
rinsed and cut into 1-inch pieces
6 tablespoons olive oil
6 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 can black beans (15 ounces),
drained and rinsed
1 can red beans (15 ounces),
drained and rinsed
¼ cup finely diced red onion
1 cucumber, diced
1 cup finely diced carrot
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
4 tablespoons chopped fresh dill

1. Fill a pot halfway with water, add 2 teaspoons salt and bring to a boil.
2. Add green beans and cook for 3 minutes. Drain and pat dry.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, Dijon mustard, cumin, pepper and remaining 2 teaspoons salt.
4. Add green beans, black beans and red beans to bowl. Stir to combine, then stir in red onion, cucumber and carrot.
5. Cover and chill until ready to serve. Before serving, stir in parsley and dill.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez while she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Roasted Tomatillo Garbanzo Salad.





Little Pots of Red Beans With Sour Cream

ALEXANDRA DIBRELL
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Sometimes cooking for two can be tricky. Don't worry—Dibrell has hungry twosomes covered with a simple one-pot dinner idea. Bacon, beans and a little jalapeño kick, served warm and topped with sour cream, are pure comfort.

- 2 strips bacon, diced**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- ½ small red onion, finely diced**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely diced**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¾ cup chicken broth or stock**
- 1 can kidney beans (15.5 ounces), drained**
- 4 tablespoons sour cream**
- Fresh cilantro sprigs, for garnish**

1. In a skillet, cook bacon until crisp. Remove from pan and drain.
2. Add olive oil, onion, jalapeño and salt. Sauté until soft and translucent.
3. Pour in chicken broth or stock and return bacon to skillet, bringing to a simmer.
4. Stir in beans and simmer until warmed through.
5. Ladle the beans into two bowls and top each with sour cream and cilantro.

SERVES 2

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Hurry Up Stew

EDITH FORSHAGE
GVEC



A filling, hearty meal that's easy to prepare at the end of a busy day, Forshage's Hurry Up Stew is pantry-friendly and can be whipped up in under 30 minutes.

SERVES 6

- 1 pound ground beef**
- 2 tablespoons dried beef bouillon**
- 1 can diced tomatoes with green chilis (15 ounces)**
- 1 carton chicken, beef or vegetable broth (32 ounces)**
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can garbanzo beans (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can hominy (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can potatoes (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can diced carrots (15 ounces), drained**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper**

1. In a nonstick pot, brown ground beef and drain.
2. Stir in bouillon, diced tomatoes and broth.
3. Add pinto beans, garbanzo beans, hominy, potatoes and carrots.
4. Add salt and pepper.
5. Simmer for 20 minutes to thoroughly heat ingredients.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

BEST BRUNCH DUE OCTOBER 10

Brunch is at your place this time. What will you serve? We're looking for the best recipes in Texas. Submit your favorite online by October 10 for a chance to win \$500.





Homemade Bean Dip

KAREN YEOMAN
SAN PATRICIO EC

Yeoman has been cooking up this family-favorite dip for 40 years for family gatherings, church functions and parties. It's easy and delicious, and we're excited to share it with you.

2 cups fully cooked pinto beans
2 tablespoons picante sauce
½ teaspoon garlic powder

¼ pound processed cheese product
2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter
Tortilla or corn chips, for serving

1. Place beans, picante sauce and garlic powder into a blender. Blend until smooth.
2. In a glass bowl, melt cheese and butter in microwave, stirring at 30-second to 1-minute intervals until smooth.
3. Stir bean mixture into the cheese mixture until smooth. Microwave dip for 30-second to 1-minute intervals until thoroughly heated.
4. Serve warm dip with chips.

SERVES 10

TCP Among the more than 1,000 recipes in our online archive are dozens that include beans—even some for chili. You can find them all on our website.

Fabulous and Versatile Beans

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Canned beans, a pantry staple, are not only delicious, they also are extremely versatile and budget-friendly, can shine as a main dish or side, and even work in desserts.

Try these ideas to get more from your pantry beans:

Blend them into a creamy dip.

Stir some into your favorite stew.
(And they really are even OK in chili.)

Use beans as a satisfying filling for your next taco night.

Consider them as a meatless option for making burgers.

Mix into cold salads for potlucks.

Bake puréed beans into brownies for added protein.



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Puffy Taco Trailblazer

Legendary Ray's Drive Inn was the first and remains the best

BY CHET GARNER

WHEN I HEAR the term “drive-in,” I immediately envision greasy cheeseburgers, thick milkshakes and smiling carhops. But Ray's Drive Inn on the west side of San Antonio isn't that kind of joint. Sure, it's full of nostalgia, an old jukebox and belly-pleasing food. But Ray's has a magical, signature dish that separates it from all others—puffy tacos. After hearing the legend, I took a day trip to the Alamo City to try them for myself.

Ray's opened in 1956 as the entrepreneurial dream of Raymond Lopez. Legend holds that one day, Ray's grandmother was frying corn masa for tostadas. She stepped away from the fryer and a wooden stick (no doubt guided by the hand of God) fell from a shelf and folded the masa into a tacolike form. The family started selling these crispy yet fluffy shells full of meat, cheese, lettuce and tomatoes. In no time, a legend was born.

After almost 70 years, the restaurant is still family owned and operated by the children of Arturo Lopez, Ray's younger brother.

I found the restaurant far from the beaten path and could smell the deep-fried tortillas as soon as I stepped out of my truck. Inside, the walls were a menagerie of family photos, taxidermy and even a neon altar to the Virgin Mary. I ordered up a platter of three puffy tacos (beef, chicken, and bean and avocado) and found a table tucked below a painting of Ray, Arturo and their three other brothers.

One bite let me know that this was unlike any taco I had ever eaten. It was crunchy but soft and perfectly greasy. I had no choice but to order a few more with different fillings. You know, for research. ■

ABOVE Chet shows a close-up of a puffy taco before making it disappear.

TCP Follow along as Chet enjoys puffy perfection. See the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

OCTOBER 07

Boerne Book Festival, (830) 249-3053, boernebookfest.com

Grapevine Celebra
Grapevine, (813) 807-3382, latinosingrapevine.org

Huntington Catfish Festival, (936) 635-3306, shophuntingtontx.com

San Marcos [7-8] Sacred Springs Powwow, (512) 393-5930, sspowwow.com

Weatherford [7-Dec. 2] Spirit of the West, (817) 599-6168, weatherfordart.com

12

Corsicana 175th Anniversary Time Capsule Ceremony, (903) 654-4850, corsicana175years.com

13

Albany [13-14] Living History Days, (512) 463-6100, thc.texas.gov

Ingram [13, 15, 20-22, 26-29] Frankenstein, (830) 367-5121, hcacaf.com

14

Fredericksburg Monarch Celebration, (830) 990-1393, wildseedfarms.com

19

Tyler [19-22] Texas Rose Festival, (903) 531-1212, texasrosefestival.com

20

Brenham Brass Transit, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

21

Cisco TX Pie Fest, (254) 334-9621, ciscotxpiefest.com

San Marcos Eddie Durham Jazz Fest, (512) 217-0600, facebook.com/calaboosmuseum

Waco Oakwood Cemetery's Walking Tales, (254) 717-1763, facebook.com/heartoftexasstorytellingguild

27

Galveston [27-28] Oktoberfest, (409) 762-8477, galvestonoktoberfest.com

28

Cibolo Cibolofest, (210) 619-3104, cibolotx.gov

Point Venture Holiday Bazaar, (781) 363-7161, facebook.com/pvholidaybazaar

Sanger Sellabration, (940) 458-7702, sangertexas.com

Waxahachie Texas Country Reporter Festival, (469) 309-4045, waxahachiecvb.com

31

Johnson City Trunk-or-Treat at the Square, (830) 868-7111, johnsoncitytx.org

NOVEMBER

03

Oakville Dobie Dichos, (361) 319-3067, dobiechichos.com

04

Cottonwood Shores Legends of the Falls Festival, (225) 747-0730, cottonwoodshores.org

TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your January event by November 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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Helping Out

From food donations to fundraising, Texans love to answer the call and lend a helping hand. Here's to all those who look out for others and embrace a challenge, rolling up their sleeves and pitching in for those in need.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 HANNAH WESTERVELT
SAN PATRICIO EC

"My son and husband working on his truck."

2 KERI NAKAMURA
TRI-COUNTY EC

"A son takes his 93-year-old mother on an evening walk."

3 BRANDON EMBRY
DEAF SMITH EC

"I always liked this photo of my grandpa with my son trailing him around. We were getting ready to harvest wheat, and my kids always liked hanging out with Pop."

4 LINDSAY HUMPHREYS
SOUTH PLAINS EC

"The beauty of raising kids in West Texas is they get to experience traditional branding and working cattle."



Upcoming Contests

DUE OCT 10 Vibrant Color
DUE NOV 10 Architecture
DUE DEC 10 Pollinators



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Helping Out photos from readers.



Noteworthy Grace

When the pandemic paused events, a tiny chapel celebrated kindness

BY SPIKE GILLESPIE
PHOTO BY WYATT MCSPADDEN

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I bought an abandoned ranch just east of Austin. I dreamed of one day converting it to a meditation center, providing space for people of all walks to gather and sit in peace.

Running a ranch, even a small one, is pricey though. So I put my dream on hold and instead created a small wedding venue, a more lucrative way to support the place.

The crown jewel was a tiny chapel I had moved here from Luling. Couples loved the rustic feel and unique beauty of the building, fashioned from reclaimed wood and antique stained glass.

During the pandemic, business fell off and grumpiness befell some of the couples who proceeded with their plans. Frustrated with how the pandemic forced unwanted change—some had to reschedule, others watched guest lists

dwindle—they sometimes took out their aggravation on me. Overwhelmed by this negativity, sometimes I snapped back.

For a spell, after a particularly enraged bride eviscerated me because of the weather, I shut down altogether. Dismayed at how joyful celebrations had become overshadowed, I knew I needed to make a change.

A flash of an idea struck me. I recalled a Vermont chapel where people make pilgrimages to honor their dogs who have passed. I remembered a little chapel in Mexico where visitors leave notes of gratitude and *milagros* (prayer offerings) for St. Francis. I dubbed my itty-bitty church the Tiny Chapel of Kindness and invited people to send stories of kindness to adorn the walls.

And they did.

Their notes run the gamut from heartwarming to heartbreaking to flat-out hilarious. One describes being saved from a car wreck by strangers. Another hails an internet stranger who sent free motorcycle parts to a fellow tinkerer. One details the discovery, late in life, of a long-lost half-brother who embraced his “new” sister wholeheartedly (the siblings had been kept secret from each other because of the sins of their father).

I had many stories of my own to share, finally settling on one. Last fall, one of my longhorns went into labor. It was a bad journey. Unable to assist her alone, I called a neighbor for help. We cried as we worked together to deliver the stillborn calf. Then he administered penicillin so the mom would survive.

Grateful visitors come to read the stories and leave notes of their own. This is not the meditation center I’d envisioned when I first laid eyes on an old run-down property, but in our own fashion, we each meditate on the power of kindness. Powerful indeed.

As I had hoped, my attitude has shifted back to positive and, inspired by others, my anger has been replaced by joy and gratitude. ■

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2023 Canada Maple Leaf: A highly sought-after bullion coin since 1988, this 2023 issue includes the **FIRST** and likely only use of a transitional portrait, of the late Queen Elizabeth II. These are also expected to be the **LAST** Maple Leafs to bear Her Majesty's effigy. Struck in high-purity 99.99% fine silver at the Royal Canadian Mint.

2023 South African Krugerrand: The Krugerrand continues to be the best-known, most respected numismatic coin brand in the world. 2023 is the Silver Krugerrand's 6th year of issue. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the South African Mint.

2023 China Silver Panda: 2023 is the 40th anniversary of the first silver Panda coin, issued in 1983. China Pandas are noted for their heart-warming one-year-only designs. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the China Mint.

2023 British Silver Britannia: One of the Royal Mint's flagship coins, this 2023 issue is the **FIRST** in the Silver Britannia series to carry the portrait of King Charles III, following the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. Struck in 99.9% fine silver.

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