

REMEMBERING THAT
FIRST LIGHT BULB

DON'T MIND THOSE
ALLIGATORS

WINDMILLER KEEPS
WITS IN A PINCH

Texas Coop Power

FOR TRINITY VALLEY EC MEMBERS

AUGUST 2024

On the Road Again

A photographer
piles on the miles to
capture rural Texas

**TRINITY
VALLEY EC
NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

I'm thinking more today about how to protect the money I've earned.

I've learned a lot of things over the years, talking to all sorts of experts in all sorts of fields. But one of the most important lessons I learned was from two former Directors of the U.S. Mint, who taught me everything I needed to know about the importance of protecting my savings with physical gold and silver.

In 25 years of working dirty jobs, the thought of a diversified portfolio really didn't cross my mind—but the more I learn, the better I feel about buying gold and silver from U.S. Money Reserve.

Is gold right for you? That's not for me to say. You've got to do your own due diligence. All I know is that today, it's not enough to simply work hard—you also have to save smart. So, call the number below. The folks at U.S. Money Reserve are standing by to help.



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August 2024



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Over five decades of crisscrossing Texas, a photographer learns to slow down to really see.

Photo essay by Wyatt McSpadden

In the Beginning

Few recall when electric co-ops lit up the countryside; Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work.

*Story by Tom Widlowski
Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun*

ON THE COVER

On the way north to Amarillo, just after crossing the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River.
Photo by Wyatt McSpadden

ABOVE

Katie Phillips enjoys quilting—and air conditioning, ample lighting and watching TV.
Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun

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TCP *Contests and More*

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FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
Young Photographers

RECOMMENDED READING
True or false: People used to believe you could dynamite rain out of the sky. They sure did, as we explained in *Rain, You Blasted Sky!* from August 2013.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I can't wait to learn ...

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 June prompt: **The next book you should read is ...**

The Time It Never Rained by Elmer Kelton. You will laugh. You will also cry.

JANIS HAGAN
NAVARRO COUNTY EC
CORNICANA

The Madstone by Elizabeth Crook. An amazing historical novel based in Texas just after the Civil War.

SUSAN ERVIN
PEDERNALES EC
GEORGETOWN

The Women by Kristin Hannah. An eye-opening book about the women of Vietnam.

DANI MACNEIL
BANDERA EC
PIPE CREEK

Visit our website to see more responses.

Rural Showcase

OVER THE NEXT YEAR, seven Texas cities will host a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition that examines the evolution of small towns as the American population moved into urban areas over the past 125 years.

Crossroads: Change in Rural America debuts August 24 in San Augustine. After six weeks in deep East Texas, the exhibition will move on to weekslong stays in Clifton, Brenham, Rockport, Buffalo Gap and San Elizario. The tour through Texas will end in Bandera on August 2, 2025.

To learn more, visit museumonmainstreet.org.



August 20
World Mosquito Day

Don't forget to celebrate **World Mosquito Day**. Wait, maybe not. Scratch that.

JUNE 2024 We Brake for Steak

“Chet Garner needs to go back to the Leona General Store on Thursday nights, when it’s just some of the best catfish anywhere.”

DARRELL HUTTO
 NAVASOTA VALLEY EC
 JEWETT



COURTESY CHET GARNER

Traveling South, Traveling East

I loved the idea of emotional healing by traveling to every state park [Trailblazer, June 2024]. I was a little disappointed that no South Texas parks were mentioned.

My favorite story in the issue was *Renewal in Blue*. I traveled to East Texas with the young girl and loved the ending with the bluebonnets.

Penny Brown
 Magic Valley EC
 Rio Hondo

Multiplying at the Sixes

As an avid fan of the *Yellowstone* TV series, it was captivating to learn about the Burnett family and how the Four Sixes Ranch began and grew into one of the 10 largest ranches in the state [Sixes on the Small Screen, May 2024].

Sarah Brown
 Bluebonnet EC
 Cedar Creek

Avenging Uncle

James Franklin Norfleet was my great-uncle [Payback Time, May 2024]. I remember when we would visit the Norfleets at their home in Hale County in the 1950s, and Aunt Eliza would regale us with stories of earlier days.

Uncle Frank awed us kids as he would always strap on his pistol belt before going outside. For kids growing up listening to *The Lone Ranger*, we were quite impressed.

Jim K. Hudgins
 San Bernard EC
 Bellville

Roadside Attractions

It seems to me that Michael Ford has discovered and perfected a new art form on the Texas landscape [Overpass Easels, May 2024]. His work is extremely expressive of Texas and unique in each example.

Mary E. Specia
 GVEC
 McQueeney



B.J. HINKLE

TCP WRITE TO US
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 Austin, TX 78701

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

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Open Roads, Open Eyes

Over five decades
of crisscrossing Texas,
a photographer learns
to slow down to really see





PHOTO ESSAY BY WYATT MCSPADDEN

When I was younger and living in Amarillo, it always seemed important to get where I was going and back as soon as possible.

For a few years after a divorce, my two boys and their mom lived in San Marcos. And so a couple of times a month, I'd make that 500-plus mile drive as fast as I could.

When I abandoned the Panhandle and moved to Austin, my freelance photography business kicked into a higher gear. The jobs were in every direction, in and around my new city.

I never griped about the mileage, but as I matured, I did start listening to my eyes. I made it a rule that if I saw something that caught my attention at 70 mph and I couldn't get it out of my mind after a couple miles, I'd go back to get a picture—or at least to visit and decide if what I saw was worth a return trip at a particular time of day.

The drives are much more mellow these days after 50 years as a professional photographer, and I navigate using a spiral-bound detail map of Texas counties. Driving seems to be the second-most important skill in my line of work.

Of course, skill No. 1 is making a good picture upon reaching my destination. Most often the job involves capturing a portrait of someone who has accomplished something a magazine editor thinks is worthy of a story. But sometimes it's capturing the feel, the presence of a place.

I'm pretty sure I've driven a million miles in Texas, but now I do it a mile at a time. That's how the pictures in these pages were made, driving slow(ish), with eyes wide open. ■

I know my way around the Amarillo area, having lived there until I was 40. I was joyriding and admiring the late-day clouds when the lonely little tree appeared on the horizon.



Early morning on the road between Earth and Dimmit, in the Panhandle, familiar territory from my early years making a living shooting for seed and cattle operations. I hadn't seen such a tall silage mound, and the man with his pitchfork caught my eye.





I was passing through Hico on my way to the Metroplex when I spotted this little house. It took some coaxing for the woman to pose.





ABOVE I have a collection of barbed wire, plastic and wind pictures. Artsy pictures of trash.

LEFT A blue Dodge seems to have a permanent parking spot between Sandy Fork and Luling.

OPPOSITE A classic farmhouse, newly plowed field and epic sky near Granger, in Williamson County. Irresistible.



In the Beginning

**Few recall when electric cooperatives lit up the countryside;
Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work**

Katie Phillips is old enough to remember the dark ages—when nightfall at her family's farm outside Coleman meant navigating by the shadowy illumination offered by carbide and coal-oil lamps and lanterns. When much of the work on her dad's dairy farm—milking, separating and bottling—happened before sunrise and without the benefit of electricity.

"It's a hard life," says Katie, who turns 97 next month. For her and her brother and two sisters growing up in the 1930s, there wasn't much free time for fun, and before electricity, there was no reading or playing games at night.

Milking started every day at 3 a.m., and a few hours later, Katie's dad, Charlie Pitts, was making the first of his twice-

daily deliveries of Oak Grove Dairy Farm milk to homes, stores and cafés around Coleman, south of Abilene, on the western Central Texas plains.

It never escaped Pitts' notice that just 4½ miles east, in town, folks had the luxury of electricity.

Back then in rural America, those 4½ miles might as well have been a million. Electricity stopped where the profits did, and in 1936, fewer than 3% of Texas farms had electricity.

But before long, farmers, ranchers and their neighbors

Katie Phillips' dad helped create Coleman County Electric Cooperative. She saw the co-op's first light bulb flicker on in 1937.

Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home.

pooled their money and worked together to build the electric cooperatives that lit up the countryside and brought a better quality of life.

Katie Phillips is among few living Americans who witnessed that important history. She had a front-row seat.

Katie turned 9 in 1936, the year her dad became a local leader in the cooperative movement that was in its early stages.

In those days, the town of Coleman had not only electricity but phone service too, and Pitts realized he needed that to keep up with milk orders. To get it, he paid to have a line strung from Coleman, across a creek, to the farm. Katie remembers their party line phone number: 4-0-0.

“I always wanted something better,” Pitts told the family.

Getting electricity to the farm was another matter.

Pitts traveled to Washington, D.C., to learn about the Rural Electrification Administration, which provided loans for the creation of cooperatives. He then visited neighboring farms, asking folks to contribute \$5 to help start a co-op.

Finally, in April 1937, the first Coleman County Electric Cooperative light bulb flickered on in the Pitts farmhouse—an honor befitting the co-op’s first board president.

“It was a great day for everybody because it was a completion of a long journey for Daddy,” Katie says. The Pitts kids had better lighting for their schoolwork, and Dad had a perfect place to read the Fort Worth newspaper he always had in the house.

Soon lines brought power to the dairy barn, where milking machines freed up farmhands.

Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home. “I just know that it was one of the most wonderful feelings there was when we could go to that refrigerator and open both doors and look in there and see what was in it,” Katie says.

Decades later, Katie spends a lot of her days knitting under a lamp in a corner of her living room in a 100-year-old farmhouse 6 miles east of Coleman. Electricity is too commonplace to warrant much thought. It powers her iPhone, tablet, two TVs and brand-new Singer sewing machine.

She’s known around Coleman County EC for being there at the dawn of the co-op. When the co-op held its 85th annual meeting in July 2023, she was there, and it was her 85th annual meeting too. She has attended every last one.

“The first light bulb was the beginning of an amazing future for all of us,” says Synda Smith, the co-op’s CEO and

general manager. “There are few businesses that have a past connection like this. It feels so good to know that Katie still feels like we are doing what our earlier leaders wanted us to do by continuing to uphold the co-op business model.”

Katie has farmed most of her life around Coleman, except for two years in high school at Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio. She dated Harold Phillips for a little less than a year—sometimes on horseback—and they married in 1948 when she was 21.

Together they farmed for 66 years, until he died in 2014. Harold was one of the first farmers in the area to grow sunflowers and to use parallel terracing. They had five children, four of whom are still living—all within five miles of Katie. Two of the sons are farmers.

By her 50th wedding anniversary, Katie figured she was ready to give up farming, and she broke that news to Harold.

“I told him, ‘I think I’ve done enough now,’ ” Katie says. “And he said, ‘What would encourage you to do a little more?’

“I said, ‘You buy me an air-conditioned, four-wheel-drive tractor.’ ”

And that’s how she ended up the proud owner of a John Deere tractor that’s still in the family.

Katie, who says she needed no prescriptions until she turned 90, has other family heirlooms that she holds dear: A six-leaf table brought by covered wagon from Louisiana by Katie’s great-grandparents in the mid-1800s graces her dining room, and there’s a couple of glider-style chairs that her mother bought in New York and the chair her dad used to rock her to sleep.

But the greatest treasure might be Charlie Pitts’ old desk chair, the very one where he worked out the wrinkles and legal details of creating the electric utility that gave his kids—and his community—a brighter future.

And Katie still has a direct connection to the co-op office in town. One of her six grandchildren, Kathreyn Portis, is a member services representative at Coleman County EC, where she has worked almost four years.

“My family’s legacy in this county is a big one, so to get to be able to continue that means a lot to me,” Portis says. “Family isn’t just blood relatives. It’s these people,” she says of her three dozen colleagues at the co-op.

They all follow in the footsteps of a dairy farmer who wanted to leave the dark ages behind.

As Katie knits or quilts or watches her beloved Dallas Cowboys, she joins nearly 5,000 fellow co-op members in her community living a better life because of co-op power.

But she alone remembers that day in 1937 when her dad helped that first light bulb come on.

“It was magical,” Katie says. “It’s just the greatest thing in the world. When he found out that you could get electricity, he said, ‘We’re going to do it.’ ” ■



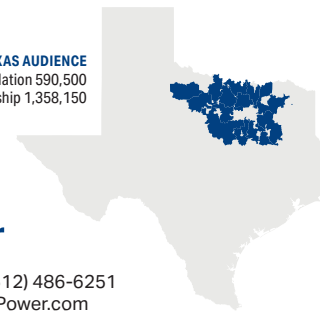
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It's not often you happen upon a bladesmith who has gem cutting skills. But finding needles in haystacks is what we do best, so when we saw this master craftsman's handiwork, we made certain to procure some of these Southwestern masterpieces to complete our collection.

The stainless steel blade, bolster and pommel are exquisitely etched and would have looked great with a less ambitious handle. But the results of overachieving are stunning here. The turquoise-blue colored handle is ablaze with assorted stones like jasper, marble, sunstone, and coral that have been hand cut and inlaid in a Southwestern motif.

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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/CEO
JEFF LANE

10 Things You Might Not Know About Power Restoration

AS THE GENERAL MANAGER and a fellow member of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, I'm accustomed to members' questions about power outages and why it can take time to get the lights back on. Simply put, there is never a good time to be without electricity.

This month I'd like to shed light on our restoration process to help our members understand what can happen behind the scenes. Here are 10 things you might not know about restoration.

1. We need you. Reporting your outage puts your account into our outage system and ensures that our system operators are aware of the issue.

2. Our employees might be affected. Because TVEC is a local business, our employees are local too. When you're without power, our people are also likely to be affected.

3. It's a team effort. Every one of our employees are working to get your power restored as soon as possible. Our member services representatives take your calls, engineers and field staff survey damage, our vegetation management team clears hazards, dispatchers organize crews, and communicators keep everyone informed of progress or potential dangers. When your power goes out, we all work together as quickly and safely as possible.

4. We assess the situation first. Every outage is different, bringing various dangers and damaged equipment. If you see a truck respond and then leave, they may be part of an assessment team.

5. Some outages must take priority. Our crews focus first on public safety issues and critical services. Then we complete work that impacts the larg-

est number of people.

6. Our employees face many hazards. Besides working around high-voltage electricity, our crews are on alert for wild animals, active weather, falling trees and fast-moving cars.

7. Flickering lights and short outages may be part of the restoration process. The whole electrical system is connected, and work on the system can affect a large area. That means work somewhere along the line may cause short "blinks" at your location. Crews may also need to temporarily disconnect power to work safely or reroute power to an affected area while restoration work continues.

8. For critical power needs, develop a backup plan. We always do our best to restore power as quickly as possible, but if you depend on electricity for life support purposes, it is important to have backup plan.

9. Crews must work together. In order to work safely and efficiently, line crews must be carefully coordinated. If you ever see our trucks lined up on the roadside, they are likely planning their next assignment or waiting for clearance to begin work.

10. Sometimes it's a waiting game. Our distribution system is connected to power generation through transmission service providers. If our outage is due to an issue on the transmission system, the transmission provider must perform their repairs to get the power flowing again.

If the lights go out, know that your co-op team is working as quickly and safely as possible to restore power. ■

COMMON CAUSES OF POWER OUTAGES

There is never a good time for the power to go out, but if it happens on a sunny day, you might be left wondering why. Here are the most common causes of a power outage.

<div style="background-color: #004a87; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; margin: 5px 0;">WEATHER</div> <p>High winds, snow and ice can cause tree limbs to fall on power lines. Other weather effects, like wildfires and lightning strikes, can cause major damage to equipment.</p>	<div style="background-color: #004a87; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; margin: 5px 0;">CRITTERS</div> <p>Squirrels, birds, snakes and other animals can inadvertently contact power lines, causing short circuits and disruptions to electrical supply.</p>	<div style="background-color: #004a87; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; margin: 5px 0;">ACCIDENTS</div> <p>Vehicles can crash into utility poles, bringing down power lines. Construction and excavation work can also result in disruptions to underground lines.</p>	<div style="background-color: #004a87; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; margin: 5px 0;">MAINTENANCE</div> <p>Occasionally, we plan outages to perform upgrades or repairs to parts of the local grid.</p>
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LAURA MELTON | TVEC

TVEC's 2024 Government-in-Action Youth Tour representatives returned from their whirlwind week in Washington, D.C. with great memories and a new perspective on the country. You can find more information about Youth Tour on tvec.net.

TVEC August Updates: Schedule Student Programs and Upcoming Board Election

SCHOOL DAYS ARE COMING SOON, along with the return to normal routines and fall sports. That doesn't mean the temperatures go down though, so be sure to keep an eye on that thermostat and keep those A/C filters clean to keep your cool as efficiently as possible.

• **TVEC Board Election Coming Next Month**—The September issue of *Texas Co-op Power* magazine will contain your board election ballot. You may vote electronically or by mail.

Your vote also serves the important function of determining our quorum for business to be conducted at the Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative annual membership meeting in October.

For a little bit more motivation, your vote also enters you into drawings for great prizes, including \$1,000 cash!


• **Get on the Calendar for School Programs**—TVEC's safety and efficiency programs are a great addition to your school or civic group's fall schedule. We have programs for all ages.

The Power Town safety demonstration gives students a memorable lesson in safety around electricity, and is perfect for schools and homeschool groups.

• **Are you on the SmartHub app?**—New features are being added, including a look at how your home uses the power you buy each month. See Page 18 for more information on how technology can help you save money.

Search for SmartHub in your phone's app store to get started. Visit tvec.net/smarthub for more information and links. ■

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative

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TVEC ENERGY MANAGEMENT SUPERVISOR
CHRIS WALKER

Your SmartHub Is About To Get Smarter

THE ROLLOUT OF SMARTHUB last November came with the promise of additional tools for Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative members to understand and manage

electricity usage. Some of those tools are being activated this month, and should appear as Bill Analysis during the first week of August.

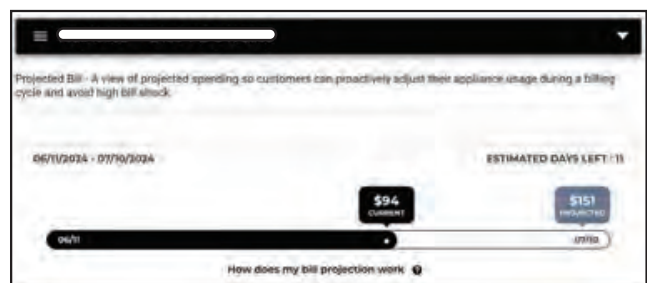
Using powerful analytical tools, this system can combine your usage data, weather information and data you enter to create a customized assessment of your energy usage. It can help you go beyond simple numbers to show what systems in your home could be causing high bills or show you how your energy saving efforts are paying off.

In the SmartHub usage menu, you will see these new options:

- ▶ **Bill Analysis.** This section will show you a detailed view of your home's likely energy usage during the selected billing period. Each major usage category is taken into account, along with the ability to compare usage amounts between billing cycles
- ▶ **Build Your Home Profile.** This profile allows you to input details about your home. When completed, this data improves the accuracy of the other analysis tools by eliminating some assumptions made by the system.
- ▶ **Projected Bill.** While daily usage alerts are great for watching your energy consumption, the projected bill tool puts a number to your usage statistics. By looking at usage and weather trends, the projected bill amount can help you avoid any surprises and maybe even adjust usage to avoid high bills altogether.
- ▶ **Energy Detail.** The energy detail screen puts all of the data together for you with charts and graphs to visualize your energy use and how that changes over time.

Knowledge really is power, and in this case, knowledge about your home's electricity usage can give you the power to cut energy costs. It may also help you discover what systems in your home are in need of repair or replacement. 59479002

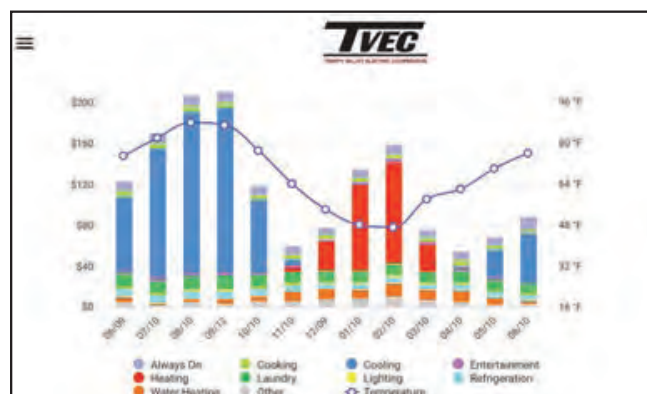
As with any automated tool, there are sure to be exceptions where the computer's algorithms and assumptions are not right for specific situations. But with that caveat, I'm certain that for most TVEC members, this addition to SmartHub will be truly enlightening. ■



The new SmartHub bill projection screen.



The new SmartHub bill analysis tool.



The Energy Detail graphs show your energy usage patterns.



ONURDONGEL | ISTOCK.COM



DID YOU KNOW?

When you unplug devices or extension cords, pulling on the wires can cause them to degrade over time. Always pull from the plug head.

DIAL-A-VIEW | ISTOCK.COM

Don't Touch That Meter Base

JUST LIKE A GAS PUMP or grocery scale, your electric meter is key for making sure that you get what you pay for.

But it is also very different in that your electrical connection to Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative holds a high risk of injury or death for anyone who opens the meter base. That is why breaking the meter base seal carries possible penalties and fees.

In some cases, an electrician or homeowner may need to disconnect power to make repairs or do other work inside a home. Please contact us for temporary disconnection of service. Opening the meter base or removing the meter leaves an exposed electrical connection that can be deadly.

Installing and removing meters must be done by trained personnel with proper safety equipment. Attaching the meter in a live meter socket can result in dangerous arc flash conditions and risk for burns and electrical injuries.

Along with the legitimate needs for power disconnection, some people have used meter bases as a way to steal electricity. Many thieves pay for the power they steal with their lives—or with the lives of others.

It also makes the electricity you use more expensive because honest members have to pick up the tab for the stolen electricity and damage to cooperative equipment.

If you need to temporarily disconnect power or access your meter base for any reason, contact TVEC member services at (800) 967-9324.

Find more information about meter base safety at tvec.net/meter-base-safety. ■



POWER TIP

Before you dry a load of damp clothing, toss in a clean, dry towel or wool dryer balls to shorten the drying time.

МИХАИЛ РУДЕНКО | ISTOCK.COM



DON JOHNSON | TVEC

The Lumber Yard Cafe

Classic home cooking menu anchors an Edgewood family favorite

THE NORTHEAST PORTION OF THE TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE service territory gives quite a few dining options, but you can always find a crowd at the Lumber Yard Cafe in Edgewood. As you may guess, the restaurant is housed in a former lumber yard building, now selling home cooking instead of boards and plywood.

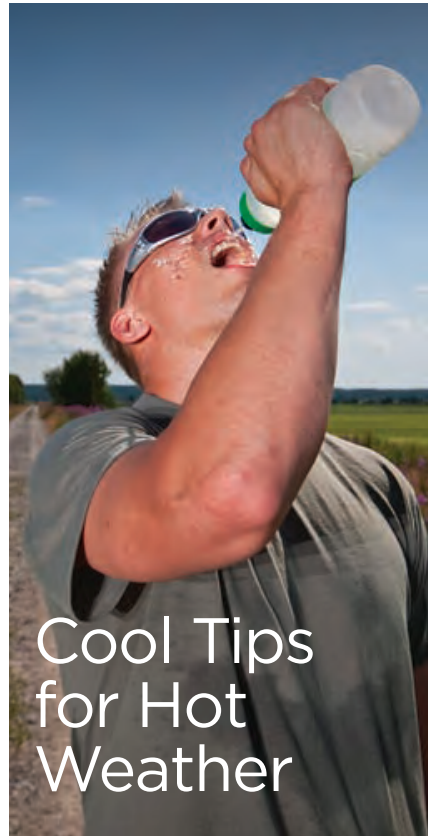
“I had not been up here but it was recommended by one of our linemen and I’m really glad I went,” said Kevin Graham, TVEC substation/transmission supervisor. “Even being typical home cooking, it is extremely well done. I don’t know why it took me so long to get over there.”

You can start your day at the Lumber Yard as well, with a full breakfast menu. From chicken-fried steak and eggs to a simple bowl of oatmeal, there are choices for any appetite.

A quick lunch is where the Lumber Yard really shines, and without too much damage to your wallet. You can get in and out on a fast food budget and almost as fast.

“The chicken-fried chicken was excellent and the service was so good you want to go back and try everything else,” Graham said. “I want to try the homemade desserts, but I’m trying to watch my figure, you know.”

Find the Lumber Yard at 809 E. Pine Street (Hwy 80) in Edgewood, and online at thelumberyardcafe.com. ■



Cool Tips for Hot Weather

BLINDFIRE | ISTOCK.COM

It’s another hot Texas summer—time to enjoy all the outdoors has to offer. While in the heat, pay attention to your body so you can enjoy each day. Follow these tips to keep you cool:

Take frequent cooling-off breaks in the shade or air conditioning.

Drink plenty of water before starting any outdoor activity and during the day, and avoid caffeine and alcohol.

Wear lightweight, loose-fitting, light-colored clothes.

Kids, cars and heat make a deadly combination. Never leave a child—or pet—in a vehicle, even for just a few minutes.

If someone exhibits symptoms of a heatstroke, act rapidly: Remove excess clothing and lower the person’s temperature with wet sheets or a cool bath. Get them to the nearest hospital.

Trinity Valley EC encourages you to always practice safety.

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 August 30 to receive a \$100 credit on your electric bill. Don’t miss out—you could be our winner.



New EPA Power Plant Rules Threaten Grid Reliability

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY released four major new regulations for the electric industry this year, including a much-anticipated rule to cut emissions from power plants, a sweeping move that will aggravate reliability concerns for electric cooperatives and other utilities nationwide.

“The path outlined by the EPA is unlawful, unrealistic and unachievable,” said Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. “It undermines electric reliability and poses grave consequences for an already stressed electric grid.”

The power plant rule constrains existing coal and new natural gas plants by requiring them to install carbon capture and storage technology that is not yet reliable or commercially available.

“The new EPA rules ignore our nation’s ongoing electric reliability challenges and are the wrong approach at a critical time for our nation’s energy future,” Matheson said.

The power plant rule will force the early closure of electricity generation sources and impede the construction of new natural gas plants. The timing of these sweeping new rules is particularly troubling as electric utilities face a surge in demand for electricity due to factors like transportation electrification and the rapid expansion of data centers to support artificial intelligence, e-commerce and cryptocurrency.

Electric cooperatives understand the need to keep the lights on at a cost local families and businesses can afford. Clean energy technologies must be balanced with generation sources to ensure a reliable electric grid.

Electric cooperatives like Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative deliver power to 42 million Americans. Our top priority is to meet our members’ energy needs, and we must have reliable electricity available to do that. ■



PIYAPHAT50 | ISTOCK.COM

2024
ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10

CANTON CIVIC CENTER

**800 FLEA MARKET RD.
CANTON, TX 75103**

**IMPORTANT NEWS
CO-OP UPDATES
DOOR PRIZES**

LIGHT DINNER SERVED

TEXAS DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Hurricane Preparedness Guidelines

Hurricane Season Is June 1–November 30

Preparedness Checklist

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

Information collected for STEAR is confidential.

Hurricane Preparedness Online Resources

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

DIVISIÓN DE ADMINISTRACIÓN DE EMERGENCIAS DE TEXAS

Preparación para huracanes

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

Lista de verificación de preparación:

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

La información recolectada para STEAR es confidencial.

Recursos en línea para la preparación para huracanes

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



Energy Quiz

In what decade were windmills first used to generate electricity?

wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_wind_power

A • 1910s

B • 1970s

C • 1840s

D • 1880s

Win \$100!

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

July Energy Quiz: Average U.S. Annual Usage

ELECTRICITY USAGE VARIES across the country, depending on weather patterns, primary heating fuel and more.

According to eia.gov statistics, the average household electricity usage is 10,791 kilowatt-hours per year.

In Texas, the average is higher at 14,112 kWh, with heavy air conditioning use in summer time and high reliance on electricity for heating as well.

Congratulations to our June Energy Quiz winner, Cathleen Dawson-Jackson of Cayuga.

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

TVEC
Charitable Foundation

Thank you, members!

4 MILLION DOLLARS DONATED SINCE 2013

The combined giving of thousands of co-op members adds up to making a big difference for charitable organizations that work in the TVEC service area.

- Fire Departments
- Senior Citizens Centers
- Education Foundations
- Food Banks
- Children's Advocacy Groups
- Animal Shelters
- Libraries
- ...and many more!

you ARE MAKING A CHANGE!

TVEC

Charitable Foundation

Operation Round Up
Spotlight: Your Donations
Add Up To A Major
Milestone

WHEN THE TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE Operation Round Up program began in 2013, there was no way to tell that it would have such a large impact on the community. But in just over 10 years, the support of TVEC members simply rounding up bills has now resulted in \$4 million in charitable grants to organizations directly benefiting TVEC members and the community at large.

Thank you! We are proud to be part of such a generous and caring community.

Over the course of the last decade, we have had the pleasure of presenting these grants and hearing directly from the people who are doing so much good work in the lives of our friends and neighbors.

While rounding up your bill may average out to a \$6 annual donation, it really does add up to a major impact.

To find a full list of grant recipients and more information about the TVEC Charitable Foundation, visit tvec.net/charitable-foundation. ■

June 2024 Operation Round Up Grants Awarded

Children's Advocacy Center for Kaufman County - \$7,500
Genesis Center North Texas - \$5,000
Kaufman ISD Literacy Lab - \$2,500
Rancho Kitty - \$500

Refuge of Light - \$2,500
Texas Health Resources Foundation - \$7,500
Texas Youth Advocates - \$3,000
Trinity Lutheran Church Disaster Response Team - \$2,250

Catch a Wampus Cat

Irreverent Texans imported a mythical creature created in Appalachia

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR CALLERY

CHEROKEE LEGEND tells of a young woman named Running Deer who once defeated an evil spirit, called Ew'ah, that she believed was responsible for driving her husband insane. Running Deer drew strength from the spirit of a mythical mountain cat but was afterward relegated to the deep woods and remote mountain passes of North Carolina, where she terrorized and drove insane anyone unfortunate enough to glimpse her.

Another legend has Running Deer as a young shape-shifter who slayed a catlike demon and became her tribe's spirit protector.

This is likely how the wampus cat of lore was born in the Appalachian Mountains, probably in East Tennessee or western North Carolina. And that's why all wampus cats—including those on the grid-iron in Texas—have a Cherokee lineage.

Appalachian settlers took the story from there and anglicized Ew'ah into a wampus cat, which likely derives from the 1840s slang term "catawampus" or, as some prefer, "cattywampus."

If something was cattywampus, it was peculiar or frightening (likely influenced by the term "cata-mount," another word for a cougar), and the wampus cat of lore can be as peculiar as a storyteller wants it to be. In some accounts, it has six legs (two for walking, four for fighting), walks upright and swims like a mink.

It didn't take long for the wampus cat to become the subject of stories designed to scare children into doing as they were told.

"Parents are telling us that they are experiencing less trouble keeping their children in after dark since the report gained circulation that the Wampus had been seen here," *The Greeneville Daily Sun* in Tennessee reported in 1918.

The wampus cat began showing up in Texas newspapers in the early 1900s, most notably as the subject of a series of stories by frontier journalist and historian Don Hampton Biggers in a satirical Rotan newspaper called *Billy Goat Always Buttin' In*. Biggers had come to the small town northwest of Abilene in 1907 to establish a respectable weekly paper, but he published satire on the side as "a journal of such things as the editor takes a notion to write."

When he needed to fill space in the paper, Biggers spun a series of yarns about the wampus cat, which

he called "a cross between a wildcat, badger and a lobo wolf, with fangs 2 inches long and claws that could peel the bark off of a mesquite tree."

The locals knew it was a hoax, but visitors to the region often left Rotan dreading an encounter with the wampus cat of Biggers' imagination.

Biggers' son, Earl Biggers, in a 1961 interview with historian and scholar Seymour V. Connor, said his father came up with most of the wampus cat tales at the Rotan barber shop, where he and his pals would concoct outlandish stories.

In 1908, the same year Biggers was chronicling the creature's depredations in Fisher County, *The Houston Post* chronicled the game-by-game results of a local baseball team called the Wampus Cats. Since then, a number of schools have chosen the wampus cat as a mascot, including Itasca High School here in Texas.

As with descriptions of the cat itself, there is more than one story about how Itasca, which is between Fort Worth and Waco, chose the beast as its mascot.

A 1996 newspaper story quoted lifelong Itasca Nancy Bowman, who ran the school's special services, as saying that in the 1920s the high school team was having trouble finding a nickname. During a raucous postgame locker room celebration, a player shouted, "Wow, we were really wampus cats tonight!" Itasca had its mascot.

A Dallas radio station has called the wampus cat "the most quintessential Texas high school football mascot," but it's not uniquely Texan. Schools in Conway, Arkansas; Atoka, Oklahoma; Leesville, Louisiana; and as far north as Clark Fork, Idaho, have also adopted the mythical creature as a mascot.

In 2003, a collegiate wood-bat baseball team in Albemarle, North Carolina, brought the creature closer to home. The Uwharrie Wampus Cats square off against the likes of the Carolina Disco Turkeys and the Boone Bigfoots.

Biggers and the other Rotan barbershop regulars would be delighted to know the creature they helped create has come full circle. ■



SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

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

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our *Sedona Turquoise Collection*. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you



could secure 26 carats of genuine Arizona turquoise for just \$99.

Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. If you aren't completely happy with your purchase, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the item price.

The supply of Arizona turquoise is limited, don't miss your chance to own the Southwest's brilliant blue treasure. Call today!

Jewelry Specifications:

• Arizona turquoise • Silver-finished settings

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| B. 18" Bali Naga woven sterling silver chain | | \$149 | +s&p | |
| C. 1 1/2" Earrings (10 ctw) | \$299 * | \$99 | +s&p | Save \$200 |
| Complete Set** | \$747 * | \$249 | +s&p | Save \$498 |

**Complete set includes pendant, chain and earrings.

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Sense and Humor

LBJ's unique penchant for storytelling helped him navigate politics

BY W.F. STRONG

WHEN MOST PEOPLE think of Lyndon B. Johnson, they don't necessarily envision a man with a great sense of humor. After all, he was president during turbulent times.

"When the burdens of the presidency seem unusually heavy," he once joked, "I always remind myself it could be worse. I could be a mayor."

Though he didn't have the public eloquence of Kennedy or King, he was charismatic. He was a wonderful storyteller.

Writer and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin worked closely with the president for seven years, and because of her professional relationship with him, I would argue that her biography—out of all the biographies about the 36th presi-

dent—is the most humanizing.

No writer knew him better.

Goodwin told me she never tired of listening to him, though eventually she came to realize that his stories were not all completely true. Some were apocryphal, she said, and like Abraham Lincoln, LBJ used stories to animate his points, skewer his adversaries, and amuse and entertain.

He learned his storytelling, Goodwin said, from his father and grandfather, growing up in the Hill Country. Johnson would listen at night as they talked politics on the porch with local power brokers.

My own father, a great admirer of the president, shared a couple of LBJ stories with me long ago.

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



When Barry Goldwater and Nelson Rockefeller were campaigning to win their party's nomination for president in 1964, LBJ heard that both men were "cutting way back on their visits to California." Johnson said, "Reminds me of a case in Texas where a man wanted to run for sheriff against an unpopular incumbent named Uncle Johnny.

"Man asked his friend Dave if he thought he had a chance. Dave said, 'Well, I guess it depends on who meets the most people.' 'Yeah, that's what I was thinking,' said the man. Dave explained further, 'If he meets the most people, you'll win, and if you meet the most people, he'll win.'"

LBJ also told of a "boy in Texas who was very poor and tired of seeing his mama struggling so much to feed her family. So he sent a letter to God asking for \$100 for his mama. The letter got forwarded eventually to the postmaster general in Washington, D.C.

"He took pity on the boy and put \$20 in an envelope and mailed it to him. Two weeks later, the postmaster got a letter back from the boy that said, 'Dear God, thank you for sending the money, but next time don't send it through Washington cuz they took 80% of it.'"

Goodwin said she was happy to see that LBJ is getting long-deserved credit for the laws and policies he passed in his time, like the Voting Rights Act, as well as the institutions he helped found, like NASA and the Public Broadcasting Service.

If only he could have known how much progress his work would bring. He certainly would have smiled—and had a story ready. ■

Party Drinks

Find fruity refreshments—and a guide for mocktail options

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Spending every summer in Mexico growing up, nothing made me happier than sipping on a tall glass of *agua de sandía* (watermelon water) sold by local street vendors. It's a bright and refreshing drink made from watermelon, water, lime juice and sugar. August is peak watermelon season in Texas, so I'm excited to share this beloved drink from my childhood.



Agua de Sandía

8 cups diced watermelon

4 cups cold water

¼ cup sugar

Juice of 1 lime

Tajín, for the rim

Lime wedge, for the rim

1. Blend watermelon and water until smooth. Depending on the size of your blender, you may need to divide this into batches, blending half the watermelon and half the water at a time.
2. Strain into a pitcher. Stir in sugar and lime juice.
3. Spread Tajín on a plate. Run lime wedge around the rim of each glass and dip into Tajín. Serve over ice in Tajín-rimmed glasses.

SERVES 8

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifelife.com](https://www.sweetlifelife.com), where she features a recipe for Hibiscus Mint Tequila Punch.



Lemon Pucker Martini

DEBI OROZCO
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

I love a lightly sweet but bold-flavored cocktail, and that's exactly what this Lemon Pucker Martini recipe offers. It's a perfect balance between tart and sweet and proves incredibly refreshing.

- 2 tablespoons sugar, for the rim**
- 1 lemon wedge, for the rim**
- 2 ounces vodka**
- 1 ounce fresh lemon juice**
- ½ ounce limoncello**
- ½ ounce orange-flavored liqueur**
- 1 teaspoon agave**
- Lemon slice, for garnish**

1. Spread sugar on a plate. Run lemon wedge around the rim of a cocktail glass and dip into sugar. Place glass in the freezer until ready to serve.
2. Add vodka, lemon juice, limoncello, orange-flavored liqueur and agave to a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously.
3. Strain into chilled, sugar-rimmed cocktail glass. Garnish with lemon slice.

SERVES 1

MORE RECIPES >



\$500 WINNER

Summer Beer

CINDY JARROTT
BLUEBONNET EC



Pour, stir, serve and sip!
A beer-based cocktail fit for a crowd, this simple summer beer is a fresh and smooth beverage that's designed for batching in bulk.

SERVES 6

- 1 can frozen pink lemonade (12 ounces)**
- 12 ounces vodka**
- 4 cans light beer (12 ounces each)**
- Frozen mixed berries, for garnish**

1. Add frozen lemonade and vodka to a pitcher. (You can use the lemonade can to measure 12 ounces of vodka.) Stir until lemonade is dissolved.
2. Add beer and stir to combine.
3. Pour into ice-filled glasses and top with frozen berries.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

HEARTY SOUPS DUE AUGUST 10

When it's cold outside, we want nothing more than to cozy up inside with a piping hot bowl of soup. Send us your favorite comforting soup, and you could win \$500. Enter by August 10.





Texas Bluebonnet

CAROL BRADY
NUECES EC

It's time to pop open the bubbly and celebrate the waning days of summer. The addition of sparkling wine to this cocktail makes it feel a bit elegant, which is always a plus, but this festive drink can easily be whipped up for four or doubled for a crowd.

½ cup blue Curaçao liqueur
1½ cups lemonade
2 cups sparkling wine
Juice of 1 lemon
Orange slices, for garnish
Lemon slices, for garnish
Maraschino cherries, for garnish

1. Fill a pitcher with ice. Add blue Curaçao liqueur, lemonade, sparkling wine and lemon juice. Stir.
2. Serve over ice, garnished with fruit on skewers.

SERVES 4

TCP Vianney Rodriguez features many more cocktail recipes on sweetlifebake.com and in *Latin Twist: Traditional and Modern Cocktails*, the book she co-authored with Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack.

From Cocktail to Mocktail

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Nonalcoholic cocktails don't have to be bland. Here are a few tips and tricks to keep your party hopping:

Replace sparkling wine with soda water for a guilt-free bubbly effect.

A mix of cranberry and grape juice produces a delicious sangrialike option.

Ginger beer punches up the flavor and adds a warm kick to a mocktail.

Nonalcoholic spirits are becoming more common in stores. From vodka to mezcal and nonalcoholic beer and wine, options are hitting shelves, ready to help you shake up a mocktail.

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tfsweb.tamu.edu/PreventWildfire



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TexasCoopPower.com/join

Grab Your Piece of America's Silver Legacy



99.9% Fine Silver Bars

Actual size is 30.6 x 50.4 mm

Fill Your Vault with Morgan Silver Bars



Not only are these hefty bars one full Troy ounce of real, .999 precious silver, they're also beautiful, featuring the crisp image of a Morgan Silver Dollar struck onto the surface. That collectible image adds interest and makes these Silver Bars even more desirable. Minted in the U.S.A. from shimmering American silver, these one-ounce 99.9% fine silver bars are a great alternative to one-ounce silver coins or rounds. Plus, they offer great savings compared to other bullion options like one-ounce sovereign silver coins. Take advantage of our special offer for new customers only and save \$10.00 off our regular prices.

No, rather the effect came from tiny flecks of silver glinting in the sun.

A Special Way for You to Stock Up on Precious Silver

While no one can predict the future value of silver in an uncertain economy, many Americans are rushing to get their hands on as much silver as possible, putting it away for themselves and their loved ones. You'll enjoy owning these Silver Bars. They're tangible. They feel good when you hold them, You'll relish the design and thinking about all it represents. These Morgan Design One-Ounce Bars make appreciated gifts for birthdays, anniversaries and graduations, creating a legacy sure to be cherished for a lifetime.

One-Ounce Silver Morgan Design Bar \$49.95 ea.

Special offer - \$39.95 ea. +s/h **SAVE \$10 - \$250**

BUY MORE SAVE MORE!

Limit of 25 bars per customer

Free Morgan Silver Dollar with every order over \$299 (A \$59.95 value!)



Morgan Silver Dollars Are Among the Most Iconic Coins in U.S. History

What makes them iconic? The Morgan Silver Dollar is the legendary coin that built the Wild West. It exemplifies the American spirit like few other coins, and was created using silver mined from the famous Comstock Lode in Nevada. In fact, when travelers approached the mountains around the boomtown of Virginia City, Nevada in the 1850s, they were startled to see the hills shining in the sunlight like a mirror. A mirage caused by weary eyes?

Order More and SAVE

You can save \$10.00 off our regular price when you buy now. There is a limit of 25 Bars per customer, which means with this special offer, you can save up to \$250.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Jaw-Dropping Journey

Brazos Bend State Park has acres and acres of alligators

BY CHET GARNER

I LIKE ZOOS. The cages and fences offer comfort when staring into the eyes of an apex predator. But there’s something exhilarating about stepping into a natural habitat and encountering a wild creature in its element.

And that’s the draw of Brazos Bend State Park, which comprises nearly 5,000 acres of wetland marsh and coastal prairie in Fort Bend County. Visit on a sunny day and you’re almost guaranteed to have an encounter with its most famous residents—American alligators.

Driving into the park felt like visiting a movie set, amid oak trees dripping with Spanish moss that create a canopy over the road. It’s hard to believe that I was only 40 miles from downtown Houston. I stopped into the visitor center and asked where to find the gators. They simply pointed me toward the park’s 37 miles of trails and said, “That way.”

It turns out hundreds of alligators inhabit the park, and it’s not uncommon to see 40–50 on a good day, in addition to the park’s other reptiles, amphibians and 300-plus species of birds.

I set off on the trail surrounding 40-Acre Lake, and it wasn’t long before I came face-to-face with a living, breathing dinosaur. It was at least 7 feet long and sunning on the edge of the trail. I cautiously passed by, giving it a Texas nod on my way. Twenty feet down the trail was another and then another.

A ranger assured me that in the park’s 40 years, no one has been injured, much less killed, by an alligator. They’re fairly docile creatures and prefer flight over fight when it comes to humans. Even so, I didn’t want to tempt fate and was more than happy enjoying them all from a very safe distance. ■

ABOVE Chet keeps a safe distance from one of the hundreds of gators that roam freely.

TCP From the safety of your screen, join Chet as he wanders among the gators. Watch the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

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

AUGUST

8

McKinney Thomas Craig, (214) 769-0645, thecomedyarena.com

9

Alpine [9–10] Big Bend Ranch Rodeo, (432) 294-1640, bigbendranchrodeo.com

10

Chappell Hill Wine and Cheese Stroll, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

14

Brady [14–17] Heart of Texas Honky Tonk Festival, (325) 597-1895, heartoftexascountry.com

Corsicana [14–17] Red, (903) 872-5421, thewlac.com

17

Brenham Peter, Paul and Mary Alive; (979) 337-7240; thebarnhillcenter.com

Santo Southwest Open Chili Championship, (940) 733-6086, casichili.net

22

Fredericksburg [22–25] Gillespie County Fair, (830) 997-2359, gillespiefair.com

23

Decatur [23–24] Wise County Guild Quilt Show, (817) 991-3407, wisecountyquiltguild.org

24

Lubbock Book Festival, (806) 775-3634, lubbockbookfest.com

Castroville [24–25]
St. Louis Day Celebration,
(830) 931-2826,
saintlouisday.com

27

**Stonewall Commemoration
of Lyndon Johnson's
Birthday,** (830) 868-7128,
nps.gov/lyjo

29

Uvalde [29–Sept. 1]
Palomino Fest & Pro Rodeo,
palominofest.com

30

Fredericksburg [30–31]
Vereins Quilt Show,
vereinsquiltguild.org

**Marfa [30–Sept. 1] Lights
Festival,** (432) 217-6777,
marfachamberofcommerce.org

Granbury [30–Sept. 2]
**Labor Day Weekend
Festival,** (682) 936-4550,
granburysquare.com

31

**Sunrise Beach Village
Sip & Stroll,** (713) 299-1728,
sunrisebeachtx.gov

SEPTEMBER

7

**Luling Luling Foundation
Youth Grill-Off,** (830) 875-
2438, lulingfoundation.org

**McKinney Jurassic Night
Out at the Heard,** (972) 562-
5566, heardmuseum.org

**New Braunfels Donny
Edwards: Tribute to the King,**
(830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

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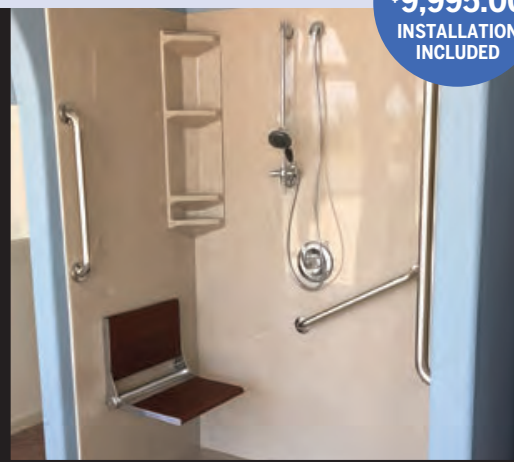


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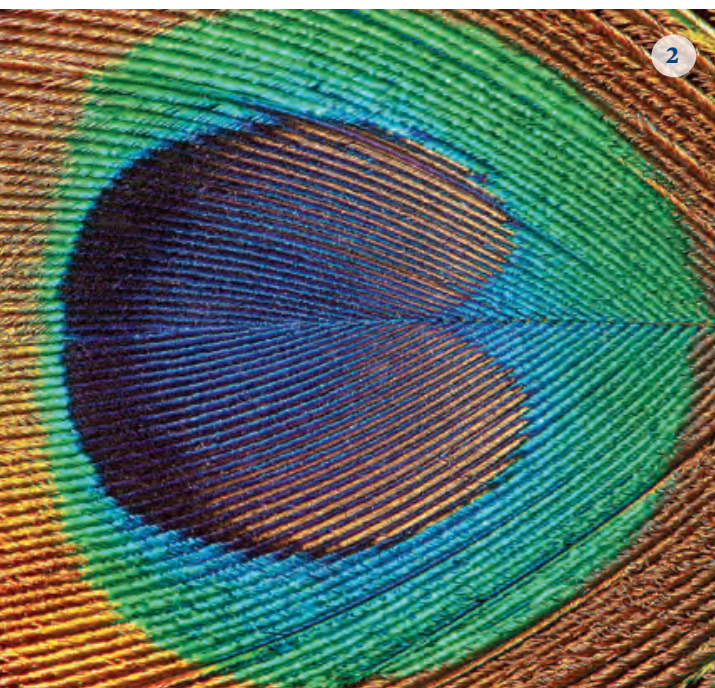
"Peacocks achieve their stunning plumage display through structural coloration called iridescence."

3 CARLY LATHAM
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4 DORA CAFFEY
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Friends in High Places

He was known for saving windmills, but one day he saved a whole lot more

BY SAM W. YOUNG
ILLUSTRATION BY
KEVIN HOWDESHELL

DAD CAME HOME from work one day with his left hand in a big bandage. He had driven himself to a hospital, where his fingers were repaired by a surgeon. One finger was almost severed but was put back together and ultimately saved.

When I was young, he worked for West Texas Lumber Co. in San Angelo, the local Aermotor Windmill dealer. Later he worked on his own. Ranch owners for miles around knew he was the man to call if a windmill needed repairs or replacement from the 1930s into the '80s. The cattle and sheep had to have water.

My brother and I are firmly convinced that no one man installed more windmills than our father. He was still climbing the contraptions after his 80th birthday and after he sold his business.

Working on these machines was dan-

gerous, even for a professional. Windmillers free-climbed and stood with a helper on a platform—untethered—as they made their repairs.

Aermotor windmills pivot on a vertical mast, with all the weight sitting on a washer inside a small cavity just under the motor. The motor has to be lifted a few inches to replace that washer.

To lift the windmill, with all the weight of the mill and the sucker rods, a chain is tied to the push rod and the tower and then a helper has to turn the wheel by hand and hold it.

Dad always had to have a helper, of course, and I was usually his helper in the summertime and over Christmas breaks.

There were days when we would load the pickup in San Angelo with the parts of a new windmill, the rods and pipe, sand, gravel, cement—everything needed for installation. I remember once when we drove to a new well on King Mountain, south of Odessa, assembled the tower and mill, raised it up with the pickup, dug the anchors by hand, and had it pumping water before sundown.

But I wasn't Dad's helper that fateful day south of San Angelo.

On that day, the chain must have slipped, allowing the weight of the rotor assembly to smash his fingers. He didn't say so, but what else could it have been?

There was something else he didn't mention until a few days later.

His helper had reacted to the sight of the blood and started to pass out. Dad reached out and grabbed the man with his right hand to keep him from falling off the windmill platform.

I don't know just how the issue was resolved from that point, but I do know this: While Dad's left hand was trapped, he saved a man's life that day with his right hand—the day he came home with the big bandage. ■

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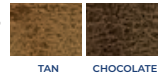
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