

HE UNEARTHED
ANCIENT TOOLS

SAM RAYBURN TURNED ON
TEXAS' LIGHTS

I'D DO ANYTHING
FOR MOM

Texas Coop Power

FOR TRINITY VALLEY EC MEMBERS

MAY 2026

Trickle Your Fancy

The arid West
is awash, if you know
where to look

**TRINITY
VALLEY EC
NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

community phone









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Forbes, January 2026



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community phone

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May 2026



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06 Wet Texas

Beyond and below the tumbleweeds and cactuses, oases beckon out west.

Photo essay by Erich Schlegel

He Kept Digging

Thanks to an archaeologist's persistence, we have 20,000-year-old evidence of Texans.

By Pam LeBlanc

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ON THE COVER

Under a relentless sun, Lake Nueces on the Nueces River nurtures an inviting ecosystem.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

ABOVE

Archaeologist Michael Collins examines Gault artifacts with Angela Davis, center, and Jon Lohse in 1999.

Courtesy Kenneth Garrett

Appreciating Our Moms



Alex Dal Santo and his mom, Karen.

IN CELEBRATION OF MOTHER'S DAY, May 10 this year, we ask readers to finish the sentence "Moms are ..." TCP's writers and editors also share their thoughts.

Lifelong learners—always reading, changing and growing.

—Samantha Bryant, communications specialist

The first person you want to call when something big happens, and you'll miss her when you can't.

—Alex Dal Santo, assistant production manager

Psychic. Mine can sense how I'm feeling even from miles away.

—Erin Sinclair, communications specialist

Frequently undervalued for their enormous contributions. They do so much.

—Claire Stevens, communications specialist

Family historians, capturing (usually unflattering) smartphone pics at family functions.

—Kelly Tran, communications specialist

Eternally selfless.

—Tom Widlowski, associate editor



TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST
Campfire Favorites

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
Rodeo

RECOMMENDED READING

Why We Like Bats, our May 2006 feature story, looked closely at the creatures that still captivate Texans. Download the May 2006 issue at TexasCoopPower.com.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Moms are ...

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 March prompt: **My favorite Texas saying is ...**

The sun has risen and the sun has set, but we haven't left Texas yet.

EUGENE NEESE
BOWIE-CASS EC
LINDEN

All hat and no cattle.

SISSY CARTER
HAMILTON COUNTY EC
GATESVILLE

If you don't like the weather, wait a minute.

TANYA STEELE
BLUEBONNET EC
BURTON

The bigger the hair, the closer to God.

DEBRA MILLS
NUECES EC
PORT ISABEL

Bless your heart.

KIT VAUGHN
PEDERNALES EC
LIBERTY HILL

Visit our website to see more responses.

MARCH 2026 Charted Waters

“Happy to see Pam LeBlanc is still adventurous. And Erich Schlegel’s photos artfully capture her adventure.”

STEVE HARDY
PEDERNALES EC
CEDAR PARK



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Matters of Funding

Overall, a great article, but there is a quote saying that rebuilding the Mason courthouse “didn’t cost taxpayers a dime” [*In All Their Glory*, March 2026]. At least \$9.6 million of funding from the state wasn’t from the tooth fairy.

Larry Strong
CoServ
Lewisville

Shouldering the Load

I loved the story of Tyler Schlickeisen, tow truck driver [*Currents*, March 2026]. It’s great to see stories on unsung heroes like him.

I do have to disagree with his comment, “Nobody likes to see a tow truck driver.” When I have needed them—on Interstate 35—my two tow truck drivers were heroes.

Frank Graham
Navarro County EC
Hill County

A Rash of Trash

Back in the ‘60s, Lady Bird Johnson championed a “Don’t Be a Litterbug” campaign, sending us children home with “litter bags” to hang on the handle of our roll-down car windows [*A Tidy Revolution*, March 2026]. Then in the ‘80s, the “Don’t Mess With Texas” slogan was a fun and effective refresher course.

Now we desperately need a new anti-litter crusade because Texas roadways have grown increasingly trashy.

Cheryl Irish
Bluebonnet EC
Bastrop

Ancestry and ‘TCP’

My hobby is genealogy and family history. Two articles in March gave enough information about people for me to see if I am related to them.

I discovered Tad Lucas [*Currents*] was the wife of my 10th cousin. Jennie Reynolds [*In All Their Glory*] is my 10th cousin. Our common progenitors date from the 1500s and 1600s.

Judith Tavares
Nueces EC
Corpus Christi



RYAN OLBRYSH

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

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Ocotillo reaches out from a bluff overlooking Devils River State Natural Area, north of Del Rio. The river, part of the Rio Grande watershed in Southwest Texas, is one of the most pristine in Texas.


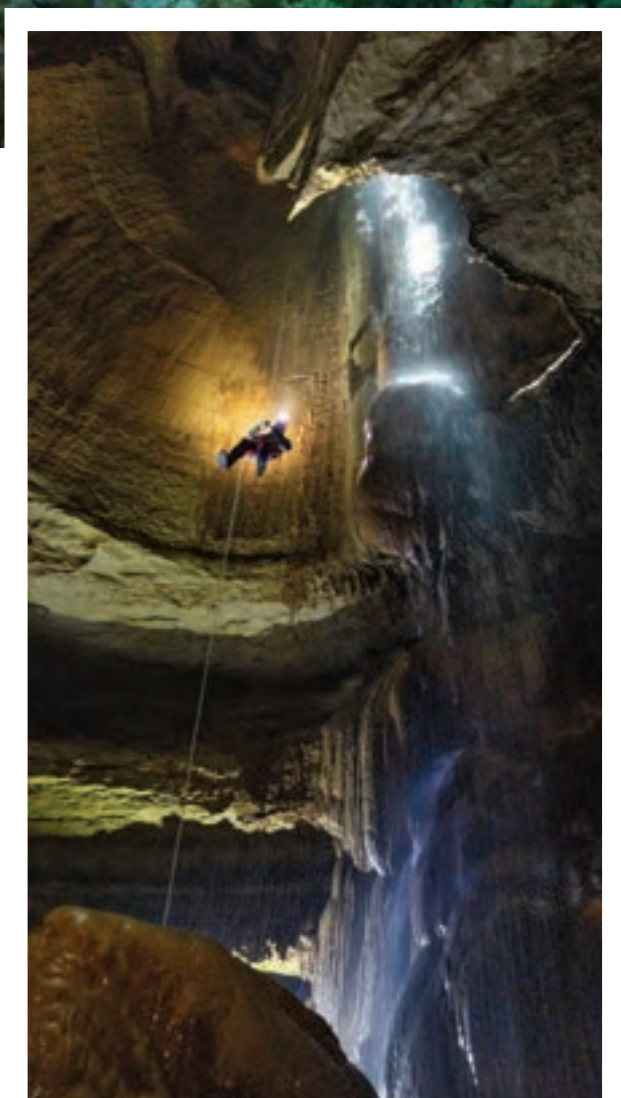
An aerial photograph of a wide river with turquoise water flowing through a lush, green landscape. The river is surrounded by dense vegetation and small trees. In the background, there are rolling hills under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. A branch with green leaves hangs from the top left corner of the frame.

PHOTO ESSAY BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

WET TEXAS

Beyond and below the
tumbleweeds and cactuses,
oases beckon out west



Drive west on Interstate 10 from the Hill Country, through beautiful desert mesas and mountains, and there's no water in sight, right?

Not unless you know where to look. Rivers, springs and even waterfalls are hidden across West Texas.

Most folks know about the Rio Grande, which cuts through the Big Bend, and you may even know of San Solomon Springs, which fills the 1.3-acre pool in Balmorhea State Park.

But you probably don't know about the 70-foot waterfall 143 feet below a cow pasture. It's managed by the Texas Cave Management Association and accessible only by wetsuit-clad expert cavers with advanced vertical rope training.

The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, also known as the Lower Canyons, flows down from Big Bend National Park toward Amistad Reservoir near Del Rio—the most remote part of the state. The 83-mile canoe trip takes a week and requires extensive river paddling knowledge and wilderness experience. Help, if needed, can be days away, but only if you carry a satellite phone.

On the other hand, anybody can paddle and swim just west of the Hill Country. Here, the crystal-clear Nueces River is nothing like the muddy flows that empty into the Gulf of Mexico. You'll find swimming pool-clear water in Lake Nueces as well as upstream, in a swimming hole in the town of Camp Wood named for its depth in feet, Quince (15).

It's easy to take water for granted. But seeing and experiencing water in West Texas brings an appreciation of one of our state's most important and sensitive resources. ■

TOP The Horseshoe Lake room sits beneath the dry, barren landscape of West Texas in the Caverns of Sonora, where the humidity is always about 98%.

ABOVE Austin cave expert Ethan Perrine descends a rope alongside a 70-foot underground waterfall in a cave below a West Texas cow pasture.

An aerial photograph of a narrow canyon. The central feature is a river with exceptionally clear, vibrant turquoise and emerald green water. The water's color varies in intensity, with deeper blues in the center and lighter greens near the banks. The canyon walls are composed of light-colored, layered rock formations, possibly limestone or sandstone, with sparse green vegetation growing on them. The surrounding area above the canyon is densely forested with green trees. In the upper right corner, there is a small waterfall or spring area where the water enters the river. A small black metal structure, possibly a ladder or railing, is visible on the left bank near the bottom of the frame. The overall scene is a natural, scenic landscape.

Blue Hole is a spring-fed swimming spot near the headwaters of the Frio River north of Leakey on the private property of the H. E. Butt Foundation Camp. Blue Hole reaches a maximum depth of about 30 feet.



Divers join a school of fish in San Solomon Springs at Balmorhea State Park, home of the world's largest spring-fed swimming pool. The springs have flowed out of the Chihuahuan Desert about 135 miles southwest of Midland for thousands of years.



LEFT The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River is the most remote part of the state. The heart of this stretch of the Rio Grande is an arduous 83 miles called the Lower Canyons, which offers spectacular scenery but requires extensive wilderness experience.

BELOW A campsite along the Devils River, which begins in northwest Sutton County and flows south for 94 miles, emptying into Amistad Reservoir on the Rio Grande.





Thanks to an archaeologist's persistence, we have 20,000-year-old evidence of Texans

COURTESY KENNETH GARRETT

BY PAM LEBLANC

He Kept Digging



COURTESY KENNETH GARRETT

TOP Michael Collins stands with several chert cores—often called flint—recovered from the Gault site along Buttermilk Creek.

ABOVE Artifacts found at the Gault site by a collector in 1990 include two stones with hatch marks etched onto their surface.

Last summer, Michael Collins gazed over a tree-lined valley near Florence, his eyes scanning the grassy field where he once led excavations that changed our understanding of how and when humans first populated North America.

“I describe it as coming back to an old friend,” Collins said during that visit to the Gault archaeological site, about 50 miles north of Austin.

Collins sat beneath pecan trees for a picnic that day with others who had worked at Gault and filmmaker Olive Talley, whose 2025 documentary, *The Stones Are Speaking*, explores the site’s significance—and Collins’ role in saving it.

In the 1980s and ’90s, the film explains, artifact hunters lugging buckets and shovels flocked to the 30-acre plot of land, where a creek flowed and an abundant supply of flint rippled through a rocky ledge. They paid \$25 a day to search for scrapers, projectile points and knives made by Native Americans and walk away with whatever they found. They left behind empty holes and mounds of dirt.

By taking those stone artifacts, collectors were destroying much of the history that they held. “It’s like looking at a book, tearing a picture out and throwing away the rest of the book,” said Elton Prewitt, a longtime Texas archaeologist.

The Gault story could have ended there—as a pay-to-dig site whose significance disappeared along with the ancient implements once scattered in its soil. But that’s not what happened.

In 1990, collectors digging at Gault found something unusual: two stones with hatch marks etched onto their surface. Word got back to the University of Texas, where the discovery perked the ears of Thomas Hester, then the director of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, and Collins, then the lab’s associate director.

The two drove to the site, where more etched stones turned up—along with a Clovis spearpoint, named for a Paleo-Indian archaeological site near Clovis, New Mexico, where scientists had discovered distinctive human-made tools more than 11,000 years old.

Most archaeologists long believed that humans first funneled into North America via a land bridge that formed between Russia and Alaska across what is now the Bering Strait about 13,000 years ago. The so-called Clovis culture was thought to be the oldest in the Americas.

Because Clovis tools had been found at Gault, Collins knew the site was important. But at the time, nobody knew just how significant.

Over the next few years, the land changed hands, and the pay-to-dig operation ended. When the property’s new owners, Howard and Doris Lindsey, stumbled onto some mammoth bones, Collins again got the call. He struck up a friendship with the Lindseys, and in 1998, Collins convinced them to allow a three-year lease so he could conduct an excavation.

That dig turned up more artifacts from the Clovis period, but Collins ran out of time. He filled in the pit and left when the lease ended, convinced the site held even more significance.

Collins stayed in touch with the Lindseys, and in 2007 they agreed to sell him the land. (They still live nearby and keep an eye on the property.) Collins and his wife, Karen, used their own money to buy the site, then immediately donated it to the nonprofit Archaeological Conservancy, where it would be protected in perpetuity.

Collins began a meticulous, long-term excavation project. The people who had come here thousands of years ago made tools, discarded some and lost others, leaving behind a record. The researchers uncovered thousands of artifacts, plus a human-made surface believed to be the floor of a structure at least 15,000 years old.

At first, not everyone believed what the stones were saying. Some pushed back on the idea that humans had been in Central Texas since before the Clovis people. But using a technique called optically stimulated luminescence, which



COURTESY GAULT SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Collins with volunteers at the last part of the Gault site to be excavated. Currently there are no open excavation sites on the property and no digs planned.

tells scientists when sediments were last exposed to light, Collins and his team proved that some of the most deeply buried artifacts were indeed older than Clovis.

Today, most archaeologists agree that humans began to move into North America before the land bridge at the Bering Strait opened, using boats to cross the water and spread down the coast.

Evidence discovered through Collins’ excavations show signs that humans have come to the water at this Texas site—what is now nearby Buttermilk Creek—for 20,000 years.

That arguably makes it the oldest demonstrably inhabited site in the Western Hemisphere.

“What’s important about this site is what we’ve learned about ourselves from it,” says Tim Brown, a board member at the nonprofit Gault School of Archaeological Research, which Collins founded. “This site has been so important in the rewriting of the book about the very early story of man in the Americas.”


And it may have more stories to tell.

Collins, now in his 80s, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in 2022, and the main excavation pit was covered in 2016. But just 3% of the land here has been excavated. New technologies may help future archaeologists unravel even more of its past.

“Walk across this soil,” Brown says. “If you don’t get a humble, awestruck reaction, there’s something wrong. And without Mike, we’d have no idea.” ■

Dig In

To book a guided tour, visit the GSAR website, gaultschool.org.

 Scan the QR code or visit gaultfilm.com to learn more about *The Stones Are Speaking* and for streaming options.





MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/CEO JEFF LANE

Honoring Those Who Served

THIS MEMORIAL DAY, as we gather with family and friends, let's remember that true appreciation for our veterans extends far beyond a single holiday. At Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, we believe that honoring those who served—especially those who made the ultimate sacrifice—requires action, not just reflection.

May is Military Appreciation Month, and at TVEC, we care about veterans and show our appreciation through our actions and ongoing commitment to them and their families. We're grateful to have veterans within our ranks, and we're proud to serve the vets and their families in our community with safe and reliable electricity.

We're not alone in our efforts to honor and serve vets. TVEC is part of a network of more than 900 electric cooperatives across the country that support and honor our nation's veterans of all generations. Across the nationwide network of electric cooperatives, spanning 48 states and serving 13.5% of U.S. consumers, programs promote and support veteran hiring practices.



Thank you to TVEC members who participate in Operation Round Up as well. Your combined giving adds up to meaningful contributions for veterans organizations, memorials and community groups that support our nation's warriors.

Not only do we pause on Memorial Day to remember the sacrifice and service of those who gave all, but we also recognize several other military anniversaries and events this month, including Military Spouse Appreciation Day and Armed Forces Day.

TVEC is proud to be part of the electric cooperative community that honors and supports veterans of all ages, ranks and branches of the military. Please join us in taking a moment to show your appreciation to a veteran—not just this month but every month. ■

Get Energy Star Products Tax-Free

ENERGY STAR-CERTIFIED products save you money on your electric bill, and what better time to purchase one than Memorial Day weekend, during the Energy Star sales tax holiday, May 23–25 this year.

Texas shoppers wanting a break on energy-efficient items can buy qualifying Energy Star products tax-free when the item is paid for during the exemption period.

Some items have price limits, so check comptroller.texas.gov before you buy to make sure they qualify for the exemption.

Qualifying Products

- ▶ Air conditioners (with a sales price of \$6,000 or less)
- ▶ Refrigerators (with a sales price of \$2,000 or less)
- ▶ Ceiling fans
- ▶ Incandescent and fluorescent light bulbs
- ▶ Clothes washers
- ▶ Dishwashers
- ▶ Dehumidifiers

Nonqualifying Products

- ▶ Water heaters
- ▶ Clothes dryers
- ▶ Freezers
- ▶ Stoves
- ▶ Attic fans
- ▶ Heat pumps
- ▶ Wine refrigerators
- ▶ Keegerators
- ▶ Beverage chillers ■





TVEC | DON JOHNSON

Laura Melton, public relations supervisor, presents Crandall High School junior Ogonna Umeh with her Government-in-Action Youth Tour prize. Umeh and CHS sophomore Victor Okonji-Nduka will be headed to Washington, D.C., for the weeklong event in June.

TVEC May News and Notes: Youth Tour, PUC Solar Site

Difference Makers: Two Crandall High School students will head to Washington, D.C. in June for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour.

Sophomore Victor Okonji-Njuka and junior Ogonna Umeh will take part in the annual tour that began as an educational effort by President Lyndon Johnson in 1957.

The event, sponsored by Texas Electric Cooperatives, sees more than 140 Texas teens join others from around the country for a week of education, team building and fun in the nation's capital.

Participants regularly get a chance to meet lawmakers, tour historic sites, visit Arlington National Cemetery and more.

If you know an area high school student who might be interested, watch for application information for next year's Youth Tour in *Texas Co-op Power* or on tvec.net this fall.

Public Utilities Commission Solar Information Site: The Public Utilities Commission of Texas has produced an informative website to help consumers who are considering the purchase of a residential solar system.

The site, required by a law passed in the last Texas legislative session, provides a set of questions for consumers to ask solar installers, as well as a section aimed at dispelling common solar energy myths.

You can find the site at puc.texas.gov/consumer-help/electricity/solar or by clicking the link at tvec.net/der.

If you are considering solar, don't forget to contact TVEC to make sure that your installer follows the proper guidelines to safely interconnect with the electric grid. ■




Victor Okonji-Njuka



PUC Solar Information

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Cedar Creek District Office

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Wills Point District Office

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tvec.net





TVEC | DON JOHNSON

4 Decades of Co-op Commitment

From living across the street to a career on the lines, Newbill is co-op connected

AS A YOUNGSTER, KEVIN NEWBILL SPENT a lot of time at his great-grandparents' home on Larkin Street in Athens. It may not have made an impression at the time, but the New Era Electric Cooperative facility across the street would be Newbill's work home for more than 43 years.

"Back then it was all dirt roads and we hadn't built a lot of what we have here now," Newbill said. "I'd play out here and didn't think much of it, but the main thing was just the smell of that creosote on the poles."



Kevin Newbill, second from right, began his lineman career with New Era EC in Athens. A 1997 merger with Kaufman County EC formed Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative.

Although he was born in the Dallas area, Newbill's extended family has a long history in Henderson County.

"My uncle built Athens Automotive and Machine Shop, and he also raised cattle so he knew all of the farmers and people from all around," he said. "If you had a tractor or a car, he knew you, knew what you needed and how to fix it. Usually people would assume that was my dad. Even now when I introduce myself around people ask me if I'm kin to Dudley."

Newbill's family eventually moved to Murchison, and he finished school at Brownsboro High School.

After graduation and a short stint working on oil rigs in East Texas, Newbill settled in closer to home working for the Brownsboro Independent School District, where he was recruited to become the school's mechanic.

"They offered to send me to school and everything, but I just thought about how I didn't really want to be working on cars and buses every day," he said. "Back then you didn't fill out an application online. You showed up, and I was up here just about every week to ask if they were hiring."

When the opportunity presented itself, Newbill jumped into a career that would carry him all the way to retirement, which he plans to do this summer.

"The first year I was here, we had a major ice storm, and back then there were no rules about when you had to take a break to

rest or anything, you just stayed until it was all done,” he said. “I just thought, ‘Good Lord! What have I gotten myself into?’ But then everywhere you go, you also hear people telling you how much they appreciate what you do and how they know when the lights are out we are working on it. That means something.”

Over the course of time, work safety has come a long way. During his four decades of line work, Newbill has seen a complete shift in how the job is done, with a heavy emphasis on planning and safe work practices.

“When I started, safety was nothing like it is now. We did things that would just make you shake your head today,” he said. “I’d say that is the biggest change I’ve seen, and it is so much a change for the better. I tell new guys now, if you ever think you are being too safe, then you aren’t. Put on your gloves, put on your sleeves, take care of yourself. That is how you stay alive.”

One thing that hasn’t changed for lineworkers is the commitment to, when necessary, put the needs of the community over personal time and family.

“There have been a lot of things. I can think of some Christmas mornings I’ve missed because storms don’t care what day it is,” Newbill said. “You can’t get that time back, but you do get the satisfaction that you do a job that really matters.” 7993001

With a large number of retirements occurring in the industry, there is an opportunity for a new generation of lineworkers coming up. With his experience coming up through the co-op system, and now as a crew foreman, Newbill said that there are some qualities he sees in new recruits that lead to a successful career.

“Being a groundman is about paying attention and being proactive,” he said. “It is constantly asking what is the line-man going to need next, and having that ready before it is a



Kevin Newbill noted that one of the biggest changes in line work over the course of his career has been an emphasis on safety.

question. Every job may look the same from the outside, but there is something different about each location. If you get too comfortable you may miss something that can get you hurt. If you can stay on top of it, you can do this job and it is something that people are going to need for a long time.”

From being a kid playing on Athens’ dirt streets to directing crews restoring power after major storms, Newbill has made a big impact on Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative and the community of members it serves.

“When you wear the co-op logo, you are never really off the clock, and that is just part of it,” Newbill said. “The members are paying the bills so you take care of them—it is that simple. This is a really good company and that is why we call it a family. I hope that when I leave, the guys coming up keep doing things the right way—that is what really matters.”

After retirement you might catch Newbill following the racing line at a dirt track instead of the power lines. He’s been driving race cars for about as long as he’s been working at the co-op and there is no slowing him down now. ■



You might catch Newbill for a conversation around town, but he’s harder to catch on the weekends at local dirt tracks where he has been racing for more than 40 years.



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TVEC MANAGER
OF DER & GRID
INTEGRATION
CHRIS WALKER

Practical Pointers for Electrical Safety Month

MAY IS NATIONAL Electrical Safety Month, and Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative is raising awareness about home electrical hazards and the importance of electrical safety.

Our modern lives depend on electricity, and if you don't properly maintain your gadgets and devices, they can turn into hazards. The good news is that staying safe doesn't have to be difficult or expensive.

Many homes and their electrical systems were built before most modern-day electronics and appliances were even invented. Today's increased demand for energy can overburden an older home's electrical system. If you notice flickering or dimming lights, it may indicate your home's wiring is inadequate for your needs. Have it checked by a licensed electrician.

TVEC offers the following tips to help identify and eliminate electrical hazards to protect yourself, your family and your home.

Make sure TVs, game systems and computer equipment have plenty of space around them for ventilation.

Use extension cords as temporary solutions only, and don't run extension cords in high-traffic areas or under carpets.

Use a surge protector to help protect your computer, TVs and other electronic equipment from damage caused by voltage changes.

Heavy reliance on power strips is an indication that you have too few outlets for your needs. Have additional outlets installed by a licensed electrician.

Keep liquids away from electrical items such as TVs and computers.

Make sure the light bulb wattage is right for the fixture. Light bulbs with wattages that are too high can overheat and cause a fire. Swap out incandescent bulbs with LEDs to prevent this and save energy.

Create a guide for your breaker box so that you know which breaker to turn off when needed.

Recurring tripped circuit breakers or multiple blown fuses can signify a serious and dangerous electrical problem. Contact a licensed electrician immediately. ■

Member
Service
Minute



Jennifer Clowers

Career at the co-op

I have been in TVEC member services for three years.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I just really enjoy talking to our members. I'm a problem solver so there is always some satisfaction in helping someone take care of something.

What is the key to providing great service?

Really I think it is to truly listen. We do a lot of routine tasks like helping with bill payment, but when there is something else, you have to pay attention to figure out how to help in the best way.

One thing you'd like to remind members about?

We are on the same team. We are your co-op and we are doing our best to help rain or shine. Please be patient with us after holidays and at the first of the month, which seem to be the busiest on the phones, and we want to give every member the high quality of service they deserve. ■

Little Changes Add Up

YOU DON'T ALWAYS have to make sweeping changes like upgrading appliances or replacing windows to save energy. Sometimes all it takes is the cumulation of small lifestyle changes to add up to savings.

When you use your printer—at home or at work—print on both sides of the paper.

Invest in a single power strip to tuck behind your entertainment center. Plug your TV, speakers and other electronics into it. Then, switch the power strip off every night before bedtime so none of those devices draw electricity when not in use.

Wait until your dishwasher is full before running it. Stop washing dishes by hand—it uses up to twice as much water and energy as the dishwasher.

Wash your clothes in cold water instead of hot. This could save you up to \$40 a year.

Lower your water heater's temperature by just 2 degrees. You won't notice the difference when you shower, but you will notice it on your energy bill.

Keep your freezer full. It takes more energy to cool an empty space than a full one.

Hang an outdoor clothesline. Pull nearly dry clothes out of the washer and hang them; they don't need to go into the dryer. That will cut the number of dryer cycles you use.

Slide your refrigerator a couple of inches away from the wall. Pressing it up against a wall limits air circulation behind it and makes the appliance work harder, which uses more energy.

Skip the hair dryer. You'll save energy by air-drying rather than blow-drying—and your hair will be protected from heat damage, too.

Turn things off when you're not using them: lights, ceiling fans, space heaters, the TV, your computer—anything that's electric. ■



MARIA ARGUTINSKAYA | ISTOCK.COM



COOKIE_CUTTER | ISTOCK.COM

Culprits of Electrical Fires

PROBLEMS WITH WIRING or electric equipment are among the most common causes of house fires. Check your home for these hazards.

Electrical outlets. Faulty electrical outlets are a leading cause of home fires. As outlets age, so do the wires behind them. Any loose, damaged or warm-to-the-touch outlets should be repaired or replaced.

Electrical wiring. Outdated wiring is another common cause of electrical fires. Frequently tripped breakers, flickering lights and burning smells are clear warning signs. If you suspect your home's wiring is outdated, leave this one to the pros and contact a qualified electrician.

Overloaded cords and outlets. Extension cords are not permanent solutions. If your TV, home theater system and other electronics are plugged into one extension cord, it's time to call a licensed electrician and install additional outlets.

Old appliances. Older appliances are more likely to have loose or damaged wiring, which means they're more likely to catch fire. Check older appliances for damage and determine if it's time to upgrade and replace. Also check to ensure you're using appliance-grade outlets. A qualified electrician can help. ■



TVEC | DON JOHNSON

TVEC
TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Energy Quiz



Which metal is considered the best electrical conductor?

- A. Silver
- B. Copper
- C. Steel

Win \$100!

Send your answer and contact information to contest@tvec.coop or contact TVEC Member Services by November 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* issue.

Ochoa's Mexican Restaurant

Great Tex-Mex in the co-op's front yard

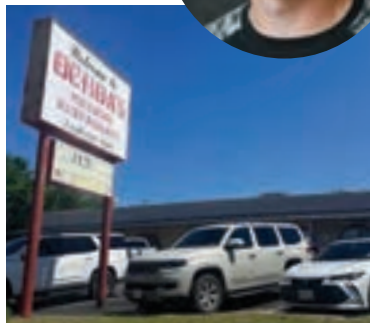
TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CREWS don't typically spend much time in the office. With more than 8,000 miles of power lines to maintain, trips to the office or warehouse are often limited to early mornings or late nights to start or end the workday. But when the Athens-based crews do have a lunch in town, it is hard to beat what is across the street at Ochoa's Mexican Restaurant.

Originally established in 1969 on Cedar Creek Lake, Ochoa's now has locations in Canton and Athens, each operated by a son of the founder.

The menu has all of the Tex-Mex standards, along with American classics like chicken fried steak and hamburgers.

"I'm a chips and salsa guy, and they have that down," said Jace Reese, first class lineman. "My go-to all the time is chicken fajita nachos, but I have to pace myself on the chips beforehand."

Ochoa's Mexican Restaurant is located at 310 US Highway 175 in Athens, and online at ochoasmexican.com. ■



April Energy Quiz: Musical Energy

ELECTRICITY HAS LONG inspired artists—from lightning to neon lights. That has stretched to music as well, with dozens of electricity-related songs and several band names like AC/DC, Tesla and Electric Light Orchestra. The Lonesome Ohms have not yet made their debut, but with some musically gifted employees here at the co-op, it could still happen. Send your favorite electrically-themed artwork or artist to contest@tvec.coop for a chance to win a TVEC goodie bag!

Congratulations to our March Energy Quiz winner, William Shipley of Terrell.

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

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 May 29 to receive a \$100 credit on your electric bill. Don't miss out—you could be our winner.





Charitable Foundation



MARCH 2026 Operation Round Up Awards

Operation Round Up is a voluntary charitable program that allows TVEC members to help support local nonprofits and community projects by rounding up their monthly electric bill to the next whole dollar.



Clothed in Grace Foster Closet

Grants

American Heart Association	\$5,000
Clothed in Grace Foster Closet	\$3,000
First Methodist Mabank Backpack Program	\$2,500

Bill Payment Assistance

Faith in Action	\$5,000
Serenity Church of Terrell	\$5,000
St. Vincent de Paul of East Texas	\$5,000

Food Pantry Assistance

Forney Food Pantry	\$3,000
Serenity Church of Terrell	\$3,000

tvec.net/operation-round-up



POWER TIP

To improve a home's energy efficiency, use caulk or spray foam to seal gaps around plumbing and wiring.

KALI9 | ISTOCK.COM



DID YOU KNOW?

On May 11, 1935, the Rural Electrification Administration was created to bring electricity to rural America.

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Garden Variety Show

Pull up a chair and look real close: There could be a menagerie hiding in your yard

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • ILLUSTRATION BY PETER DONNELLY

CAROLINA SNAILSEED often pops up in our native gardens. I let a few vines clamber up our chain-link fence. The rest I yank. That's what I was doing a few Aprils ago in a front-yard bed. Bent over, pulling on a stubborn root, I glanced at a nearby tree stump.

Could it be? I squinted and looked again, this time closer.

It was a long-legged gray spider, a kind I'd never seen before in our yard, and so well camouflaged that I inched up for an even closer look. Sensing my presence, the spider sidled on the stump.

I laughed. "I see you," I said, snapping some photos with my phone. The spider sidled back the other way. "Sorry, I still see you!" Later I learned that I'd actually met a white-banded fishing spider, a species—as its name implies—that mostly hangs out near water. How she found her way to our gardens will always mystify me.

To this day, my encounter with that spider ranks among my favorite garden adventures, the list of which continues to grow. That's what happens when you tend native plants: Mother Nature shows up.

To keep track of what I find, I use iNaturalist, an online network of users who record and identify organisms around the world through a mobile app and website. Within the 1-acre property that my husband and I own in a neighborhood in the Hill Country town of Blanco, I've documented more than 1,520 species of flora and fauna, including some surprises.

For instance, one June our velvet-leaf mallow hosted a huddle of violet-hued caterpillars with red heads. Or so I thought. They turned out to be the larvae (not butterfly caterpillars) of sawflies, which are named for the female's egg-laying appendage that saws into plants. Adult sawflies are seen less often than their chubby larvae.

Not so for a large fly that's commonly called an elephant mosquito (yes, mosquitoes are flies). Somehow I resisted the urge to swat the first one I ever saw, resting on a salvia leaf. Imagine my surprise when I learned that these iridescent mosquitoes feed on flower nectar, not blood. Plus, their aquatic larvae eat watery insects, including other mosquito larvae.

My first jagged ambush bug, lurking on a coreopsis flower, stumped me. Viewed from the side, these peazoid predators have a silhouette that resembles a humpbacked dinosaur. Concealed on a bloom, they

wait for a small butterfly, moth or bee to land. Then they grab the victim with their hooked forelegs, similar to a praying mantis', and stab their sucking mouthpart (called a proboscis) into the body.

One evening, a green dragonfly called an eastern pondhawk sideswiped my left ear at top speed. Then she landed near my feet on a rock. After taking some photos, I stuck out my hand. To my delight, she flitted onto me! So have longhorn cactus flies, red admiral butterflies, robber flies, a picture-winged fly and a scaly cricket, along with assorted bugs, beetles and spiders.

Sometimes critters have fooled me, too. Like a hefty ant perched on an esperanza bloom. Wrong—it was a juvenile Texas bow-legged bug. Another time I spotted a firefly (which are beetles) on a plateau goldeneye leaf. Nope—it was a firefly-mimicking longhorn beetle.

Other pranksters in our gardens include ant-mimicking jumping spiders, velvet ants (wingless female wasps) and Beelzebub bee-eaters, a fuzzy robber fly that looks like a bumblebee. All use mimicry to either ward off predators or trick their prey (and me).

We've seen Texas spiny lizard mothers excavate burrows in flower beds. One time I happened by an autumn sage just in time to see a checkered garter snake gulp down an earthworm. In the summer, Rio Grande leopard frogs honeymoon in our 100-gallon stock-tank pond.

Bird adventures? You bet. One June a wild turkey hung out in our backyard. That same month, a juvenile green heron practiced his fishing skills in a shallow birdbath. We still laugh at videos taken of a black-crested titmouse mom pulling fur off our annoyed cat. Yes, the titmouse survived!

Fate wasn't so kind when a red paper wasp landed on the street at my feet. I'd been en route to check our milkweed crop of antelope-horns. I crouched down, then grimaced.

The wasp mother was sawing the legs off an orb-weaver spider that she'd paralyzed with a sting. A few minutes later, she finished her gruesome task and lifted into the air, clutching her victim. Soon the legless spider would feed hungry wasp larvae.

Yes, Mother Nature can be cruel. But she can be fascinating and surprising, too. Take my advice and look closer. Soon you'll be on your own garden adventure. ■



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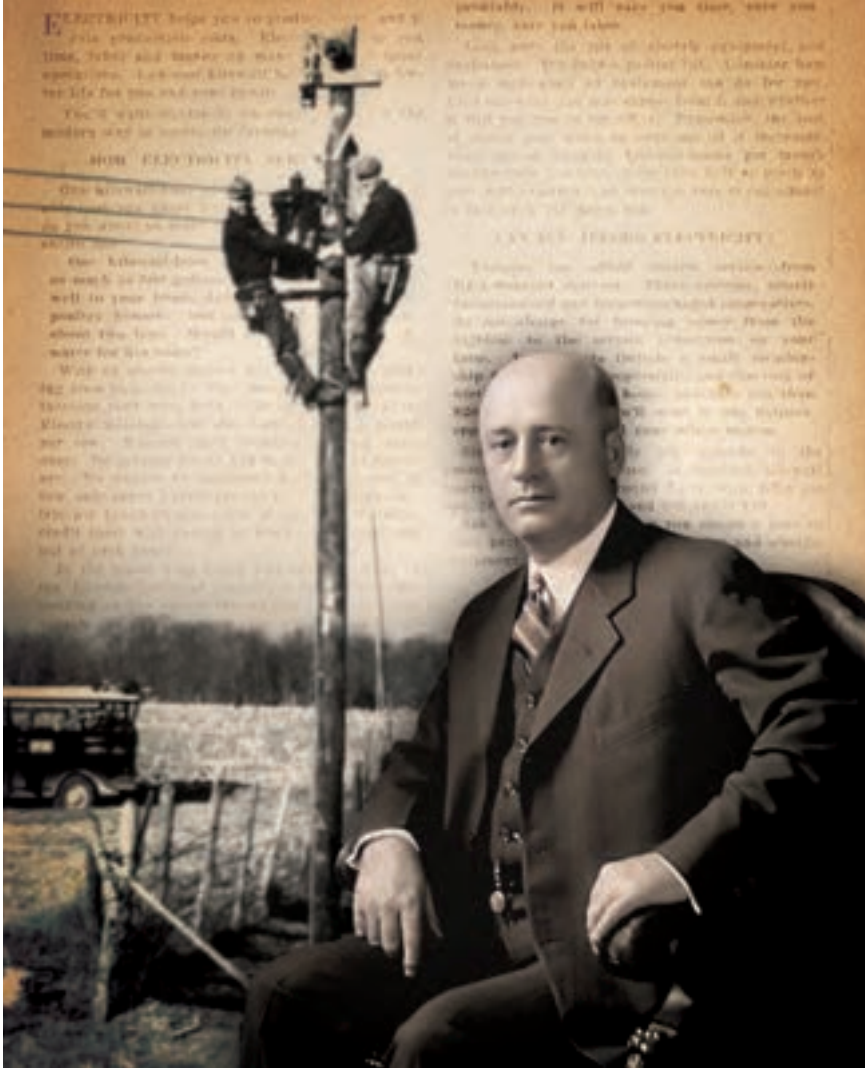
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Power and Light

Sam Rayburn helped pull rural Texans out of the dark

BY JESSICA RIDGE

BEFORE THE PASSAGE OF THE Rural Electrification Act nearly a century ago, in the depths of the Great Depression, most U.S. farmsteads made do in the dark while their neighbors in cities a few miles away experienced a higher standard of living. Investor-owned utilities didn't deem it profitable to run miles of power lines across the countryside.

Without electric lights and appliances, farm families cooked over smoky woodstoves, read and studied under kerosene lamps, and performed laborious agricultural chores by hand.

By the mid-1930s, change was afoot, thanks in large part to a dedicated and diplomatic Texan intent on the empowerment of rural communities. The REA,

enacted 90 years ago this month—May 20, 1936—made available low-cost federal loans to rural landowners who had banded together in hopes of threading the countryside with electric lines.

Electric cooperatives were born, starting with the first, Bartlett Electric Cooperative in Central Texas.

Before the REA, only around 10% of U.S. farms had electricity. By 1950, the federal financing the legislation shook loose had helped electrify nearly 80% of farms. Today, more than 900 co-ops power rural and suburban residents.

A 1960 Department of Agriculture video describes electricity as “magic from nowhere and everywhere” and details “the drab, colorless days” before

its rural availability. The video colorizes a black-and-white sequence, demonstrating the life-changing force of electricity coursing through the home of the fictional family it depicts.

Similar transformations, effected many times across prewar rural landscapes nationwide, were largely enabled by the efforts and advocacy of U.S. Rep. Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn, who cosponsored the REA legislation with Nebraska Sen. George Norris.

Rayburn, born in Tennessee, moved with his family to an unelectrified Fannin County farm, in North Texas, when he was 5, in 1887.

He attended grade school through law school in Texas and served in the Legislature before catapulting to Congress in 1913, where he set records as the longest-serving speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives—17 years over 10 sessions spanning the 1930s to 1960s, accrued piecemeal during his near-half-century tenure.

Rayburn didn't forget his former neighbors. In his papers, housed at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas, a March 1938 thank-you on Fannin County Electric Cooperative letterhead notes the co-op's progress in installing its first 110 miles of line, thanks to a \$100,000 REA requisition.

In July 1940, Farmers Electric Cooperative sent its own note to Rayburn, chiefly attributing to him the REA's “birth and success.” Included was a precursor to this magazine, a monthly newsletter called the *REA Co-op Message*, which included a run-down of the co-op's recent annual meeting, a list of new members and updates about members' appliance purchases.

Readers learned that member W.C. McKay had installed an electric range at home. “Naturally,” the newsletter reads, “Mrs. McKay is very happy.”

She wasn't alone. Thanks to Rayburn, life in Co-op Country was changed forever. ■

Mom's Favorites

Recipes perfected and passed down through the years

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

This salad smells like home. Growing up, my mami had a beautiful garden where she harvested the juiciest cucumbers and tomatoes. Sliced, tossed with panela and drizzled with her homemade dressing, I could eat this salad every day. I'm thrilled to share a dish my mami and I still enjoy together.

Tomato Cucumber Panela Salad

2 cups halved cherry tomatoes
2 medium cucumbers, diced
1 package panela cheese (16 ounces), cubed
½ cup olive oil
2 tablespoons white vinegar
2 tablespoons lime juice
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons ground black pepper
1 bunch cilantro, finely minced

1. Place tomatoes, cucumbers and panela in a bowl.
2. In another bowl, whisk together oil, vinegar, lime juice, salt and pepper until well blended. Stir in cilantro.
3. Pour dressing over salad, stir to combine and store in fridge until ready to serve.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Frida Kahlo's Ensalada de Calabacin.





Lasagna

DANI DECESARO
TRINITY VALLEY EC

DeCesaro's Norwegian mom married an Italian man and perfected this recipe alongside her sister. It has become a wonderful memory for the entire family.

- 3 quarts plus 1/3 cup water, divided use**
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon salt, divided use**
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
- 9 lasagna noodles**
- 4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) butter**
- 1 pound ground beef**
- 1/4 cup minced onion**
- 1/4 cup dried parsley flakes**
- 1/8 teaspoon garlic salt**
- 2 tablespoons flour**
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper**
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano**
- 1 can evaporated milk (12 ounces)**
- 1 can tomato paste (12 ounces)**
- 1 pound mozzarella cheese, sliced into 18 pieces**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
- 2.** Bring 3 quarts water to a boil. Add 1 tablespoon salt and oil. Cook noodles according to package directions. Drain and place noodles on paper towels.
- 3.** Heat butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add ground beef, onion, parsley and garlic salt. Cook, breaking up ground beef with spoon.
- 4.** When fully cooked, reduce heat to simmer, and stir in remaining 1 teaspoon salt, flour, pepper and oregano until well combined.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Mom's Fresh Apple Bars

DIANE KORUS
KARNES EC



Korus' mom enjoyed these bars in the afternoon with a cup of coffee, and I have to agree that these babies are the ultimate afternoon snack. Packed with fresh apples and a sinfully sweet streusel topping, these bars are a crowd pleaser.

STREUSEL

- 1/2 cup flour**
- 1/2 cup sugar**
- 4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, softened**

BARS

- 2/3 cup shortening**
- 2 cups light brown sugar**

- 2 eggs, room temperature, lightly beaten**
- 1/4 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2 cups flour**
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 2 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1 1/2 cups peeled and chopped Granny Smith apple (about 1 large or 2 medium apples)**
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans**

- 1. STREUSEL** In a bowl, combine flour, sugar and butter. Mix until mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
- 2. BARS** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
- 3.** In a large bowl, beat shortening and brown sugar on medium speed until smooth. Add eggs, salt and vanilla and mix until combined, scraping down sides as needed.
- 4.** With a spatula, stir in flour, cinnamon and baking powder until well combined. Gently fold in apples and pecans.
- 5.** Spread batter into prepared pan and sprinkle with streusel. Bake 35-40 minutes or until the top is golden brown and a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

CAMPFIRE FAVORITES DUE MAY 10

For our October issue, we're eager to pass around treats and meals to munch on while gathered around the flames. Fire off your best recipe for a chance at winning \$500.

UPCOMING: CRANBERRY HARVEST DUE JUN 10



RECIPES CONTINUED

5. Add evaporated milk and remaining 1/3 cup water. Cover and simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in tomato paste until well combined.
6. Layer three noodles on bottom of prepared pan. Spread 1/2 meat sauce over noodles, then layer on 3 more noodles and top with 1/2 of cheese. Add remaining 3 noodles. Top with remaining meat sauce and remaining cheese.
7. Bake about 30 minutes, until cheese is melted and begins to brown.

SERVES 8

Yankee Cake

CHUCK BURGESS
HEART OF TEXAS EC

Burgess' mom was from Texas, his dad from New York. His dad's family shared this cake recipe with Mom. It's now a family favorite and sure to be your new



favorite too. This Yankee Cake is a cinnamon sweet surprise sprinkled with sugar and nuts.

- 2 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar, divided use
- 7 tablespoons (7/8 stick) butter, softened, divided use
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup heavy cream

- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
2. In a medium bowl, mix together flour, salt and baking powder.
3. In a large bowl, beat 1 cup sugar and 5 tablespoons butter at medium speed until light and fluffy. Reduce speed to low and add egg, heavy cream, milk and vanilla. Mix until combined, scraping down sides.
4. Add flour mixture and mix until combined.
5. Spread batter evenly into prepared pan. Sprinkle with remaining 1 tablespoon sugar plus cinnamon and nuts. Dot with remaining 2 tablespoons butter.
6. Bake 25–30 minutes, until edges are lightly golden and a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12

WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS BEGINS WITH YOU

Have your "Go Kit" packed and ready.

Create defensible space around your home.

Identify two evacuation routes incase one becomes compromised.

Communicate with local officials and learn how they will send emergency notifications.




tfsweb.tamu.edu/PreventWildfire

JUNE 12 -13 2026

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Craft Beer Awards
Banquet

SATURDAY:
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Texas wine
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Seltzer, Food
Games & more!



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Ticket Info: fbgcrafterfestival.com

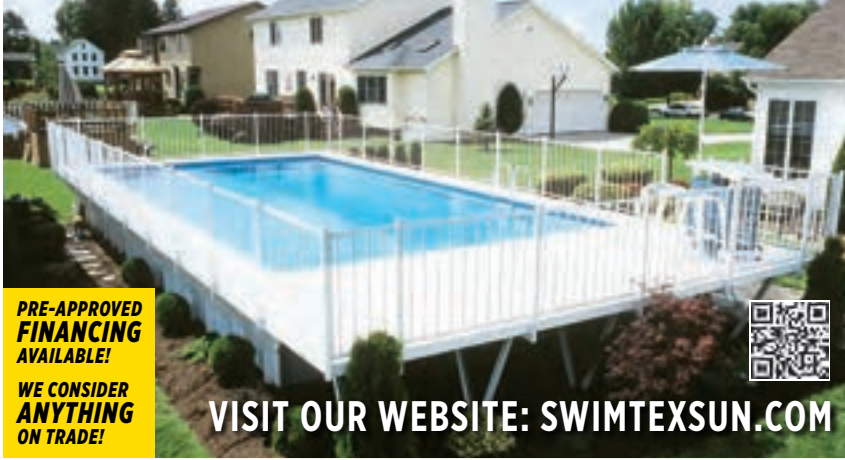
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

South Poles

Panna Maria museum shows off Polish heritage in a big way

BY CHET GARNER

LOTS OF FOLKS know Texas for its Mexican flavors, its German beer halls and its Czech kolache. But mention our Polish history, and most won't know where to start, even though Texas is home to the oldest permanent Polish settlement in America.

I'll admit, before visiting the small community of Panna Maria, I didn't grasp how deep our Polish roots run. But fortunately, I found the Polish Heritage Center ready to educate me and the rest of Texas.

Panna Maria (population about 40) sits quietly on the rolling plains of Karnes County about an hour southeast of San Antonio.

The entire community revolves around two blocks. On one sits the picturesque Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, which dates to 1855. And on the next is the stately Polish Heritage Center, which dates to 2021. I have visited more than my fair share of small-town museums, but nothing could prepare me for what I found inside this state-of-the-art facility.

After signing my name in the guest book next to visitors from the Polish capital of Warsaw and beyond, I stepped into an immersive experience that transported me to 1854, when a group of Polish immigrants held Mass under the oak trees just outside the church and decided to call Panna Maria home. The museum went on to tell the story of the culture, faith and struggles of this community, including its influence on modern life in Texas.

The history unfolds through hand-embroidered clothing, family photos, tools and letters carried across the Atlantic. It's so well done that it would impress visitors in any big city, making it all the more amazing in tiny Panna Maria.

Texas is a patchwork of cultures, accents and traditions. Thanks to the Polish Heritage Center, one of our more overlooked threads is finally getting the spotlight it deserves. ■

ABOVE Chet stops at a painting in the Polish Heritage Center in Panna Maria showing the first Catholic Mass after immigrants reached the site on Christmas Eve in 1854.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all of 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.

MAY

8

Brenham [8-9] Maifest, (979) 451-0621, brenhammaifest.com

Round Top [8-10] Fine Art Festival at the Compound, (281) 236-3821, bit.ly/fafatthecompound

9

Nacogdoches Scottish Highland Games and Festival, (936) 371-3072, nacscottishgames.com

Palestine Mother's Day Lunch Train, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

Stonewall Williams Creek (Albert) School Open House, (830) 685-3321, historicschools.org

14

Giddings [14-16] Lee County Fair, info@leecountyfairtx.com, leecountyfairtx.com

15

Columbus [15-16] Magnolia Days Festival, (979) 732-8385, magnoliadays.org

Grapevine [15-17] Main Street Fest, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

16

Fredericksburg Classic Truck Show, (830) 990-4433, pecangrovestore.com

Greenville Knights of Columbus Mayfest, (903) 455-9062, donvinson75402@gmail.com

17

Fredericksburg Thomas Pandolfi, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

21

Grapeland [21-23] Salmon Lake Park Gospel Bluegrass Festival, (936) 687-2594, slpbluegrass.com

Kerrville [21-June 7] Folk Festival, (830) 257-3600, kerrvillefolkfestival.org

22

Granbury [22-24] Memorial Day Weekend Festival, (682) 936-4550, granburysquare.com

Kerrville [22-24] Texas Masters of Fine Art & Craft Show, (469) 223-4162, texasmasters.com

23

Chappell Hill Artwalk on Main Street, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

Hondo Heritage Hike, (830) 660-6908, bit.ly/hondohike

Levelland [23-25] Panhandle Cutting Horse Association Show, (325) 518-1424, panhandlecha.com

29

Corsicana Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

JUNE

5

Fort Worth [5-7] Hadestown, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

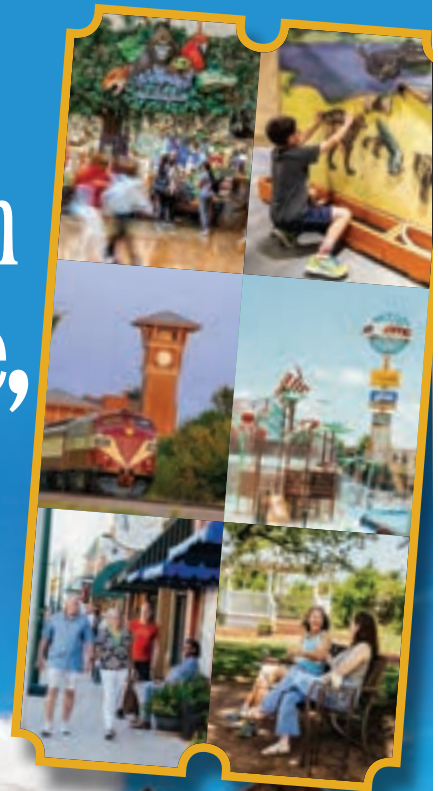
Yoakum [5-7] Tom Tom Festival, (361) 293-2309, yoakumareachamber.com

San Antonio [5-August 1] Fiesta Noche del Rio, (210) 226-4651, fiestanochesa.com

TCP Submit Your Event

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

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TCP Plan now

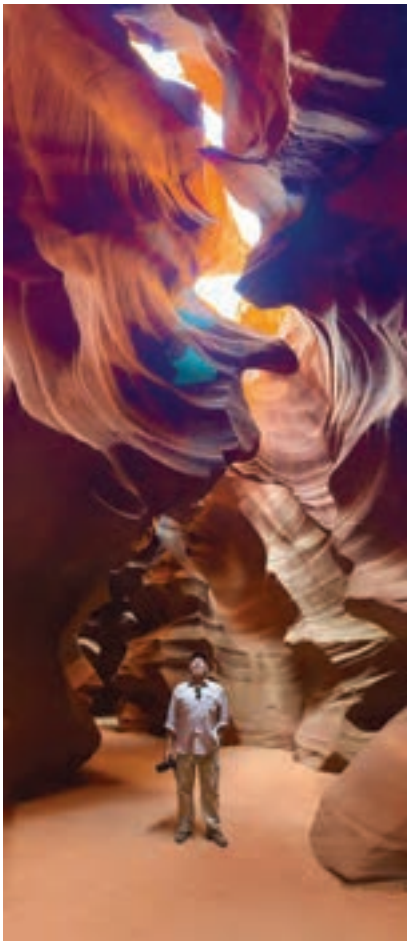
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Upper Antelope Canyon, fine art giclee print, 2025, 12" x 19", Bobby Greeson



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Caught Napping

If you find yourself catching a catnap, needing 40 winks on the fly or sawing logs around your siblings, you're in good company. Usually, if you snooze you lose. But these readers won't be losing sleep anytime soon.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 PAUL LAUDER
FARMERS EC

"After a hard morning competing in the livestock show at the State Fair of Texas, a young competitor and her pet take a well-earned rest."

2 REAGAN FERGUSON
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

"A number of neighbors went to the CF Ranch in Clarksville to help with their cattle drive. Following the drive, this young lady laid claim to a few bales of hay."

3 SHAWN DEAN
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

"My granddaughter took this of her horse's new colt."

4 GABRIELLE ETHINGTON
PENTEX ENERGY

"Some friends raise kunekune pigs on a small farm outside of Nocona. I photographed this cutie napping in the front pasture area. It looks so happy."



Upcoming Contests

RODEO DUE MAY 10

TAILGATING DUE JUN 10

RIDE THE RAILS DUE JUL 10



ENTER ONLINE

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



Mother's Days

They give a lot to their kids, but sometimes moms need a little bit back

BY CAYT CALHOUN

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA GODEASSI

A PANG OF FEAR HIT as the gurney wheeled me away from my family. Months of testing brought me here, and within the hour, I would become my mom's kidney donor.

Until that point, it struck me as odd when people asked if I was afraid. Why? I love her. That's enough. And it was enough to bat away intrusive thoughts as the anesthesia took hold.

Those fleeting moments of anxiety paled in comparison to years of uncertainty.

I understood the crushing weight of losing a parent—my dad died before I turned 2. Between his death and the deterioration of my mom's health, I tumbled through my adolescence fearing I'd lose *both* my parents before adulthood.

My mom received the IgA nephropathy

diagnosis when I was 10. At the time, I didn't understand how to pronounce it, let alone grasp the complexities of an inflammatory kidney disease that has no cure and can be fatal.

But chronic illness doesn't give you time to understand. It creeps in and presents itself with a slew of medications, revolving appointments and the enormously draining toll of it all. Despite everything, she expended energy she didn't have on my behalf. It seemed effortless at the time. I know better now.

Back then it was easier to accept things at a blithe glance—because being anything other than willfully ignorant meant facing a hard reality. I convinced myself that her active role in my life meant all was well.

But I couldn't pretend anymore. For a decade, I watched the quality of my mother's life ebb and flow until her kidney function dwindled to a measly 19%. She had two options: dialysis or surgery. With no known viable donor, she was forced to choose the former.

It had been us against the world for as long as I could remember. What if she lost the ability to do the things she loved? What if I lost her? The scenarios I conjured in my mind felt suffocating.

Watching how nightly dialysis altered her life was heartbreaking. At that point, I didn't have a choice. The voice in my head said the least I could do was try to give back to the person who gave me everything. So when co-workers, professors, peers and doctors asked if I was comfortable with donating a kidney at 20, I said yes emphatically. I don't believe it was selfless. I selfishly wanted more time with my mom.

Luckily, we got it.

We're now approaching the 10th anniversary of the donation, and I'm beyond grateful for the opportunity to have been her donor. There may be a world out there in which I wasn't qualified. There isn't a world where I wouldn't do anything for my mom. ■



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