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Eduardo Garza of Mission was one of the big winners at the 2019 Big Squeeze youth accordion competition.

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By Joe Nick Patoski

**14** **Texas' Main Squeeze** The accordion has been a beloved musical instrument since it got here.  
By Joe Nick Patoski



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

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By Joe Holley

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By E. Dan Klepper



**NEXT MONTH**

**A Snake To Love** An outdoors journalist comes to admire rattlesnakes, which are not the evil beings of legend and myth.

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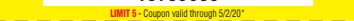
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## Scrumptious and Healthy

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

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

ELAINE FRIEDBERG | BRENHAM BLUEBONNET EC

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

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

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

NANCY GLASSCOCK | SONORA SOUTHWEST TEXAS EC



## Brews and Pews

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

## Courthouses as Art

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

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

NORMAN BEAN | MARTINDALE | BLUEBONNET EC



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

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

MARY VAZQUEZ | MONTGOMERY MIDSOUTH EC

## Tamalada Tradition

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

BETTY KEIPER | VIA FACEBOOK

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

will be pluralized by adding "es."

MIKE MCEWEN | JACKSONVILLE CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

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

## Letters About Letters

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

CHARLOTTE CASSIN | BATESVILLE MEDINA EC

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

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

RON BOERGER | BRUSHY CREEK PEDERNALES EC

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

   **Texas Co-op Power**

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## HAPPENINGS

# The Box Tops Are Back

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

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

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

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

**INFO** ▶ (830) 627-0808, [brauntex.org/tickets.html](http://brauntex.org/tickets.html)

### WEB EXTRAS

▶ Find more happenings online.



**BOX TOPS, 1968**

## FLASHBACK

### 175 Years Ago

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



## SPORTS SECTION

### RANGERS ARE MADE IN THE SHADE

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

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

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

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

BY THE NUMBERS

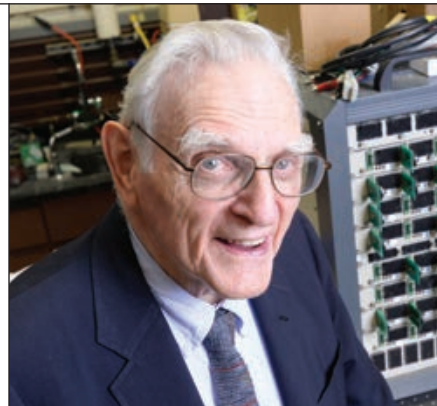
➔ *Did you know?*

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

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



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



TECH KNOWLEDGE

### Powering the World

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

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

He hasn't stopped.

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

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

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

### FINISH THIS SENTENCE

*Why do dogs always . . .*



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

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

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

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

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

To see more responses, read Currents on our website.



SOUL MUSIC OF SOUTH



BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

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



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

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

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

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

TEXAS

GUZMÁN: JOHN DYER. PRIETO: COURTESY TEXAS FOLK LIFE

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



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

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

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

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

#### WEB EXTRAS

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Darren Prieto is part of the next wave.

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

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

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

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

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# TEXAS' MAIN SQUEEZE

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



BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# Why We Encourage You To Conserve Energy



## MESSAGE FROM YOUR GENERAL MANAGER/CEO GARY RAYBON

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

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

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

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

That's because electric co-ops must keep enough power on hand to supply all members' highest usage.

So if electricity can be conserved, less overall power is needed, new power sources may not have to be tapped as soon as they would otherwise and the construction of costly new generating plants can be postponed.

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

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

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

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



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## Save The Date For Annual Meeting!

### EVERY YEAR, WHARTON COUNTY

Electric Cooperative holds a meeting of our owners. That's you.

It's a fine opportunity to get together with your friends and neighbors. Mingle with the parents of your kids' classmates, find out how many new grandbabies others have and just catch up with what's been happening.

But it's more than that. It's also a time to speak up and share your views about how your co-op is doing because as an owner, you're important to the present and future of your electric cooperative.

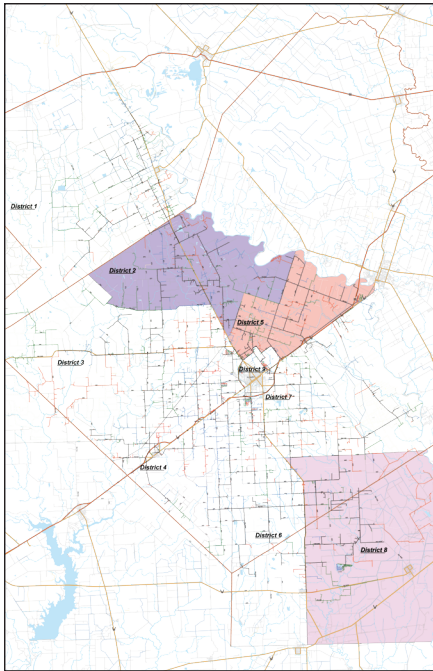
Member ownership and member participation aren't just the hallmarks of your electric cooperative; they provide the foundation for its success.

Your participation and vote mean a lot. After all, it's your business.

We look forward to seeing you at WCEC's annual meeting on June 17, 2020 at the El Campo Civic Center.



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# It's Not Too Late To Nominate

*WCEC Members To Vote On Districts 2,5 and 8 This Year - Nominations Taken Until March 16*

**LATER THIS MONTH, A NOMINATING COMMITTEE WILL MEET TO SELECT A SLATE OF candidates for three seats on the WCEC board.**

Up for nominations this year are:

- **DISTRICT #2:** Currently held by Leroy Kaspar. Mr. Kaspar has reached the end of his term limits and is not eligible to be re-elected.
- **DISTRICT #5:** Currently held by A.J. Kresta. Mr. Kresta has reached the end of his term limits and is not eligible to be re-elected.
- **DISTRICT #8:** Currently held by Jim W. Harton who is eligible to run for another term.

If you live in one of these districts and are interested in running for the board, contact Brenda R. Silva by Monday, March 9. Brenda can be reached at 979-543-6271. She will put you in contact with the nominating committee.

If you do not live in one of these districts, please consider running in 2021 or 2022.



## Power Tip

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

CATHERINE LANE | ISTOCK.COM



## Wharton County Electric Cooperative

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### GENERAL MANAGER/CEO

Gary Raybon

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Leroy Kaspar, President, District 2
- Peggy Glaze, Vice-President, District 9
- A.J. Kresta, Secretary-Treasurer, District 5
- Paul Phillips Jr., Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, District 1
- Frankie Peter, District 3
- Rick Graff, District 4
- Gus Wessels Jr., District 6
- John Roach, District 7
- Jim W. Harton, District 8



## Contact Us

For information during office hours and outages 24/7

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- Automatic bank draft
- SmartHub app
- By mail or in person
- Payment drop box

# Add Safety to Your Spring Cleaning Checklist

AS YOU GIVE YOUR HOUSE A GOOD CLEANING THIS SPRING, DON'T OVERLOOK appliances, fixtures and emergency supplies.

HERE ARE 10 THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE THOUGHT TO CHECK:

**1. The stove's exhaust hood.** A year's worth of home cooking—especially after the holidays, when your home might have hosted company—can leave grime and grease buildup on the hood. That buildup, which also includes food particles and dust, can catch on fire. Remove the hood and clean the filter and all surfaces.

**2. The back of the refrigerator.** When is the last time you pulled the fridge away from the wall and vacuumed the coils? A rule of thumb: Do that every two or three months. Dust on the coils prevents the appliance from operating efficiently. Once they're clean, push the fridge back toward the wall, but don't let it touch. Air needs to circulate around those coils.

**3. The dryer vent.** The lint that collects in the dryer duct presents a fire hazard. Snake it out at least twice a year and clean the lint trap after every dryer cycle.

**4. Ceiling fans.** It's easy to overlook dirt and dust that you can't see. Use a small ladder so you can climb high enough to wipe down the tops of the blades. If your fan has a built-in light, remove the decorative cover and rinse out the dust and dead bugs. Let it dry completely before replacing it.

**5. Cord clutter.** Are tangled cords a hazard in your home? Tangled cords can become damaged or frayed, increasing the risk of electrical shock or fire. A tangled mess increases the chance of damaging electrical equipment by inducing power loss or by accidentally pulling out one cord while working with another. Keep your wires neat and organized with cable ties or clips and make sure they are in good repair.

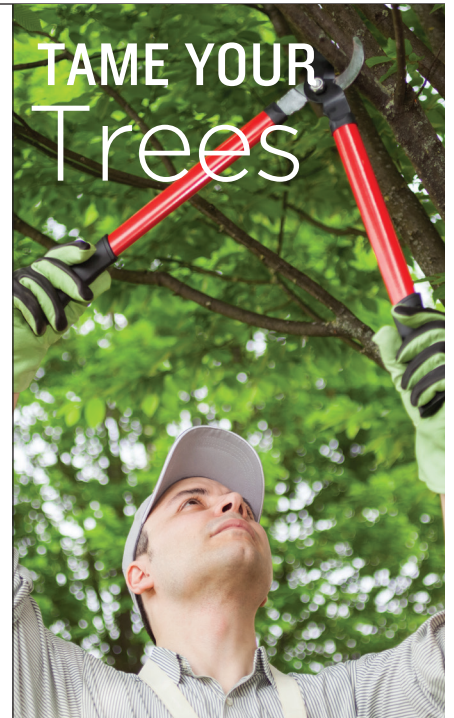
**6. Power tools.** Inspect power tools and outdoor appliances before using them. The long winter months could have left dirt buildup and some wear and tear. The risk of electrical danger is too high to not take a few minutes to clean them up and check for damage.

**7. Smoke detectors.** Although they may look clean from the outside, dust can accumulate inside the cover of smoke detectors and cause them to malfunction. Gently vacuum them with a soft brush to avoid false alarms, then check to ensure that the battery is operational. The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends replacing smoke detectors every 10 years.

**8. Outdoor lighting.** Winter's damp air can corrode the metal fixtures of outdoor lights, so check each one carefully. Check metal sockets for signs of corrosion. If you find rust that has eaten into the metal socket, contact an electrician to install a new one.

**9. Outlets and switches.** During your spring cleaning, take a quick walk through your home and check each switch and outlet. If you see any that appear discolored or are hot to the touch, contact an electrician immediately. This is a sign of a wiring issue that could easily become a fire hazard.

**10. Emergency kit.** Some things in your emergency kit are built to stand the test of time. But others, like batteries, canned goods and bottled water, must be replaced every so often. Take time each spring to toss out and replace as needed so you're prepared for spring storms.



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

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

**Never trim trees** that grow close to power lines; that is a job for professionals. Call WCEC for assistance and guidance.

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

**Don't allow children** to climb trees or build tree houses close to power lines.

**Plant appropriate** distances from all power lines.

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

**WCEC encourages you to always practice safety.**

# SPOTLIGHTING YOUR HOME TEAM

## Meet WCEC's Carol Diaz

At WCEC, we pride ourselves on outstanding member service and make every effort to play a key role in our community.

As our employees interact with you, our members, we want you to get to know them beyond their job title. Each month, we feature a TEAM member here.

Our commitment to you and our community is why WCEC is your HOME TEAM provider.

**This month's HOME TEAM feature spotlights Carol Diaz.**

You might recognize Carol from one of your visits to the WCEC office. She is a Customer Service Representative and one of the friendly faces you see as you come in.

As a CSR, her primary duty is to assist our members in anyway she can. From setting up a new membership, scheduling tree trimming or taking an outage call, her first priority is always the need of the member.

"Helping our members is really what I love most about my job," Carol says. "It's very rewarding to see a member smile because I've been able to resolve an issue for them. Our members are the best group of people to work for. They are so appreciative of all of us at WCEC. We can't help but want to do our best for them."

Carol was born and raised in El Campo and is a graduate of El Campo High School. Before coming to work at WCEC, she worked in retail, finance, and, most recently, was a Material Engineer at Fluor Daneil - Sugar Land.

"Besides working here, I think the most interesting job I've ever had was as a temporary appraiser with the appraisal district here in Wharton County. I met a lot of people and saw a lot of the county I wouldn't have otherwise," she recalls.



She learned of the opening at WCEC through a friend.

"I'm so glad I was able to get on at WCEC. The benefits are great, but, most of all, we are a family. There really is a great team of people here," she says.

Carol and her significant other of 20 years, Gary Garza, reside in El Campo. She has a daughter, Carissa, and a son, Christopher. Carissa lives in San Antonio and is an accountant at Valero. Christopher also lives in El Campo and is a correctional officer for the Wharton County Sheriff's Office. The light of her life, however, is her grandson, Christopher Jr.

"I didn't know how much having a grandchild would change me," she says. "My 'Papi' is so special to me - in a way only a grandson can be!"

In her spare time, Carol enjoys spending time with her family and getting outdoors to camp, hunt or fish when she can.

The greatest advice she's ever received is to treat others as you wish to be treated.

"I use this advice everyday - at work, at home, everywhere," she says.

When asked who she would have lunch with out of anyone, alive or dead, Carol says, "There wouldn't be a dining table big enough! I could never choose out of all the people I love!"

Her dream vacation destination is Niagara Falls.

"I've always wanted to go there," she says. "I feel like it is one of the great examples of God's beautiful work."

In ten years, Carol sees herself doing what she loves right here at WCEC - taking care of our members. She is outgoing, always smiling, and always ready to lend a helping hand.

This is why we are proud to have Carol on your HOME TEAM.

# Springtime Savings

**EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS LIKE IT WAS JUST CHRISTMAS, SPRING IS ALREADY HERE.**

As the weather warms up and the days get longer, it's a good time for homeowners to take a few steps that could save energy—and money—throughout the spring and summer.

**1. Tune up your air conditioner.** AC weather is likely still a couple of months away, but if you put off having your equipment serviced until it's hot outside, you run the risk of a breakdown on a sweltering summer day. A qualified technician

can replace your central air conditioning system's filters, make sure it has enough refrigerant and clean its evaporator coils. A pro also can spot problems in the making and recommend repairs so they don't put your unit out of commission.

**2. Open your windows.**

Natural ventilation costs nothing. On warm spring days, invite spring breezes and sunshine in. It's a great way to air out the house as you begin your annual spring cleaning.

**3. Turn off the heat.** And delay your use of the air conditioner. Unless March and April are especially warm this year, enjoy the fresh spring air for as long as you can.

**4. Seal cracks in the dry-wall on the indoor side of your exterior walls.** You'll find them around electrical outlets, cable lines, windows and doors. The U.S.

Department of Energy estimates that you can save up to 30% on your energy bills by sealing air leaks around your house.

**5. Service your large appliances.** The refrigerator is one of your home's biggest users of energy. Keep it clean on the inside and out—including the back of it, where coils collect dust and sap the unit's efficiency. Clean the lint out of your dryer's vent.

**6. Bring in sunlight.** During daylight hours, switch off artificial lights and use windows and skylights to brighten your home.

**7. Use ceiling fans.** Cooling your home with ceiling fans will allow you to raise your thermostat several degrees when it gets warm outside. This can help lower your electricity bills without sacrificing overall comfort.

**8. Cook outside.** On warmer spring days, keep the heat out of your home by using an outdoor grill instead of an indoor oven.



OLEKSANDRA MYKHALUTSA | ISTOCK.COM

## RECIPE OF THE MONTH



LILECHKA75 | ISTOCK.COM

### Spinach and Mushroom Frittata

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 12 eggs
- ¼ cup half-and-half
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 4 ounces baby portobello mushrooms, stemmed and thinly sliced
- 6 ounces fresh spinach, stemmed and coarsely chopped
- 4 ounces shredded Swiss cheese
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- ½ teaspoon sea salt

- 1.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with olive oil.
- 2.** Whisk the eggs and half-and-half together in a large mixing bowl. Add the remaining ingredients. Stir to combine, then pour into the prepared baking dish.
- 3.** Bake 45–50 minutes, or until eggs have set and top is lightly browned.

► Serves 4–6.

**COOK'S TIP** For the best flavor and texture, allow the frittata to rest 10 minutes before serving. Serve with your favorite fresh salsa for an extra kick.

Find this and more delicious recipes online at **TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM**

# Join the Fight To Stop Scammers

*Consumers are urged to report potential scams to utilities and authorities*



**OUR INCREASINGLY CONNECTED WORLD IS GIVING SCAMMERS** more opportunities to take advantage of unsuspecting consumers, which means local authorities, utilities and other businesses are working overtime to keep people informed. To help protect yourself, your family or your business from being victimized, heed the longtime maxim about vigilance, “If you see something, say something.”

The Federal Trade Commission has received reports about scammers impersonating utility companies in an effort to get money. Reporting these scams helps authorities fight them.

Electric cooperatives are among the businesses and consumer organizations supporting Utilities United Against Scams. The international consortium of electricity, natural gas, water and sewer providers and trade and industry associations is sharing information on payment scams, identity theft, and sales and service schemes to gain a leg up on the criminals.

Impostor scams are the most common type of fraud reported to the FTC. Impersonators call homes and small businesses demanding payment for supposedly delinquent bills and threatening to terminate service. This type of scam becomes more common during peak heating and cooling seasons, when its practitioners prey on consumers’ need to maintain utility service amid temperature extremes.

Variations on the scheme are also becoming more common. Rather than making an initial claim that a consumer owes an outstanding balance, some scammers are now claiming an overpayment is the reason for a phone call to a consumer. They will make contact in an attempt to get banking information so they can process a supposed refund.

Never give banking information over the phone unless you place the call to a number you know is legitimate.

There has also been an uptick in door-to-door scams by people claiming to represent utility providers like your electric co-op. Representatives knock or ring the doorbell offering to replace or repair a meter or other device, or they solicit personal information to sign up a consumer for programs that could reduce their energy bills.

They may try to charge you for the phony service, sell you unnecessary products, collect personal information for use in identity theft or simply gain entry to steal valuables.

High-pressure demands are a common tactic in many of the schemes. Urging immediate decisions or actions—such as immediate payment, particularly by a specific method like a gift card, wire transfer, cellphone or third-party app—should raise serious concerns.

Utility-connected scams are common because utility services are so integral to daily life. Lighting, heating, water and sewage services are all essential, so any threat of service disconnection can provoke a lot of anxiety.

Your first defense is maintaining awareness of your account status, including knowing whether balances are up to date. This is becoming more important as scammers use more automatic dialers, or robocalls, to phish for potential marks.

If the caller insists you have a bill past due, that’s a big red flag. Contact the utility company directly using the number on your paper bill or on the company’s website. Don’t call any number the caller gave you because it’s likely to be answered by someone who is part of the scam.



# Green Isn't Just for St. Patrick's Day

## YOU CAN DO MORE THAN WEAR GREEN TO CELEBRATE ST. PATRICK'S DAY THIS YEAR.

You can “go green”—throughout your home.

The best way to start is simply to waste less. Here are four ways to do that:

**Save energy.** Use the energy you need—wisely, so you don't waste any. It's simple to conserve energy at home. Some examples: Turn off lights and electronics when they're not in use. Use a smart power strip to help you turn off multiple electronic devices at once. Lower the heat at night during the winter and raise it during the summer. When the weather is mild, turn your air conditioning system off completely. Replace old, incandescent lightbulbs with high-efficiency LEDs. Use cold water—instead of hot—whenever possible to save the energy used to heat water.

**Conserve water.** A few conservation strategies: Take shorter showers. Run the dishwasher and washing machine only when they are full. Invest in water-efficient toilets and low-flow faucets and showerheads. Fix leaks immediately.

**Recycle electronics.** When you replace your computer, printer or other electronics, don't throw the old ones in the trash; they'll wind up in a landfill. Instead, donate or recycle them. Manufacturers and retailers often have recycling programs, and some charities accept used electronics. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that recycling 1 million laptops saves enough energy to power 3,500 homes for a year.

**Shop locally.** Like your electric cooperative, many nearby markets and shops are locally owned and operated. These small, independent businesses often rely on local farmers, craftspeople and labor to supply them with what they sell and the services they provide to you. That means their goods require less long-distance transportation, which has a positive impact on the environment.

You already buy your electricity from your local electric cooperative; look for a neighborhood food cooperative, credit union and other kinds of cooperatives to do business with as well.



## Meter Tampering Can Kill

### TAMPERING WITH YOUR ELECTRIC METER can cost you your life.

No, the crime won't land you on death row when the electric cooperative—whose technicians are trained to spot electricity theft—reports you to the police. In that case, you'll be charged with theft, possibly sent to jail and definitely slapped with fines of about triple the money you thought you could save by rigging your meter.

But an attempt to bypass or alter an electric meter can result in shock, fire, explosion and even electrocution. And if you're lucky enough not to get hurt, you'll still leave the tampered meter in a state that's dangerous to others, including the electric cooperative employee who reads or maintains it.

Plus, you're driving up electric costs for your neighbors, just as shoplifters force stores to inflate the price of their products to cover losses from theft.

The cooperative does not have to catch you red-handed to turn you over to the authorities. In fact, the law assumes that a person who benefits from the use of stolen electricity has tampered with the meter.

If you're aware of a meter on our lines that you suspect has been tampered with, please let us know. You could save a life.



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# The Dirt on Soapy

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

BY CLAY COPPEDGE



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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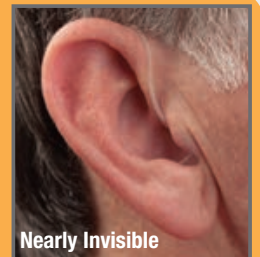
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## Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More

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

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

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

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

### Shrimp Étouffée

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

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

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

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

# Recipes

## Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

DEANNA PAYNE | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

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

### Gulf Lump Crabmeat Sauté

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

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

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

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

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

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

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

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

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com).

### Crawfish Bread

GERI HUPP | DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

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

- 1 package (6 ounces) cornbread mix
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper, plus more to taste
- 12 ounces fully cooked crawfish tail meat, thawed
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 can (15.25 ounces) corn, drained
- 3 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup diced green onions
- ½ cup diced white onion
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper

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

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### \$500 Recipe Contest

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

ENTER ONLINE at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests); MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.



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

## Gulf Coast Corn Chowder With Shrimp and Pico de Gallo

SHERRY SCOTT | PEDERNALES EC

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

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

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

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

mer until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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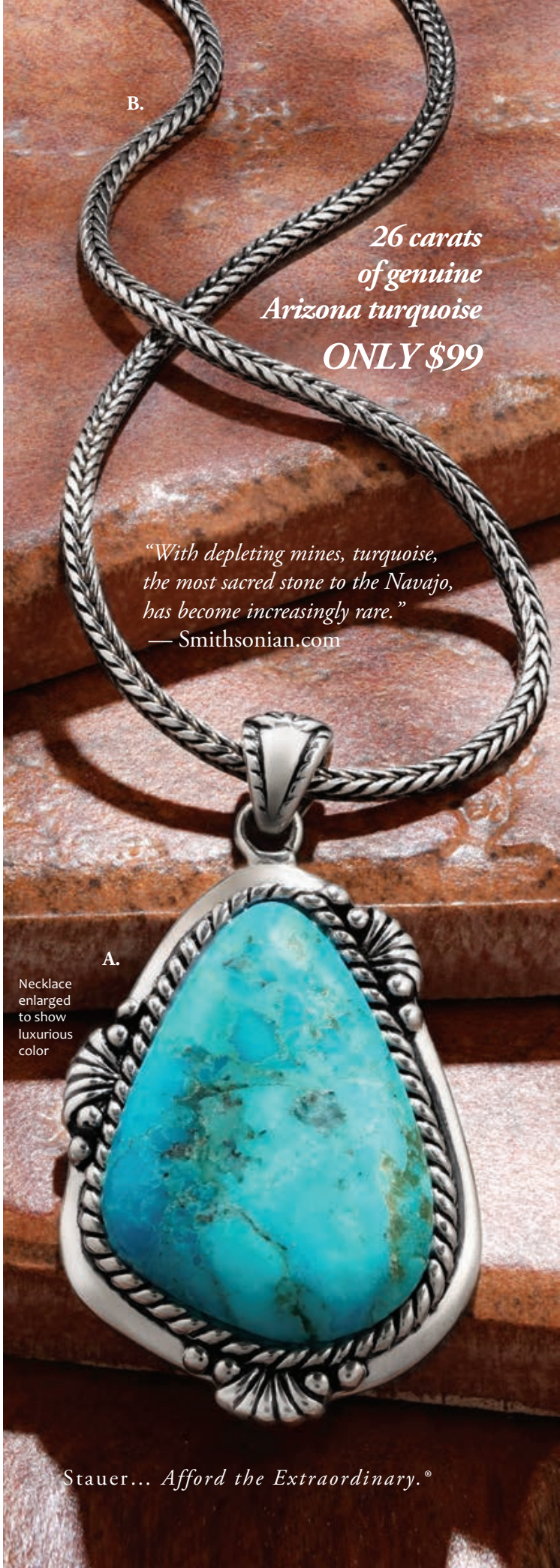
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**WEB EXTRAS** ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



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

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



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

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



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



## UPCOMING CONTESTS

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AUGUST	ON THE WATER	DUE APRIL 10
SEPTEMBER	SHAPES	DUE MAY 10

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**Pick of the Month**  
**RISE for Families**  
**Chili Cook-Off**

**Leander** March 28  
 (512) 736-8887, riseforfamilies.org

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



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## March

**7**  
**Lake Jackson** Youth Fishing Day at Sea Center Texas, (979) 292-0100, visitbrazosport.com

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

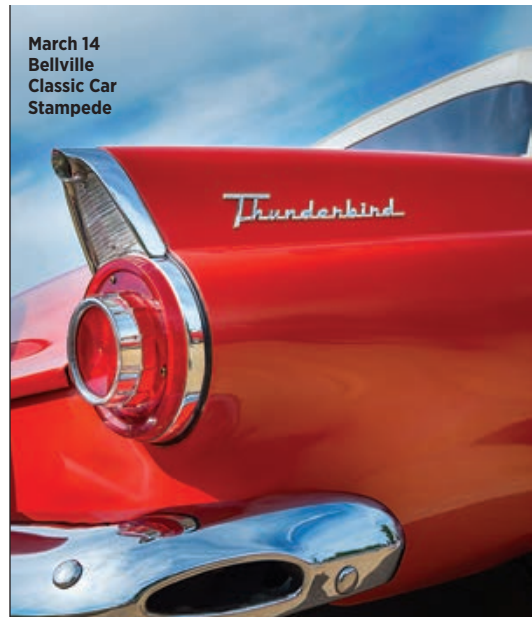
**Clarendon [7-8]** Whistle-Stop Trade Days, (806) 206-6815, facebook.com/whistop

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

**12**  
**New Braunfels** T.G. Sheppard & Kelly Lang, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

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

March 14  
**Bellville**  
 Classic Car Stampede



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

**14**  
**Bellville** Classic Car Stampede, (979) 865-3187, austincountycruisers.com

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## AROUND TEXAS EVENT CALENDAR

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

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

## 20

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

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

## 21

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

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

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

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

## 27

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

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

## 28

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



April 2-4  
Edinburg  
UFO Festival

## 30

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

## April

### 2

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

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

### 3

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

### 4

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

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

### Submit Your Event!

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

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# Sharpening My Knowledge

Poking around the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean

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

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

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

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

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

The museum in McLean displays 2,000



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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

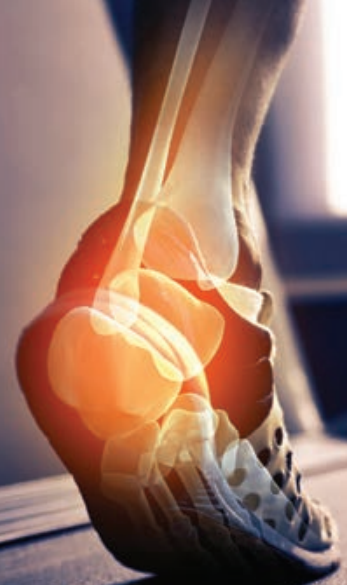
 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video from the Devil's Rope Museum. To learn more about the fence-cutting wars, read *Barbed Wire, Barbaric Backlash* in our January 2014 issue.

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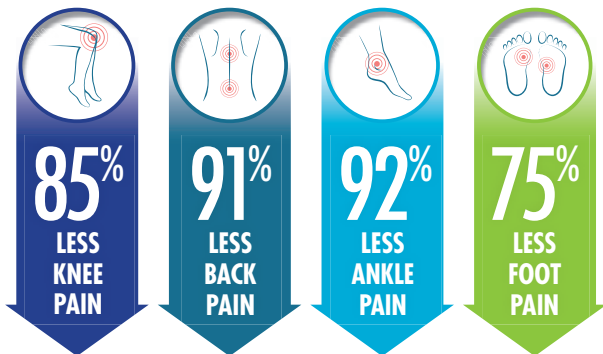
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