

PIONEERING PILOTS
OF SWEETWATER

A TEXAN'S HISTORIC
PLAY AT THE MASTERS

THE MOST OVERLOOKED
BIG BEND VISTA

Texas Coop Power

FOR TRINITY VALLEY EC MEMBERS

APRIL 2025

Jewels of the Sky

Dragonflies and damselflies
rule Texas skies
with deadly grace



**TRINITY
VALLEY EC
NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

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April 2025



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ON THE COVER
Widow skimmer dragonflies use their legs and fangs to catch and eat prey.
Photo by Kerry Carloy

ABOVE
Women Airforce Service Pilots trainees in the 1940s.
Photo courtesy Official National WASP WWII Museum, Sweetwater, Texas

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Troy Moore, a crew supervisor at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

Grounded in Co-op Pride

WILLIAM KAISER JOINS the rest of Co-op Country in saluting a special segment of the workforce April 14, National Lineworker Appreciation Day.

As a groundman in the late 1940s, Kaiser, 96, helped construct power lines in Central Texas for San Bernard Electric Cooperative.

He did so from the back of a Burma Jeep, unspooling line around Hallettsville, about halfway between San Antonio and Houston. Bringing electricity to rural Texas was backbreaking work in the years after co-ops got their start, and all these decades later, Kaiser is proud of his role.

“Somebody had to lay those lines out through the right-of-way so that they could hang the lines on the pole,” he says. “It takes a whole crew, many people, to get to where the lineman could do his job.”

A job, Kaiser notes, that wasn’t for him: “I’m not somebody who likes to get up in the air.”



“A flower blossoms for its own joy.”

—OSCAR WILDE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The best view in Texas is ...

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 February prompt: **My first car was ...**

A 1953 Chevy with a nonworking reverse gear. Had to be creative in finding a place to park.

WANDA SIKES
TRINITY VALLEY EC
TERRELL

Such a clunker that it was on my mechanic’s lift so much that it had more miles on it vertically than horizontally.

JOE POLINO
TRI-COUNTY EC
GRANBURY

A hearse! Specifically, a 1958 Cadillac coach by Miller-Meteor. My father wanted to make sure if I got in an accident, it would be the other guy who got hurt.

JAY WEBER
PEDERNALES EC
ROUND ROCK

A used fluorescent yellow Ford Maverick. Living in a small town, my parents always knew where I was—no tracking/locator services needed!

PEGGY RUSTERHOLTZ
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
LUCAS

Visit our website to see more responses.



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College Life

RECOMMENDED READING

We sure love telling you about intriguing insects—as we did with *The Bugs That Make You See Red* in February 2019. Find it at TexasCoopPower.com.

FEBRUARY 2025 It's Hip To Be a Square

"I square danced for 20 years. Nothing better for exercise, enjoyment, friendships."

DONNA DEAN HUTCHERSON
VIA FACEBOOK



DAVE SHAFER

Fun For All

I plan to send *It's Hip To Be a Square* [February 2025] to some folks who may be shy about trying square dancing or round dancing.

Cheryl Rush
Upshur Rural EC
Winnsboro

It brought back so many memories of when my hubby and I had a blast square dancing for so many years. It was very challenging, and the friendship was incredible.

Genny Pruitt
Nueces EC
Victoria

Not Light Reading

I enjoyed *Field of Beams* [December 2024] so much that I had a tear in my eye when I finished.

Roberta McLaughlin
Heart of Texas EC
Lorena



KENNY BRAUN

Bears in Texas

Around age 10 my friend and I were walking on a trail that ended at a dirt road. We saw a large black bear less than a football field away [Our Nosy New Neighbors, January 2025]. We cried and ran.

Then, my friend stopped running and started laughing. I turned around and saw the bear running away from us.

There were many black bears in Minnesota. None of our bear meetings turned out bad for anyone other than our garbage cans. But I still don't think people will like having that many bears in Texas.

Tyler Carlson
Pedernales EC
San Marcos

Black History Month

Thank you for the informative articles in February [Currents and *History to a Tea*] about the achievements and contributions of Black Americans in the U.S. and world. It is much appreciated.

Gabrielle Gordon
Tri-County EC
Tarrant County

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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ODE TO A MIGHTY HUNTER

Texas' diversity of colorful dragonflies and damselflies beguiles bird and butterfly watchers

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

On the grassy edge of a dry irrigation canal, an emerald green insect darted about in the air. Then it landed on the limb of a thorny mesquite.

Armed with a camera, amateur naturalist Tripp Davenport of Uvalde aimed his long lens at the dazzling dragonfly and quickly snapped photos before it flitted away.

That morning in July 2017, he had visited the National Butterfly Center in South Texas in hopes

of spotting a red-mantled skimmer, a dragonfly from central Mexico that rarely ventures into Texas. Instead he found something even more special.

"When I looked at my images, I realized it was a dragonfly that I'd never seen before," says Davenport, a high school teacher and Medina Electric Cooperative member. "And I've seen nearly all of them in Texas."

Perplexed and excited, he called and texted pictures to some fellow naturalists. One beelined to Davenport's location. Another researched records and nailed down the species. "It was a secretive darter that had only been photographed twice before, in central Mexico," Davenport says. "My adrenaline was running!"

When you're a dragonfly chaser, that's what can happen. Like avid bird watchers, many chasers keep life lists of every species they've seen. Similarly, they may travel long distances in pursuit of dragonflies. Damselflies, too. The closely related insects, which have two pairs of long wings, elongated bodies and large compound eyes, are listed in the taxonomic group Odonata (derived from *odont*, a Greek root word for "tooth" that refers to their large chewing mandibles).

Luckily for Texans, our state is home to hundreds of species.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A female eastern pondhawk dragonfly; dragonflies and damselflies have compound eyes made up of thousands of tiny eyes called ommatidia. The eastern amberwing is one of the only dragonflies that mimics a wasp. The great spreadwing is one of the largest damselflies in North America, with a length up to 2.4 inches, a 3-inch wingspan and a notable yellow stripe. A male eastern pondhawk with its prey.

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD KERRY CARLOY

Odonates (chasers call them “odes”) can typically be found near water but not exclusively. Their bodies come in a rainbow of hues—red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple along with black and white. They can alternately beat and rotate their four membranous wings, enabling them to zip in all directions and even backward.

Using their aerial agility, odes hunt in the air and use their strong legs to snatch prey, such as butterflies, mosquitoes, bees and other insects, including other dragonflies. Odes have excellent vision, too. Not even the tiniest movement escapes their compound eyes made of thousands of tiny eyes called ommatidia.

Of the two groups, dragonflies can generally be identified by their thicker bodies and hindwings that are broader at their base than the forewings. They fly higher than damselflies and can reach speeds of up to 35 mph. At rest, dragonflies hold their wings open whereas damselflies fold their wings over their toothpick-thin bodies.

Worldwide, odonate species total more than 6,430, a number that’s tracked virtually at Odonata Central. The website maintains an extensive database compiled from information submitted by users who report their dragonfly



COURTESY TRIPP DAVENPORT

sightings and upload photos. According to the site, more than 490 odonate species occur in the U.S., and more than half (251 species) have been documented in Texas.

John Abbott, a Texas native who serves as the director of museum research and collections at the Alabama Museum of Natural History, has studied and written about dragonflies and damselflies since the early 1990s. Among his many publications, Abbott has authored *Damselflies of Texas* and *Dragonflies of Texas*, field guides published by the University of Texas Press.

In his opinion, there’s no better place than Texas to chase dragonflies.

“The state holds a unique geographic position where there’s mixing of eastern and western faunas and temperate and subtropical faunas,” Abbott explains. “This leads to the large number of odonate species that can be regularly observed in the state and tremendous opportunities for new species to be documented.”

He credits a growing number of natural history enthusiasts interested in odonates for making major contributions to what’s known about the species of Texas.

Among them are enthusiasts like Davenport and Martin Reid, a retired computer programmer from San Antonio who used to photograph mostly birds and butterflies.

“I got interested in dragonflies in 2001 when I saw a cool-looking insect eating one of my butterflies,” Reid recalls. “I took a picture, and that was it. I was hooked on dragonflies.”

Since then, Reid has sought out odonates across the country as well as in Mexico, Peru, Panama, England and other distant places. But he prefers to focus on Texas species, of which he’s photographed 230.

“Whenever there’s been a new species found in the state, I dash out and try to catch up with it,” he says. “I get tips from Facebook or when someone texts me with a sighting.”

Life for dragonflies and damselflies begins in the water, where some species deposit eggs. Others insert eggs into



LOVE ON THE WING

Butterflies and flies mate back-to-back. Not odonates. During mating, their slender bodies curl and join together (like these double-striped bluet damselflies) to form a heart-shaped “wheel” that’s unique among insects. They remain in this position for a few minutes or hours.

KERRY CARLOY



OPPOSITE One of the first photos captured in Texas of a secretive darner dragonfly, at the National Butterfly Center in South Texas.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A male checked setwing dragonfly. A male American rubyspot damselfly, found in all but two of the lower 48 states. A male neon skimmer dragonfly.

vegetation or rotting wood near water. From the eggs hatch aquatic larvae that look like big-eyed creepy crawlers. After shedding their hard skins in a series of molts, the nymphs emerge from the water and morph into winged adults.

All across Texas, adult odonates fly from spring through fall. Some occur year-round. Most adult damselflies live two to four weeks; dragonflies live four to six weeks. But some odonates survive several months.

They're best found around freshwater, where they hunt and mate. Large open spaces, such as yards, fields and parking lots, may attract hungry odes in search of winged prey.

On their travels, Reid and Davenport have frequented the Christmas Mountains Oasis, 70 miles south of Alpine in far West Texas. Since 1996, owner Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, a member of Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, has worked to transform 5 acres of her scrubby ranchland into a lush hot-spot for birds, butterflies, and, more recently, dragonflies and damselflies. So far, she has tallied 65 species.

"I remember when Tripp Davenport found a California spreadwing here," she says. "Since then, I've had hundreds of them. People come here specifically to see them and Mexican amberwings."

In Port O'Connor, on the Gulf Coast, longtime birder Petra Hockey, a member of Victoria Electric Cooperative, mostly taught herself about odonates.

Using her birding skills and Abbott's field guides, she documented local odonate species. She's since branched out to photograph dragonflies in the Big Bend, Pineywoods, Rio

Grande Valley and other places across Texas. Before a trip, she always researches her destination.

"I learn what dragonfly species are there and what habitats they're found in," Hockey says.

"What time of the day do they fly? Do they fly high or low? How do they perch? As you get more into dragonflies, you learn how interesting and unique they are."

That uniqueness fascinates retired teacher Kerry Carloy, who lives north of Dallas in Lewisville and is a CoServ member. He frequents local natural areas in search of dragonflies. "Their intelligent design to me says they weren't an accident," he says. "I try to get that point across through my photos."

"They're interesting because they can maneuver with such agility," he adds. "They have 360-degree vision, and you can watch them crunch insects up with their teeth."

Though he's chased dragonflies around the world, Brian Gooding, a quality engineer who lives in Plano, doesn't keep a life list.

"Numbers aren't important to me," he says. "My challenge is to take the best picture that I can, even if it's a common species. I've used some of my best pictures to help educate people about dragonflies and how cool they are."

They can also be wise. Gooding recalls the time he watched two male eastern pondhawks fighting over territory at the Colleyville Nature Center northeast of Fort Worth.

"After they were done, they went back to their respective perches and carried on with existing," he says. "That's when I realized I need to be more like them and let go of negative stuff in my life. It was a great lesson to learn from a dragonfly." ■

Hundreds of female pilots made history
at Avenger Field, where they're still celebrated

The WASPs Who Flew Out of Sweetwater



BY PAM LEBLANC

They had to cinch up the waistbands of their oversized, hand-me-down flight suits, and they weren't allowed to climb out of a cockpit without applying fresh lipstick. The women who trained at Avenger Field in Sweetwater stepped up in a serious way.

They volunteered when more pilots were needed to fly vital stateside missions during World War II.

The National WASP WWII Museum, which opened in 2005 in a circa 1929 hangar at Avenger Field, celebrates the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs, who trained at the remote airbase, about 40 miles west of Abilene, as part of an experimental wartime program designed to free up male pilots for combat.

"A lot were young and single and free, but some were married—and some had children," says Lisa Taylor, executive director of the museum, located across Avenger Field from what is now Texas State Technical College, where the female trainees once lived in barracks.

"The feeling was, 'We have this skill, and there's a need for us.' They adored flying and were thrilled to fly, but they were also thrilled to be needed."

Applicants to the program, which ran for two years, had to have high school diplomas or the equivalent and be between the ages of 18 and 35, although at least one 17-year-old lied about her age to get in. They had to be at least 5 feet 4 inches tall, have a pilot's license, and pass a physical exam and interview to get a spot.

About 25,000 women applied, and 1,830 were accepted.

They came from all 48 states and Alaska and Hawaii. They were overwhelmingly white, but there were at least two Chinese Americans, a Native American and two Latina women. The program rejected Black applicants. They were high school dropouts and debutantes, blackjack dealers and teachers. One was a pinup girl. Some had worked as crop duster pilots or barn stormers, performing stunts in traveling shows.

OPPOSITE Women Airforce Service Pilots assigned to Camp Davis in North Carolina pose in front of a Beechcraft AT-11.

BELOW The courtyard between hangars at the National WASP WWII Museum features three steel cutouts based on a historical photograph of women arriving at the base.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OFFICIAL NATIONAL WASP WWII MUSEUM, SWEETWATER, TEXAS

The program officially started in Houston in November 1942, under the direction of pioneering aviators Jacqueline Cochran and Nancy Harkness Love. It quickly outgrew its space in Houston and moved to Avenger Field, where the women could live in bunks in on-site barracks.

The new location worked well. The airfield had two runways plus classroom space. The sparsely populated area's big skies and open fields suited the flight school's needs, and the stiff West Texas wind provided ample training opportunities.

The women spent half their days in ground school, learning meteorology, navigation, first aid, military law, Morse code, mechanics and parachute packing. The rest of the working day was spent learning to fly various military aircraft.

Many of the women were small and had a hard time reaching the pedals on aircraft designed for men. They used blocks of wood and parachute packs as cushions to make it work. One bragged that she was a "three-cushion pilot," meaning she stuffed three packs behind her back so she could operate the controls.

For their efforts, the women earned \$174.50 per month (about \$3,250 today), deducting \$1.65 for room and board. Because they were civil workers and not officially part of the U.S. military, they even had to buy their own uniforms.

Training lasted at least seven months, and about 40% of the recruits washed out before earning their wings. But ultimately, 1,102 women completed training.

Those who graduated were assigned to air bases around the country, where they went to work shuttling military personnel

Notable Texan WASPs

Millie Dalrymple

After her husband was shot down in a B-17 over Europe, Dalrymple of Llano took up flying, joined the WASPs and was soon flying B-17s herself.



Madge Moore

As a local who grew up just up the road from Sweetwater, in Haskell, Moore used dead reckoning—a navigational method of estimating a plane's current position

based on a previously known location, course, speed and time traveled—to ferry planes without working instruments.

Florene Miller Watson

Watson of San Angelo was one of just 25 women who qualified for a forerunner to the WASP program. She flew every type of plane used by the Army Air Corps.



and ferrying aircraft from base to base. The WASPs flew 78 different aircraft, including pursuit planes and bombers, and flight-tested others, flying more than 60 million miles.

Some of the women served as tow pilots, dragging targets 1,000 feet behind their planes so soldiers on the ground could practice firing at them with live ammunition. Others worked as instructors or practiced concealment, learning to lay smoke that would hide personnel on the ground.

Thirty-eight WASPs were killed during their service, including 11 who died in training accidents. The military didn't pay for their funerals, so fellow WASPs took up collections to send the women's remains home to family.

About 14,000 people visit the museum in Sweetwater every year, exploring two hangars filled with everything from flight suits to logbooks, part of a tow target, a flight simulator, medals, parachutes and four complete aircraft of the type the women used for training.

Visitors can take a turn at a chin-up bar like one the women used during daily calisthenics or grab a seat in a re-creation of a classroom, where a film leads them through what it was like as an incoming recruit reporting for duty. They can peer into a mock-up of a room in the barracks too.

Mostly, though, visitors can learn who the WASPs were as individuals. "They've all got really amazing stories," Taylor says, sharing a few as she walks through the museum.

When one group of WASPs traveled to California on a mission, they were arrested and briefly jailed for impersonating military pilots, Taylor says. Another WASP made an emergency landing in a farmer's field, and the family who owned the land fed and housed her for the night. Other stories describe WASPs who had to parachute to safety from their airplanes and WASPs who tested aircraft with engines prone to catching fire.

The names of all the WASPs, including those who didn't complete training, are listed on one wall of the museum, and visitors can access a database that includes information about each one. There are photos and handprints of many of the women.

Each April, the museum hosts a Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In, set for April 25–26 this year. While most of the



OPPOSITE A graduation ceremony August 7, 1943, at Avenger Field in Sweetwater.

ABOVE AND LEFT Nell "Mickey" Stevenson Bright, 103, knew she wanted to learn to fly when she was 8. She ended up being one of only 20 women chosen to train on B-25 bombers.



WASPs are now gone, their families, as well as members of the public, still attend.

At the 2012 homecoming, WASP Nell "Mickey" Stevenson Bright, who is now 103 years old, explained that she skipped meals as a teenager to pay for flying lessons. After becoming a WASP, she remembers standing in a shower wearing her flight suit to clean it.

"The thrill of flying those wonderful airplanes and getting paid for it—that was worth it," Bright, who is from Canyon, said at the time.

The WASPs were deactivated in December 1944, but it took more than 30 years before President Jimmy Carter signed a bill recognizing them as military veterans. In 2010, President Barack Obama awarded the WASPs Congressional Gold Medals, the oldest and most prestigious civilian award in the U.S.

Today, museum officials hope the institution can inspire the next generation.

"These women went to a lot of time and trouble to learn how to fly in a world that wasn't going to let them in," Taylor says. "So, what is it that you want to do and try, and what barriers will you need to overcome to leave a good legacy for yourself?" ■

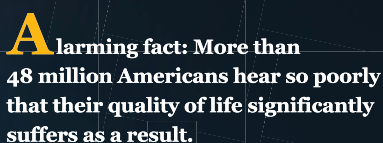
Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In

The National WASP World War II Museum will celebrate its 20th anniversary at this year's WASP Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In, Friday–Saturday, April 25–26. There will be museum tours, guest speakers, live reenactors, aviation games and a display of aircraft. For more information, go to wasmuseum.org/homecoming.

TCP Tour Hangar 2 at the National WASP WWII Museum with Lisa Taylor, the museum's director.

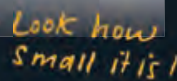


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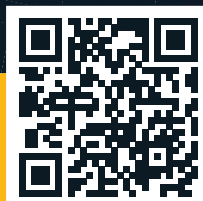
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FROM
GENERAL
MANAGER/
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JEFF LANE

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That is a powerful distinction.

Here are a few ways co-ops like ours bring unique value to the local communities we serve.

We put people before profits. Co-ops don't make profits and provide at-cost service. Any excess revenue is returned to our consumer-members in the form of capital credits, typically as a bill credit or check.

Community comes first. We live and work here too, and we care deeply about our local communities. That's why we engage in development and revitalization projects, sponsor local students for scholarships and youth programs, and support local nonprofits and first responders, helping our neighbors in need.

Affordable, reliable power is our priority. TVEC purchases electricity from our wholesale energy partner, Rayburn Electric Cooperative. Our cooperative business structure allows us to pool local resources and provide electricity at a lower cost than if we purchased it from outside sources.

We're focused on our members' energy needs—not only for today but for the long haul. We're advocating for smarter energy policies that prioritize reliability and affordability for all. We recognize we must be inclusive of all energy sources, which is why we work closely with our wholesale power provider to ensure use of a diverse mix of sources to generate the electricity we provide to our members.

TVEC is working to power a brighter future through innovation that meets tomorrow's energy needs. Reliable, affordable electricity is more important than ever before, and our focus will continue to be the best interest of the local communities we serve. ■



DID YOU KNOW?

Herbert Hoover was the first president to have air conditioning, spending \$30,000 to have it installed in the West Wing of the White House in 1930.

USCHOOLS | ISTOCK.COM



POWER TIP

Plant leafy trees to the south of your home to block sunlight in the summer and reduce the need for air conditioning.

BACKYARDPRODUCTION | ISTOCK.COM



How Do You Plan To Celebrate Earth Day?

EARTH DAY IS ONE OF the world's largest civic events, and on April 22, we can all be part of this global movement to help the environment.

There are many ways we as individuals can improve the environment, and some are easier than you'd think. **Here are a few simple actions you can take now to reduce your energy use.**

Audit your light bulbs. Swapping out incandescent bulbs with LEDs can make a big difference in home efficiency, and it's one of the easiest ways to reduce your energy bill.

Maintain your HVAC system. Replace your home air filters to allow your HVAC system to run efficiently. Air filters prevent dust and allergens from clogging your HVAC system. Changing the filters makes your unit run more efficiently—keeping your home cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.

Examine your smart or programmable thermostat. Make sure it's programmed for the current season and family schedule. Your thermostat is one of the best tools at your fingertips; however, you can only achieve these efficiencies and savings if it's programmed properly and adjusted periodically to keep pace with changes in household routines.

Seal windows and doors. Seal leaks with weatherstripping and caulk to keep cool air indoors during warm months and prevent cold air from penetrating the indoors during colder months. Sealing gaps around piping, dryer vents, fans and outlets also helps to seal the envelope and increase efficiency.

As we celebrate Earth Day, let's continue to work together and make a positive impact on our local community—and our beautiful planet. ■

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

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Vacant, District 4

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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





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 is 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 tree houses 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 EC encourages you to always practice safety.



CEMAGRAPHSICS | ISTOCK.COM

Get Ready for Storm Season

Preparedness is the best defense

ALTHOUGH SPRING AND SUMMER allow more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, the seasons unfortunately can create the perfect conditions for severe storms.

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative crews are always prepared and standing by to respond should power outages occur in our area. When severe storms cause power disruptions, our line crews take all necessary precautions before they get to work on any downed lines.

We encourage you to also practice safety and preparedness to protect your family during storms and outages.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency recommends the items below as a starting point for storm and disaster preparedness, but you can visit [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) for additional resources.

- ▶ Stock your pantry with a three-day supply of nonperishable food, including canned goods, energy bars, peanut butter, powdered milk, instant coffee, water and other essentials (i.e., diapers and toiletries).

- ▶ Confirm that you have adequate sanitation and hygiene supplies including towelettes, soap and hand sanitizer.

- ▶ Ensure your first aid kit is stocked with pain relievers, bandages and other medical essentials, and make sure your prescriptions are current.

- ▶ Set aside basic household items you'll need, including flashlights; batteries; a manual can opener; and a portable, battery-powered radio.

- ▶ Organize emergency supplies so they are easily accessible in one location.

- ▶ In the event of a prolonged power outage, unplug major appliances, TVs, computers and other sensitive electronics. This will help avert damage from potential power surges and will also help prevent overloading circuits during power restoration. Be sure to leave one light on so you'll know when power is restored.

- ▶ If you plan to use a portable generator, make sure it's rated to handle the amount of power you'll need, and always review the manufacturer's instructions to operate it safely.

- ▶ Listen to local news or a weather radio for storm and emergency information, and check TVEC's Facebook page for restoration updates.

- ▶ Severe storms can occasionally bring down power lines. If you see a downed line, always assume it's energized and never approach it. If flooding occurs, never walk through areas where power lines could be submerged.

- ▶ Advanced planning for severe storms or other emergencies can reduce stress and anxiety caused by the weather event and lessen the impact of the storm's effects.

- ▶ If you experience an outage, please don't report it on Facebook. Call our outage reporting number at (800) 967-9324—this is the fastest way to let us know if your power is out.

No one wants to experience severe storms, but it can be hard to predict Mother Nature's plans. At TVEC, we recommend that you make a plan today—because storm preparedness is always our best defense. ■

Consult an Electrician Before Adding Home Office, Gym

IF YOU HAVE an unused room you want to convert to a home office, gym or theater, add one more item to your to-do list: Call an electrician.

Setting up any of those rooms may involve moving in equipment like a treadmill, big-screen TV or computers and printers. It's quite possible that the electrical outlets in the room won't be able to handle that load.

You also might not have enough outlets for all the things you'll need to plug in. Sure, you can buy a power strip that adds space for plugs. But that power strip won't add any capacity to the circuit—possibly resulting in overloaded and overheated circuits or even a fire.

The new setup may require ground-fault circuit interrupters. You also may need to expand or upgrade lighting. Some equipment may require a dedicated circuit.

So, before you start using your home gym to get in shape, get the room in shape first. Ask a licensed electrician to inspect the room's outlets and power supply and determine if you need to upgrade. ■



PROFESSIONALSTUDIOIMAGES | ISTOCK.COM



KENNETH-CHEUNG | ISTOCK.COM



TVEC ENERGY
MANAGEMENT
SUPERVISOR

CHRIS WALKER

Electricity Theft and Vandalism Pose Safety and Financial Concerns

THEFT INVOLVING ELECTRICITY and related materials is a problem all electric utilities face, and it's a problem for electricity customers too.

Since Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative is member-owned, electricity theft ends up costing you—the member—money.

Theft of electricity also puts personal safety at risk. Tampering with an electric meter can make it unsafe and unstable. When people steal electricity, they put themselves, their neighbors, family and pets—and the co-op's lineworkers—all at risk for electric shock.

Stealing electrical equipment and materials can also pose a significant risk to the culprit, resulting in injury or even death from electric shock.

Although electricity can be easily acquired through a utility, some people are still willing to risk physical damage or loss of life just for the sake of some free kilowatt hours. Others may not realize the serious legal and potential health implications.

Keeping power safe and affordable is a priority for TVEC. That's why we routinely inspect co-op meters and equipment to ensure we're doing our best to protect you from the risks of electricity theft. We take a proactive approach to this serious problem in an attempt to eliminate theft and reduce related costs.

Meter tampering may also include installing a solar system without approval from TVEC. Upon approval, we install an appropriate meter type, without which the proper billing adjustments are not applied. Without the correct meter, members can end up paying for a portion of the solar energy they generate.

Keeping power safe and affordable is a top priority for TVEC, which is why we routinely check our meters and all solar installations. You can help by contacting us at 972-932-2214 if you suspect meter tampering or emailing us at energymangement@tvec.coop before installing any alternate generation source. ■



ADOBESTOCK 421589349

Barn Fire Safety Checklist

MRS. O'LEARY'S COW may have gotten a bad rap, but the folktale reminds us fire safety is an important part of farm life. People, animals and property are in danger when fire breaks out on the farm.

Inspect your barn and outbuildings for fire hazards using this checklist.

- ▶ Place heat lamps and space heaters at least 3 feet from anything flammable.
- ▶ Keep heaters and other hot equipment on a sturdy surface where they can't fall over.
- ▶ Make sure electrical equipment is labeled for agricultural or commercial use.
- ▶ Check that wiring is free from damage and extension cords are not being used in the barn.
- ▶ Protect light bulbs with covers that shield them from dust and moisture and prevent breakage.
- ▶ Identify any damage quickly and complete repairs with safety in mind.
- ▶ Regularly remove dust and cobwebs around electrical equipment, outlets and lights.
- ▶ Store oily rags in a closed, metal container away from heat.
- ▶ Maintain the barn as a smoke-free zone.
- ▶ Clearly mark exits, and keep pathways clear.
- ▶ Train workers to use fire extinguishers.
- ▶ Make sure everyone knows personal safety is the first priority if a fire breaks out.

Recommended Equipment

The following safety equipment can help quickly extinguish a fire and may be required by local building codes.

- ▶ ABC-type fire extinguishers near every exit and within 50 feet from any point in the barn.
- ▶ Fire alarm and sprinkler system.
- ▶ Carbon monoxide detection system. ■

It's Time To Think About Air Conditioning

THE COMFORTABLE spring weather is more likely to nudge you to open your windows than to turn on the air conditioner—and that makes this the perfect time to make sure your AC is in shape for the inevitable summer heat.

The best time to service your home's air conditioning system is when you don't need it. If you put it off until it's uncomfortably hot outdoors, you could end up dealing with some harsh heat in the meantime.

Annual service is important. Your technician should lubricate and clean moving parts and check for—and repair—potential problems. That way, it's more likely your system will run smoothly all summer.

Choose a technician who is licensed by the state. Chances are, the same tech can come back in the fall to tune up your heating system. ■



FSTOPI23 | ISTOCK.COM

Lineman Lunch



LEIGH DENNEY | TVEC

Chef Cassy's Kitchen

A State Fair staple puts down roots in Eustace.

LINEMEN WORKING IN THE EUSTACE AREA don't have to drive far to enjoy a taste of State Fair of Texas cuisine. Nestled between a tire shop and a billboard, a small metal building is home to the famous fried collard greens of Chef Cassy Jones, who debuted the entree at the state fair in 2013.

Along with catering for clients, Chef Cassy opened her Eustace restaurant to offer a menu filled with homemade, delectable dishes that emphasize comfort food and unique flavors.

"What got me was the fried bologna sandwich," said Floyd Choyce, TVEC field inspector. "That is something I've loved since I was a kid and so for me it will always get my attention when that is on the menu."

From crawfish queso fries to a fried bologna sandwich, Chef Cassy expertly combines traditional Southern fare with a modern twist. The cozy atmosphere will make you feel at home, and Chef Cassy personally ensures that her patrons feel like family, frequently stepping out of the kitchen to check in and gather feedback.

Chef Cassy's Kitchen is located at 304 US Hwy. 175 in Eustace. You can find her on Facebook as Chef Cassy's Creations and at chefcassy.com. ■



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 April 30 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



Who invented the electric generator?

- A.** Nikola Tesla
- B.** Andre-Marie Ampere
- C.** Michael Faraday

Win \$100!

Send your answer and contact information to contest@tvec.coop or contact TVEC Member Services by April 30. One \$100 bill credit winner will be chosen from all correct replies. Look for the correct answer in a future *Texas Co-op Power*.

March Energy Quiz: Energy Units

ELECTRICITY AND OTHER types of energy have a variety of words and concepts to measure and describe their unique properties. Comparing one to another can be almost impossible.

To make that comparison possible, scientists came up with the British Thermal Unit or Btu.

The Btu is a measure of how much energy it takes to raise the temperature of water, whether the energy source is electricity, calories, burning fuel or others.

Congratulations to our February Energy Quiz winner Gary Whitton of Scurry.

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

Your Generosity Supports Pet Adoptions and Animal Rescues

ORU grant funds better care at Humane Society of Cedar Creek Lake

FOR MANY OF US, pets are part of the family. For some though, the welfare of animals has become a passion, taking care of the dogs, cats and other creatures that need help.

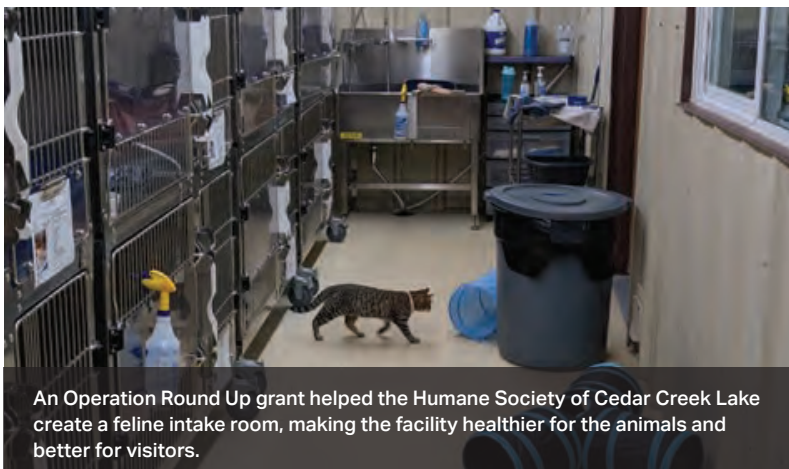
Since the inception of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative's Operation Round Up program in 2013, members' donations have resulted in more than \$68,000 in grants to assist area agencies that do the work of dealing with stray animals and placing pets with loving families.

In the middle of the TVEC service area, the Humane Society of Cedar Creek Lake serves the area and cities around the lake.

"We serve several surrounding cities and counties, including Gun Barrel City, Malakoff and the City of Kaufman and others," said facility manager Jennifer Miller. "The goal is to provide compassionate care for the animals in need, but also to assisting pet owners in our community."

In 2024, the HSCCL's grant enabled an upgrade of their cat facilities, transforming some unused space to make it healthier for the animals and a better experience for potential adopting families. 9787003

"The original facility was built in the 80s, so you can imagine," Miller said. "We were able to create an intake area for cats



An Operation Round Up grant helped the Humane Society of Cedar Creek Lake create a feline intake room, making the facility healthier for the animals and better for visitors.

and kittens, allowing us to assess new arrivals for illness before introducing them to the main population. It has helped greatly for a healthier environment for all the feline residents."

In May, a sponsored adoption event will lower the cost of pet adoptions to \$30.

Located in Tool, the HSCCL facility offers adoption services by appointment. You can find out how to adopt a pet, volunteer or donate to the shelter at hsccl.org. ■



FEBRUARY 2025 Operation Round Up Awards

Thank you for turning your coins into change!



FBC WELLNESS



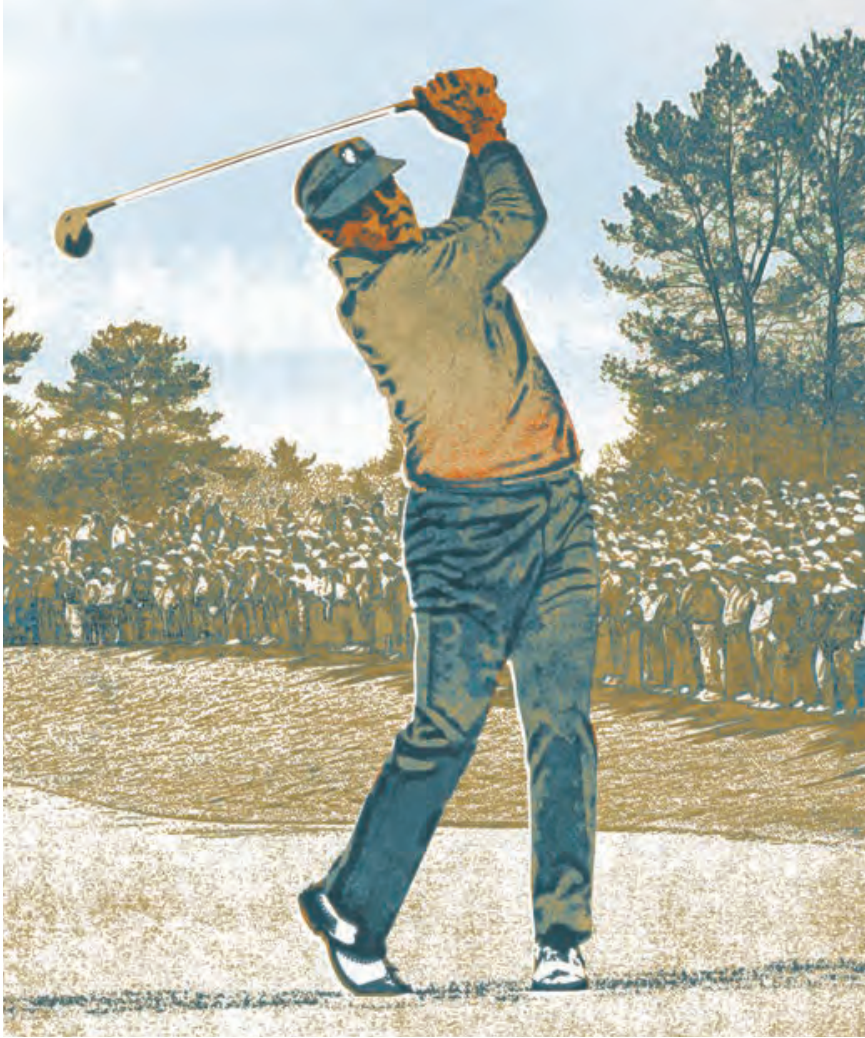
WILLS POINT ISD
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Grants

Cedar Creek Veterans Foundation	\$7,500
FBC Wellness	\$2,000
Friends of the Van Zandt County Library	\$3,000
Stage Notes Academy of Performing Arts	\$2,000
Wills Point ISD Education Foundation	\$5,000

Bill Assistance

Faith In Action - Malakoff	\$5,000
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Playing Through

Golfer Lee Elder shot his way to the very top despite grave barriers

BY KEVIN ROBBINS • ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC KITTELBERGER

LEE ELDER WAS 40 when he played in his first Masters Tournament, the spring golf ritual in Augusta, Georgia, that represents the first of the four major championships each season. But his rather advanced age wasn't the story at all 50 years ago this month—in April 1975. Nor were the death threats.

The Dallas native had become the first African American to compete in the Masters. Augusta National Golf Club, which organizes and hosts the tournament, had finally responded to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. While the club had no formal policy banning Black players, it nonetheless had never extended an invitation to one.

That changed in 1971.

That year, the Masters announced that

any player who had won the previous season on the PGA Tour would automatically qualify—a policy that exists to this day.

Elder won the 1974 Monsanto Open in Pensacola, Florida. It was two weeks after Hank Aaron broke the Major League Baseball home run record set by Babe Ruth.

Elder's acceptance to play in the Masters generated massive publicity. It felt like a watershed moment in American sports.

"Move over, Hank Aaron," wrote *The Chicago Defender*, a Black newspaper. "There's enough room in the spotlight for at least two people." The threats soon followed.

In April, as the Masters neared, Elder rented two houses near the course for himself and his wife. He wanted no one

else to know where he would be while competing.

It was all so new and unnerving to the U.S. Army veteran who, along with his nine siblings, had lost his parents when he was young. Born in 1934, Elder caddied with his brother Raymond at Tenison Park Golf Course in Dallas, miles from the nearest course that allowed Black players. He moved to California in the 1940s to live with an aunt.

There he caddied, toiled in bag rooms, did odd jobs in pro shops and gradually learned to hit a golf ball straight and far.

Elder joined the United Golfers Association, a tour for Black players, who were, at the time, excluded by fiat from the PGA Tour.

Elder thrived on the UGA. He won 18 of 22 tournaments in one remarkable stretch. But that wasn't where the money and prestige were; UGA purses were a pittance. Elder joined the PGA Tour in 1968, seven years after it lifted its Caucasian-only policy.

That August, he took the mighty Jack Nicklaus to a playoff in Akron, Ohio. Elder had arrived. People knew his name.

He eventually won four tournaments in 448 starts on the PGA Tour, including once in Texas, at the 1976 Houston Open. He proved, with Charlie Sifford and Calvin Peete, that Black players belonged in professional golf.

Elder missed the 36-hole cut at that Masters (a tournament he would play five more times) in his 1975 debut. He later said he felt seen in a way he never had.

"The display from the employees at Augusta National was especially moving," Elder, who died in 2021, told *Golf Digest* in 2019. "Most of the staff was Black, and on Friday, they left their duties to line the 18th fairway as I walked toward the green.

"I couldn't hold back the tears. Of all the acknowledgments of what I had accomplished by getting there, this one meant the most." ■

Eggs

Hearty meals that just might be too good to limit to breakfast

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Team salsa verde! I unapologetically drench salsa verde over all my dishes, but over eggs in a well of hash browns topped with bacon? This is what breakfast dreams are made of. Take this directly from the stovetop to the table and serve it family style.

Salsa Verde, Hash Brown & Bacon Breakfast Skillet

6 strips bacon, diced
6 cups frozen diced hash browns
¾ cup chopped red bell pepper
¾ cup chopped green bell pepper
½ cup chopped onion
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
4 eggs
1 cup salsa verde
¼ cup chopped cilantro (optional)

1. In a large skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Remove bacon and set aside. Drain, reserving 2 tablespoons of drippings in skillet.
2. Add hash browns, peppers, onion, salt and pepper to drippings. Cook 2 minutes while stirring.
3. Cover and cook about 15 minutes more or until potatoes are browned and tender, stirring occasionally.
4. Reduce heat to low. Make 4 wells in potato mixture. Break 1 egg into each well. Top each egg with ¼ cup salsa verde.
5. Sprinkle bacon over the top, cover, and cook until eggs are completely set, about 8–10 minutes.
6. Serve warm, garnished with cilantro if desired.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Honey Flan.





Egg Puff & Stuff

MICHELE BRADLEY
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

If you crave an easy, sticks-to-your-bones breakfast, this one has it all—veggies, sausage, eggs, cheese and a hint of spice. Served warm with a few slices of creamy avocado, this dish will keep you going all morning.

- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed
- 1 small potato, diced
- ½ cup ground pork or turkey breakfast sausage
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper
- ½ cup diced red bell pepper
- ½ cup diced yellow bell pepper
- ¼ cup thinly sliced portabello mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 8 eggs
- 2 tablespoons cottage cheese
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- Sliced avocado

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add diced potato and sausage. Cook, stirring occasionally, until sausage is cooked through and potato is fork-tender.
2. Stir in peppers, mushrooms and garlic, and cook until vegetables are slightly tender, adding additional oil if needed. Remove from skillet and set aside.
3. In a bowl, beat eggs lightly. Add cottage cheese, Cajun seasoning and crushed red pepper flakes.
4. Pour egg mixture into skillet over medium-high heat. Run spoon across bottom of skillet to begin lightly scrambling eggs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Easiest Breakfast Casserole

VALERIE KRUSE
TRI-COUNTY EC



Stuffing in a breakfast casserole? This recipe piqued my interest from the start, and boy was I happy I gave it a try. The stuffing addition gives this eggy dish a mouthful of flavor and bite. This casserole will feed a crowd, but you could also keep it for yourself and enjoy it for lunch all week.

- 9 eggs
- 3 cups milk
- 1 box stuffing mix (6 ounces), any flavor
- 1 pound ground breakfast sausage, cooked and crumbled
- 3 cups grated cheddar cheese, divided use

1. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, lightly beat eggs. Add milk, stuffing, sausage and 2 cups cheese. Stir to combine.
3. Spoon into prepared dish and top with remaining 1 cup cheese.
4. Cover with plastic wrap or aluminum foil and refrigerate overnight.
5. In the morning, allow casserole to sit at room temperature 30 minutes while the oven preheats to 350 degrees.
6. Bake uncovered 40–45 minutes or until lightly browned on top and toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12–16

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

ONE-SKILLET DINNERS DUE APRIL 10

It's a busy weeknight, and you need an easy one-dish dinner to fill up the family. What's your go-to? Send us your best skillet stunner, and you could win \$500. Enter by April 10.

UPCOMING: CANDIES AND FUDGE DUE MAY 10



RECIPES CONTINUED

5. Stir in cooked potato, sausage and vegetables to evenly coat with egg. Continue to cook until eggs are fully cooked.

6. Serve warm, topped with avocado.

SERVES 3-4

Easy Egg Bake

AMY STREET
MIDSOUTH EC

This egg bake packs all the flavors of a breakfast sandwich into a casserole. I love finding great recipes to have on hand for a lazy Sunday morning brunch with ingredients I have readily available in my kitchen. Fresh from the oven, I topped my slice with plenty of hot sauce—delicious!

1 tube crescent rolls (12 ounces)

1 pound pork breakfast sausage



½ cup diced green onion

8 eggs

1 cup milk

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon ground black pepper

1 cup shredded cheddar cheese,
divided use

1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese,
divided use

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Line crescent rolls along the bottom, pinching seams to seal. Bake 8 minutes, then remove from oven.

2. While crust is baking, cook breakfast sausage in a skillet over medium-high heat, breaking up with a spoon. Add green onion and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until sausage is fully cooked. Remove from heat.

3. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees. Add eggs, milk, salt and pepper to a bowl. Whisk until thoroughly combined.

4. Spread sausage mixture over cooked crescent crust. Sprinkle half the cheddar and mozzarella over sausage. Pour egg mixture evenly over cheese and then sprinkle on remaining half of cheeses.

5. Bake 30 minutes or until top is lightly browned and toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12



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COURTESY TODD WHITE STILLS AND MOTION

Fish School

For millions of fish, life starts at Sea Center Texas

BY CHET GARNER

MANY TEXANS WILL spend their entire lives chasing the big one on the Gulf Coast. They'll traverse marshes and bays in search of a bull red or spec worthy of hanging on the wall or, perhaps more importantly, posting on social media.

I've spent my share of afternoons casting but have never had half as much luck as I did in 10 minutes fishing the ponds outside Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson, about an hour south of Houston. That's because many of the redfish and speckled trout in our state started their lives right here.

Sea Center Texas is an aquarium, science lab and fish nursery. It's where the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department breeds fish to populate our waters and educates the public on all the amazing creatures of our coast.

What immediately impressed me wasn't the live fish but the replicas of state-record saltwater fish covering the lobby walls. Let's just say the great hammerhead specimen still gives me nightmares.

I walked the halls of aquariums, each focusing on a different underwater ecosystem, from coastal marshes to deeper offshore waters. There was even a touch tank where I held a blue crab (pincers removed, thankfully).

I then grabbed a tour of the back-of-house where TPWD biologists raise millions (literally) of reds, trout and flounder. Outside is a wetlands boardwalk and 75 acres of tanks, including some open for public youth fishing. Luckily I had my kids in tow and was able to reel in a speckled trout much bigger than anything I've ever caught before. But, hey, I'll count it.

It's just one of the many reasons to plan a trip here instead of chasing the big ones all around the coast. ■

ABOVE Chet and Paul Cason, director of Sea Center Texas, with a speckled trout.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all Chet's Explorations 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.

APRIL

11

Carthage [11-12] Piney Woods Quilt Festival, (903) 754-1948, carthagetexas.com

12

Aubrey GreenFest on the Greenbelt, greenfestdenton.com

Lake Jackson Kids Reel Big Fish Event, (979) 297-4533, lakejacksontx.gov

McKinney [12-13] Spring Native Plant Sale, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

19

Fairfield Easter Eggstravaganza, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

23

Corsicana [23-26] Derrick Days, (903) 654-4850, derrickdays.com

25

Burnet [25-26] Highland Lakes Quilt Festival, hlqguild@gmail.com, hlqq.org

26

Burton Cotton Gin Festival, (979) 289-3378, texascottonginmuseum.org

Castroville Alsatian Festival of Texas, castrovilletx.gov

Channing Hogs at the Point, (806) 935-5598, talonpoint.org

Fredericksburg Volunteer Fire Department Fish Fry, (830) 997-7521, fbgtx.org

Huntington Homestead Festival, shophuntingtontx.com

Huntsville Gen. Sam Houston Day, (936) 294-1832, samhoustonmemorialmuseum.com

Kerrville Hill Country Chorale Spring Concert, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

Tomball Rails & Tails Mudbug Festival, (281) 290-1035, tomballtx.gov

Brazoria [26-27] Migration Celebration, 1-844-842-4737, migrationcelebration.org

Temple [26-27] Texas State Button Society Spring Show and Sale, (512) 892-4265, texasstatebuttonociety.com

MAY

2

Fort Worth UNT One O'Clock Lab Band Spring Showcase, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

Taylor [2-3] Chisholm Trail Quilt Guild Quilt Show, ctquiltguild.org

3

El Campo Cinco de Mayo Celebration, (979) 275-1600, eclostlagoon.com

Fairfield Lemonade Day, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

New Ulm Honey Bee Jubilee, (713) 568-5584, newulmtexas.org

San Marcos Heritage Home Tour, (512) 392-4295, heritagesanmarcos.org

Comfort [3-4] Hill Country Two-Step, texasminimilkers.org

TCP Submit Your Event

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

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Characters

Whether your friends be of a feather or the four-legged variety, they bring a unique flavor to life in Texas. As these photos attest, being true to oneself is joyful.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

1 THERESA MCKEE
FANNIN EC

"This guy has been iconic over the years. He truly is a Texas character!"

2 PAUL GARCIA
MEDINA EC

"It took me forever to get this shot. I had about 10 hummingbirds at my feeder and had an idea about trying to hand-feed them."

3 MARY CARUTH
PEDERNALES EC

Cheese! This was taken at Dripping Springs Distilling.

4 AMY SAYLAK
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

"A Texas girl with her first cap gun, Sneaky Pete!"



3



2



4

Upcoming Contests

DUE APR 10 College Life
DUE MAY 10 Off-Road Adventures
DUE JUN 10 Heroes



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Characters photos from readers.



Overlooked (No More)

The best view in the Big Bend is worth the trek

BY PAM LEBLANC
PHOTO BY CHRIS LEBLANC

FROM MY VANTAGE point on the side of a rocky slope high above the Rio Grande, the river looks like a glinting horseshoe far below.

I think it's the best view in the Big Bend region, and that's saying a lot. I've spent hours gazing down at the rippling desert floor from the South Rim, watching the sun sink behind the Window in the Chisos Basin and peering upriver at Santa Elena Canyon.

But this view, from the western edge of Mesa de Anguila, surpasses all of those, and few hikers make the trip. The mesa, an 11-mile hump of land that juts like a broken pinkie off the western side of Big Bend National Park, is one of the least-visited areas of the park.

I first discovered the overlook six years ago, during a challenging multiday back-

packing trip down the spine of the mesa. Now I make a much easier 2.5-mile jaunt to reach the overlook.

Here, the desert closes in for a prickly hug. With its shattered rocks and cactuses that look like bouquets of steak knives, this remote spot feels like the backdrop of an old *Star Trek* episode.

You've probably seen photographs of Horseshoe Bend at the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Arizona, where Instagrammers famously flock to snap photos of themselves high above a U-shaped section of the Colorado River. This, to me, is the Texas equivalent.

To get here from the park's west entrance, drive 21 miles west along FM 170 to Lajitas. The Mesa de Anguila Trail starts behind the Lajitas Golf Resort, next to a sign that says, "Poisonous snakes and insects may be present."

The first mile and a half of the trail zigzag through flat desert, dipping into shallow arroyos and winding past scrub. There is no shade; bring plenty of water, even in winter.

After about 30 minutes plodding through the desert, the trail starts to climb up a rocky gully. You'll get a quad-burning workout as you ascend 600 feet over half a mile. You might need to use your hands as you clamber over rocks as big as armchairs and tiptoe through spillways of scree.

When you reach the saddle at the top, just past the 2-mile point, the main trail continues straight. Instead of following that path, look for a faint trail to your right. Make your way up the hill, then look south, toward Mexico.

Voilà.

Find a good boulder to sit on, and take it in. I could sit for hours, contemplating the way the river embraces the land.

They say horseshoes bring good luck. In this case, I'm sure it does. Anyone who makes it to this spot is lucky to take in such a beautiful view. ■

Author Pam LeBlanc takes in the view from the western edge of Mesa de Anguila in Big Bend National Park.

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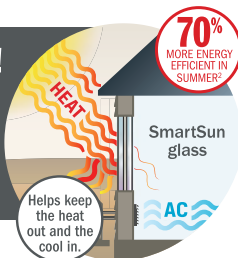
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