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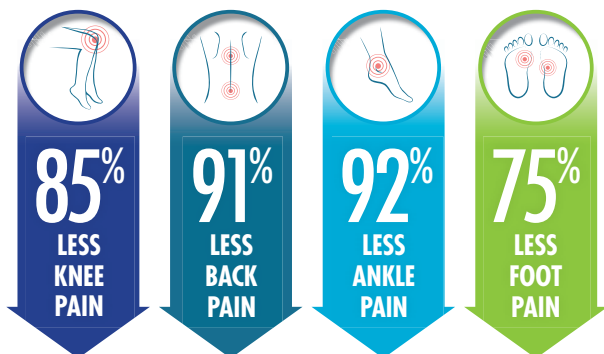
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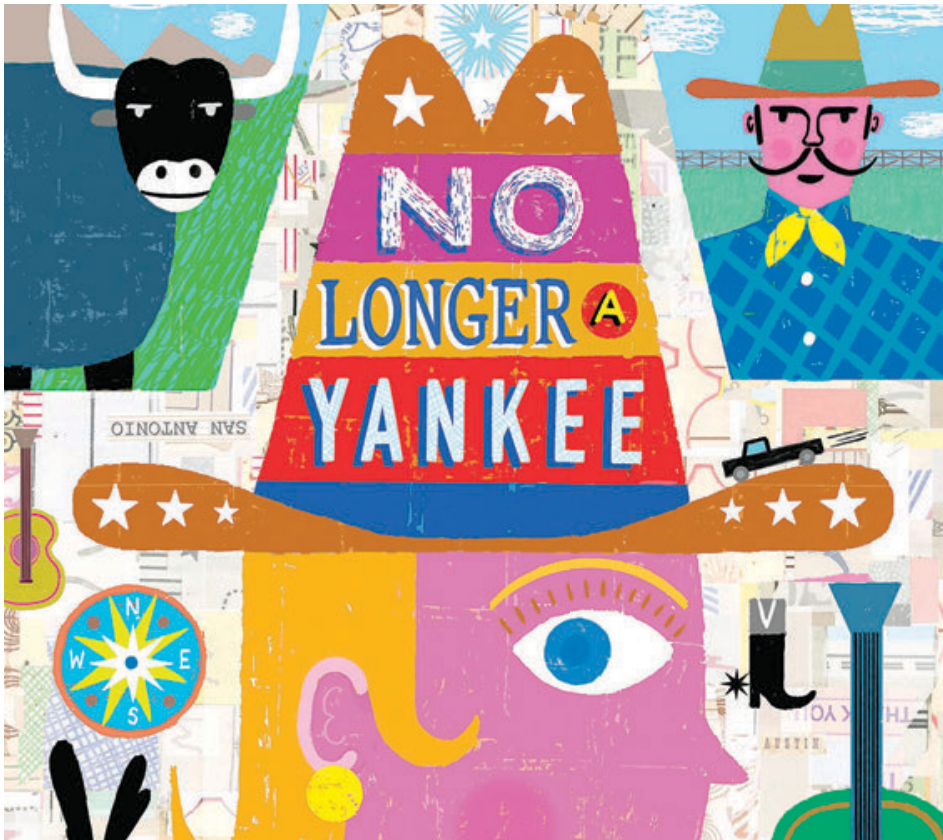
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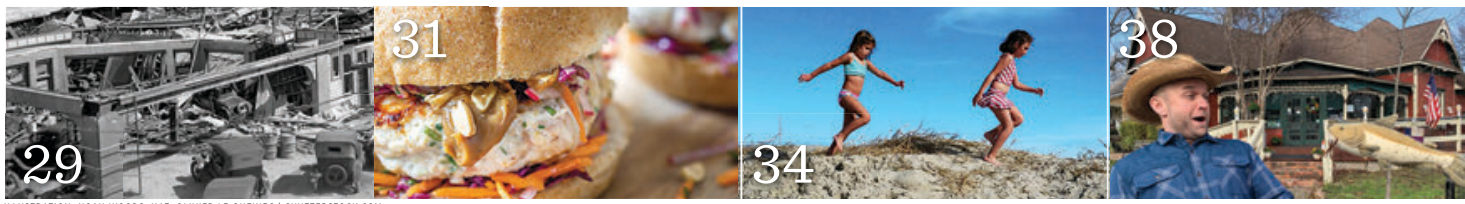
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NEXT MONTH

MYTX *What does it mean to be Texan? We asked a variety of folks who have special connections to the state.*



ON THE COVER A photo of Georgia O’Keeffe in Canyon—and Palo Duro Canyon, her muse in Texas. Canyon photo by Rob Greebon | ImagesfromTexas.com

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 Vegetarian
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Stark Memories

My family lived in Orange during the mid-1950s [*Firmly Rooted*, May 2020]. I recall a classmate was the grandson of the Stark-Lutcher marriage. I recall being invited out to a huge plantation house by his parents to spend the day with him playing and exploring the land.

**BILL WHEELLESS JR. | EVANT
HAMILTON COUNTY EC**

One thing the article did not mention is the church that Frances Ann Lutcher built. Known as the Lutcher Memorial Building, it was built for the First Presbyterian Church of Orange. It was built around three stained-glass windows, made by Lamb Studios, which Lutcher purchased at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. The granite was quarried in Llano.

**DAVID AND PATTY MOUTON | MEADOWLAKES
PEDERNALES EC**

Horse Sense

I enjoyed Martha Deeringer's history of the Spanish mustang in Texas [*Horses' Roundabout Trail*, May 2020]. This history is alive and well in East Texas. Vicki Ives of Karma Farms in Marshall has dedicated her life to the preservation, promotion and love of America's first horse.

**CHUCK WATERS | MARSHALL
RUSK COUNTY EC**



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My Old Friend

Every day is scary with this virus spreading like wildfire. New rules to live by: sheltering in, masks, 6 feet apart, empty grocery store shelves.

I shut all that out for a moment when I opened my mailbox and there was my old friend, *Texas Co-op Power*—arriving on the same date, entertaining, always comforting.

I don't know why, but tears filled my eyes. I was so happy to see something that had not gone by the wayside.

JANE PATTERSON | TEXARKANA | BOWIE-CASS EC



Ripple Effect

In response to *Splash Across Texas* [Currents, May 2020], there is also a Texas-shaped pool in Hilltop Lakes. My grandmother lived there, and the best memories were made at that pool.

**ASHLEY PHILLIPS | BROADDUS
SAM HOUSTON EC**

Here's my Texas-shaped pool [below] in western rural Fayette County near West Point.

**JOE W. ARNOLD | WEST POINT
FAYETTE EC**

We've had fun through the years teaching our kids and now grandkids Texas geography by swimming around the pool at Hilltop Lakes.

A favorite memory was a big family celebration of the Texas sesquicentennial in 1986. My sister was living in Wyoming, and we joked about our wonderful Texas-shaped swimming pool and the baby pool being in the shape of Wyoming—boring rectangle.

**JANA VICK | DESOTO
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC**

Name That Snake

Thanks to the article [*Common Snakes of Texas*, April 2020], I was able to correctly identify a snake that my dogs attacked. I was afraid it was a water moccasin, but it was a nonvenomous diamondback water snake.

**CINDY LUTKENHAUS | GAINESVILLE
PENTEX ENERGY**

Snakes are friends, never foes. The snakes are simply trying to survive in a home that was taken from them, in a world that is constantly changing at the hands of human beings.

RICHARD CLAY CROWELL | VIA FACEBOOK

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LIFESTYLE

Social Distance at the Drive-In

AS MOVIE THEATERS across the country were forced to close to help slow the spread of the coronavirus, many drive-in theaters found themselves in a unique position to remain open, offering an increasingly rare opportunity for public entertainment while allowing patrons to maintain distance from one another.

For some drive-ins, like the Showboat Drive-In Theater in Hockley, outside Houston, it led to a momentary uptick in business. As Showboat owner Andrew Thomas told The Associated Press, ticket sales increased by about 40% one March weekend when the theater otherwise would have expected a 40% loss. “Obviously this isn’t the way you’d want it to occur, but I’m excited for the idea that there may be a new generation of people that will get to experience going to a drive-in theater,” he said.

To find a drive-in near you, check out our story *Drive In, Chill Out* at TexasCoopPower.com.



NATURE

FEATHER IN THEIR CAPS

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Audubon Texas have selected Bastrop, Dallas, Houston and Port Aransas for the Bird City Texas distinction. They are recognized for community engagement, habitat management and threat reduction for birds in the inaugural year of the campaign. Their Bird City designations last through 2022.

Fort Worth’s Coyote Drive-In



**JULY 1
IS NATIONAL
POSTAL WORKER DAY**

**1.6
million**

That’s how many copies of Texas Co-op Power magazine are mailed to subscribers—mostly electric cooperative members—every month.

CO-OP PEOPLE

Brave Faces

WHEN NICOLE CRABTREE HANEY read that her local hospital was facing a mask shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Wise Electric Cooperative customer service representative got to sewing.

The rest of Decatur, in North Texas, did, too—fulfilling the hospital's need right away. But Haney, who has a sister and two daughters who work in the medical field, was undeterred. She realized that her co-workers at the co-op, who are

critical to keeping the lights on, could use the protection.

"I was able to get all the specs and qualifications of the masks that our hospital had asked to be made, and I dusted off my sewing machine and got to work," Haney said.

By mid-April, she had sewn nearly 250 masks, donating more than 100 to her co-workers and other essential workers.

"Honestly, this has turned into a bigger project than I anticipated," she said.

"It feels good to be able to help in some small way during these uncertain times that we are in."



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

It's not really summer until . . .

► **Tell us how** you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Please include your city and co-op.

Below are some of the responses to our May prompt: **The best part about being a mom is ...**

Hugs—real heartwarming hugs, not virtual hugs.

CAROLYN GOLAN | BELLVILLE
SAN BERNARD EC

Weed flowers and sticky kisses.

DEBORAH JENNINGS | HAWKINS
WOOD COUNTY EC

Getting to say, "Ask your dad."
MARK BROWNING | GOODRICH
SAM HOUSTON EC

Mothers turn into grandmothers, and you can send the kids back home.

MARIE MELGOZA | GRANBURY
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Having your kids grow up into adults you're very proud of who bear no resemblance to themselves as teenagers.

ELLEN PATTERSON | FATE
FARMERS EC

Knowing there is no way to be a perfect mom but a million ways to be a great mom.

JO LESTER | WIMBERLEY
PEDERNALES EC

Feeling the love you gave to your children come back to you 10 times greater.

GAIL VERNER | JUSTIN
COSERV

To see more responses, read Currents on our website.

THE ARTS

Culinary Canvas

Palo Duro Love Letters on Page 8 looks at Georgia O'Keeffe's creative legacy—her paintings and writing—from her time in Texas 100 years ago.

When the artist died in 1986, she left behind a collection of some 300 recipes, which Sotheby's auctioned in March, along with artistic works, books, clothes and other personal effects from the estates of O'Keeffe and her husband, noted photographer Alfred Stieglitz. Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library paid \$17.2 million for the whole lot.

The recipes, many handwritten on notecards, slips of paper and hotel stationery, reflect O'Keeffe's culinary passions. She was as exacting in her kitchen as she was on her canvases, growing vegetables at her New Mexico home, obtaining eggs from a local woman and weekly making yogurt from goat's milk.

O'Keeffe and her guests enjoyed a variety of dishes, including pecan butterball cookies, tomato aspic, vegetable soup, applesauce and chicken flautas.



ALMANAC

WAVING OLD GLORY

The U.S. flag is said to have been raised on San José Island, a sand barrier between Matagorda Island and Mustang Island in the Gulf, on July 26, 1845—the first time it was flown in Texas.

PAINTING: GEORGIA O'KEEFFE (1887-1986), LIGHT COMING ON THE PLAINS NO. III, 1917, WATERCOLOR ON NEWSPRINT PAPER, AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, FORT WORTH, TEXAS, 1966.31. © AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

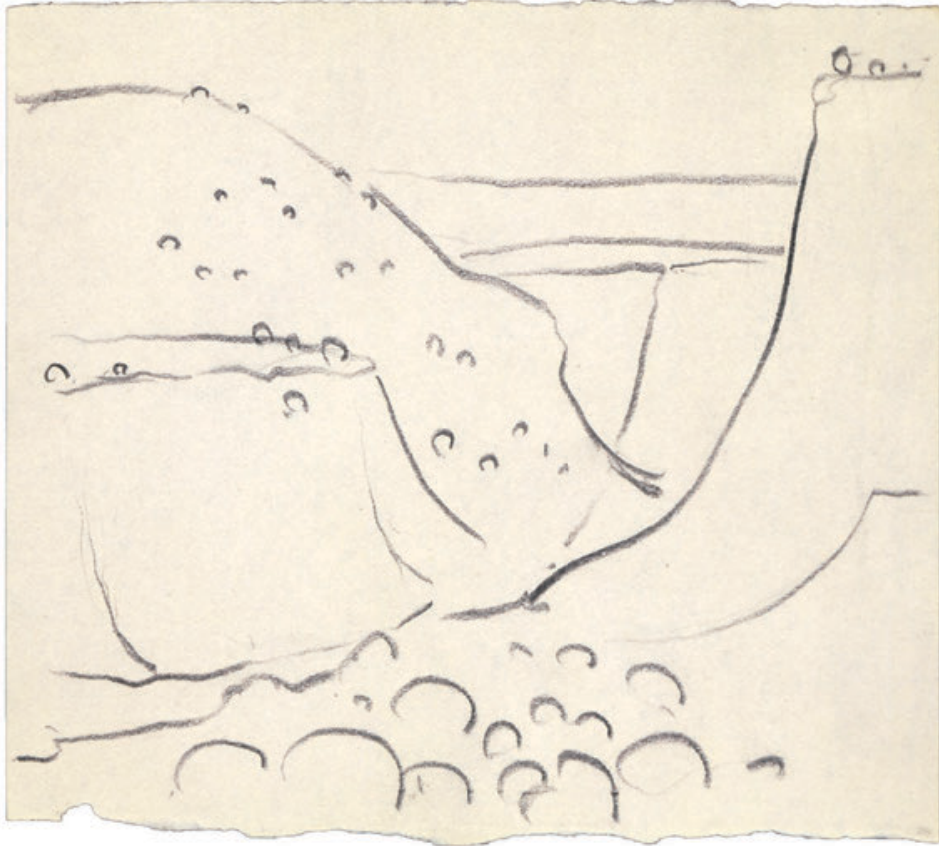


“There is something wonderful about the bigness and the loneliness and the windiness of it all,” O’Keeffe wrote to a friend.

PAINTERUSH.VVOE | STOCKADOBESTOCK.COM. PHOTO: UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. GEORGIA O'KEEFFE AND FRIENDS IN TEXAS, CA. 1912/1918. PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT, GEORGIA O'KEEFFE FOUNDATION PHOTOGRAPHS. GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM, GIFT OF THE GEORGIA O'KEEFFE FOUNDATION



PALO DURO LOVE LETTERS



Georgia O'Keeffe's
paintings captured
the Panhandle;
her wistful writings
brought it to life

BY CHRIS BURROWS

Ammy Von Lintel's art history students need little guidance when she shows them *Light Coming on the Plains No. III*. The abstract painting consists only of an elliptical shape formed by darkening cool hues and bisected by a horizontal line of paper.

The West Texas A&M University students aren't fine arts majors, but they recognize that image.

"I'm like 'What is this? You guys know what this is,'" Von Lintel says of the 1917 watercolor by Georgia O'Keeffe. "The students know what a sunset and a sunrise look like here, and you put up an O'Keeffe that's totally abstract. They're like, 'Oh yeah, she got it, and I get it.'"

O'Keeffe got it—the stunning way the sun breaks the horizon

on the Staked Plains of the Texas Panhandle—because she lived it.

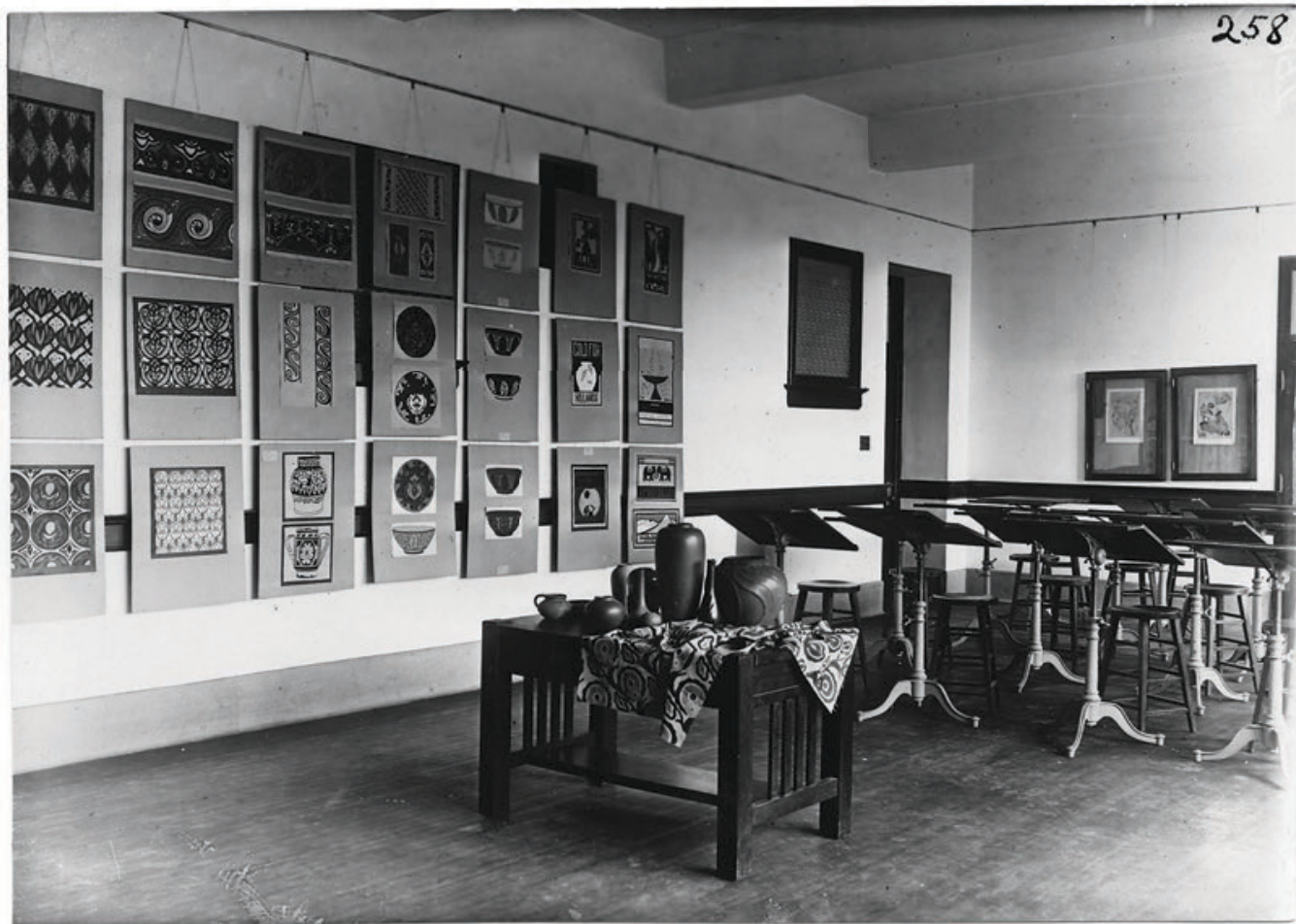
One hundred years ago, O'Keeffe taught art on the same campus—years before her oil paintings would earn her the title Mother of American Modernism. O'Keeffe's Texas landscapes hang in galleries nationwide, but only recently has her dazzling prose—preserved in dozens of letters and studied by scholars—allowed the artist herself to convey the feelings that colored the paintings and painter. Her words show a stunning well of creativity within a young woman who was figuring out life—and how to stay upright in the craggy paths of Palo Duro Canyon.

O'Keeffe spent only a few years in Texas, but it had a hold on her.

"There is something wonderful about the bigness and the loneliness and the windiness of it all," O'Keeffe wrote to a friend. "I like it so much that I wonder if it's true—The country is almost all sky—and such wonderful sky—and the wind blows—blows hard—and the sun is hot—the glare almost blinding—but I don't care—I like it," she wrote another.

Clockwise from opposite: Georgia O'Keeffe's *Light Coming on the Plains No. III*. O'Keeffe, center, among friends in Texas; she crisscrossed the Panhandle by car, wagon, foot and train. One of her drawings of Palo Duro Canyon.

DRAWING: GEORGIA O'KEEFFE. UNTITLED (PALO DURO CANYON). 1916-1917. GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 3 7/8 X 5 INCHES. GEORGIA O'KEEFFE FOUNDATION. © GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM. [2006.5.1]



‘Kick Your Heels in the Air’

Many decades before she would be hailed as “the undisputed doyenne of American painting” by *The New York Times*, O’Keeffe needed a job. That’s what brought her to Texas from Virginia in 1912, when the 24-year-old artist took a job teaching art in the Amarillo public school system. She had never been to Texas, knew no one when she arrived alone and had never taught.

She took to the place and the work. “Pretty soon, I got so interested in teaching I wondered why I should be paid for it,” O’Keeffe said in a 1974 interview.

In 1914, she relocated to New York City and expressed jubilation in 1916 when she was offered the job as head of the art department at what was then West Texas State Normal College, in Canyon, south of Amarillo. The Wisconsin native who had studied in Chicago and Virginia and taught in South Carolina was headed back to the Panhandle.

“Kick your heels in the air!” she wrote to a friend. “I’ve elected to go to Texas.”



Above: Friends in New York City supplied O’Keeffe with books and prints of textiles and pottery for her Canyon classroom. Left: Her 1917 yearbook photo.

Texas Panhandle and had never studied O’Keeffe. “I think the thing that also led me to study her is this strange connection of being in the department that is hers,” Von

Lintel says. “It takes some bravery to move into the middle of nowhere and fall in love with it, and I think she did.”

O’Keeffe is still present in the Panhandle. The Amarillo Museum of Art and the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum display her works.

“Canyon is very aware of its history with Georgia O’Keeffe,” says Carol Lovelady, PPHM director. “It’s a tremendous point of pride for the museum and for Canyon.”

The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, near where the artist spent her later years, houses many of her works, but her letters are kept at Yale University.

The trove is mostly correspondence between O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, the New York City photographer whom she married in 1924. The letters were unsealed in 2006. In them, “She talks about abstraction, about how her mind works and about how she makes a piece,” Von Lintel says. “We learn about her technique, we learn about her thought process, her frustrations of like, ‘I’m seeing this form, but I can’t get it right.’”

The dozens of letters recorded life among the vestiges of the Old West: Texans coming to terms with a world

Red Landscape is on display at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

‘Big Quiet Moonlight’

A decade ago, Von Lintel needed a job. When West Texas A&M University offered her a position in O’Keeffe’s former department, the Kansas City native, who studied in California, moved her family to Amarillo. She had never lived in the

PHOTOS: COURTESY PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL MUSEUM. PAINTING: GEORGIA O’KEEFFE. RED LANDSCAPE, 1916-1917. OIL ON BOARD. COURTESY PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL MUSEUM.

“What she liked here were people that she felt like had a lot of red in their blood,” Von Lintel says.
“Red-blooded, vibrant people who go outside, who stand in the light and live their lives.”



O’Keeffe explored the canyon with fervor, writing of it in many letters.



at war and life as a 20-something who spent her free time not just painting on front porches but also shooting rifles, riding in cars with boys and walking for miles on end.

“It’s a wonderful night—still and warm and moonlight—big quiet moonlight—As I walked home alone in it—I was tired,” she wrote Stieglitz. “... I think the best way I can tell it to you is—that last night I loved the starlight—the dark—the wind and the miles and miles of the thin strip of dark that is land.”

‘So Big and Impossible’

Von Lintel began studying the letters in 2011, using them to assemble a timeline of O’Keeffe’s time in Texas. That work culminated in her book, *Georgia O’Keeffe’s Wartime Texas Letters*, published in March. The professor sought to empower the artist to tell her own story.

“I wanted her to just kind of stand on her own because when she was out here, she was on her own,” Von Lintel says.

The letters trace the feelings that shaped O’Keeffe’s early paintings, some of which feature 800-foot-deep Palo Duro Canyon—what she called “a curious slit in the plains.”

O’Keeffe explored the canyon with fervor, writing of it in many letters: “Yesterday was sunny and fine and I went to the Canyon again—about twenty miles east—climbed and scrambled about till I was ... out of breath many times over—

Hikers in Palo Duro in the 1910s.

and felt very little—such a tiny little part of what I could see had worn me out—Yes—I was very small and very puny and helpless—and all around was so big and impossible.”

Those “big and impossible” feelings are apparent in O’Keeffe’s 32 canyon works—many of which include imposing forms and dark colors, including deep reds. And while the iron-rich walls of the place do bear a reddish tinge, O’Keeffe’s feelings bore the rest.

“What she liked here were people that she felt like had a lot of red in their blood,” Von Lintel says. “Red-blooded, vibrant people who go outside, who stand in the light and live their lives.”

‘Terrifically Alive’

I n April 1917, O’Keeffe opened her first solo show, in New York. She also sold her first piece, a charcoal drawing of a Panhandle train, which she described in a letter: “A train was coming way off—just a light with a trail of smoke—white—I walked toward it—The sun and the train got to me at the same time—It’s great to see that terrifically alive black thing coming at you in the big frosty stillness.”

Von Lintel hopes her students, through O’Keeffe, can see the beauty right in front of them.

“One of the things I always do is connect whatever I’m teaching to the local area because students should learn to look around themselves and see art and beauty here,” she says. “It’s not like we’re in the middle of nowhere.”

Chris Burrows is a TEC senior communications specialist.

WEB EXTRAS

► Read online how a co-op spread Palo Duro Canyon’s beauty.

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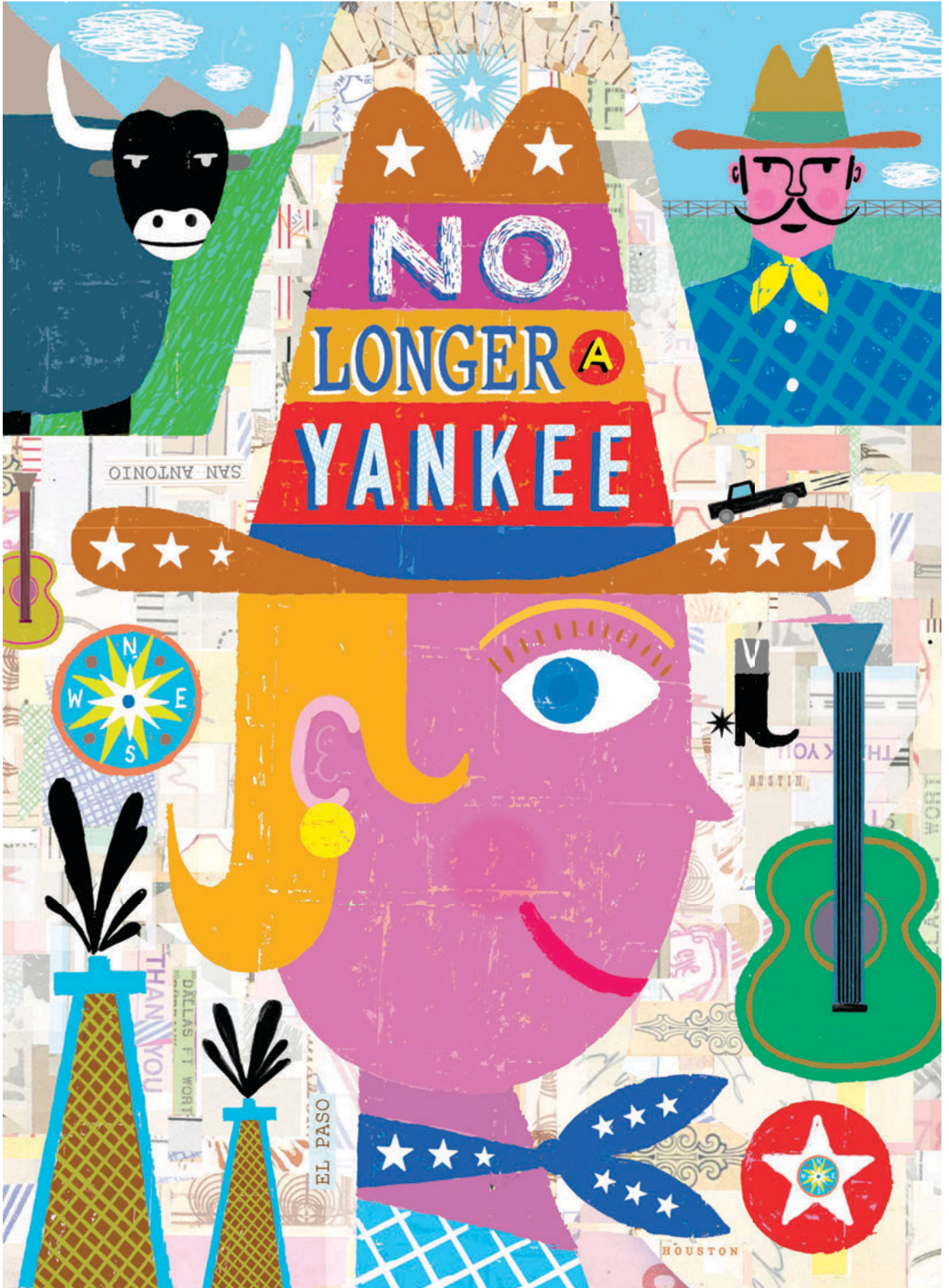
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I WAS BORN IN MICHIGAN but moved to Texas 50 years ago. I'm 56 now, which means I've spent 90% of my life as a resident of the Lone Star State. Until recently, I have not thought of myself as a Texan. I came from "up north."

In Ann Arbor, my family ate dinner, not supper. We sipped pop, not soda. We nibbled PEE-cons instead of pe-CONS—and never baked them into pies. And we never, ever blessed anybody's heart.

We moved to Texas in 1969, when my dad, an aeronautical engineer, transferred to Austin. In my 5-year-old mind's eye, I was moving to the land of tumbleweeds where people rode horses, wore cowboy hats and lived in a forest of prickly cactus. All that sounded exciting, but when I moved into a tract house in an Austin neighborhood, I still had to walk to school, and not once did I see a tumbleweed.

I've spent most of the past five decades thinking of myself as a misplaced Midwesterner. Texans are big, bold and, I used to think, a tad obnoxious when it came to state pride. Now I've changed my mind.

Texans are a proud lot, always noting how many generations of their family have lived on Texas soil. A few years back, a blog from *The New York Times* published a report noting population trends across the United States. The article said 61% of the people who lived in Texas in 2014 were born here, the highest retention rate of any state. That percentage had dropped just six points since 1900, when 67% of the state's residents were born within its borders.

I asked some of my most Texan friends their opinions about my Texanness, noting that I'd been living on Texas soil for half a century. Steven Fulton, a 39-year-old native and ranch manager of Selah Bamberger Ranch Preserve near Johnson City, was skeptical. "I don't know. There's a lot of development that happens in those first five years," he said. "Are you driving a truck yet?"

My personal vehicle is a bicycle, with a Fiat Spyder convertible as backup, but my husband drives a Ford F-150. And while out adventuring in his truck, I've taken a baseball-sized rock through the windshield and collided with a white-tailed deer, which all seem pretty Texan.

Next I phoned West Hansen, a 57-year-old fourth-generation Texan born in Pasadena. One of his great-grandfathers is buried in the Texas State Cemetery; another was the Dutch consul to Texas. Hansen stops for ribs on his weekly commute from Austin to Port Arthur and paddles rivers with a group of guys called the Cowboys.

When I asked him if I had to be born on Texas soil to qualify as Texan, he pointed out that if that was true, Stephen F. Austin, the Father of Texas, couldn't claim Texas heritage. Austin was born in Virginia, spent just 15 years in Texas before dying of pneumonia

in 1836 and still has a city named for him plus a 76-foot statue of himself outside Angleton.

"It's kind of like what it takes to be an Australian," Hansen went on, fleshing out his only-a-true-Texan-would-think-of-it reasoning. "There's a certain attitude that has to do with being the ultimate C student. We're probably not welcome in most polite atmospheres, and we have no qualms about that. We tend to make our own way where it's needed."

So, I'm not native, but I've been here longer than someone half my age who was born over Texas caliche. I'm more Texan than them, aren't I?

Hansen, probably wiping a dollop of cream gravy off a chicken-fried steak from the other end of the phone line, hesitated. "You don't sound like one—you have a distinct accent," he said, in a slow drawl. But Texans are brash, bold, independent and paradoxically,

he said, rely upon one another. They aren't concerned with the opinions of people outside their state but do care about their parents' opinions.

"I'd say you are," he finally conceded.

Another native Texan, Jason Jones, who lives part-time in Terlingua, assured me I qualify.

"I think it's more of a state of mind. If you've been here for a while and you feel Texan, then you're Texan," he said. "It's kind of a mindset of vastness and diversity."

I know that March 2 is Texas Independence Day. I like country music—especially James Hand. I've attended chicken poop bingo night at a local bar and even buy jars of pickled okra. I've petted a longhorn, sat in a field of bluebonnets, held a horned toad, watched the raging power of a flash flood and two-stepped across a creaky, wooden floor in a genuine Hill Country dance hall. I've paddled the Pecos and Devils rivers, gone teal hunting with the former head of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and own not just one but two cowboy hats, which I actually wear with regularity. I know how to ride a horse, can load a powerboat onto a trailer and make a mean margarita.

My best friend lives in the country with 15 horses and three dogs (bless her heart). Her boyfriend, a horse trainer with a handlebar mustache, makes chili (no beans) and frijoles a la charra from a 1949 cookbook called *A Taste of Texas*.

No, I wasn't born in Texas. I'll never be a native Texan. But after half a century in this amazing state, I'm officially claiming it as my own.

Pam LeBlanc is a former staff writer at the *Austin American-Statesman*. She has finally embraced what she calls her "Texanixity" and admits a soft spot for chicken-fried steak, cowboy hats and horses.

AFTER HALF A CENTURY HERE, I'M CALLING MYSELF A TEXAN

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SEVERE WEATHER

Are You Ready?

Lightning strikes kill more Americans than tornadoes or hurricanes. Don't take chances with this deadly force of nature.

Go inside a building and stay away from windows and doors.

Avoid electric appliances and metal plumbing and stay off the phone.

Do not seek shelter under a tree—they are easy targets.

Move to low ground and avoid open fields.

Whether at the beach or in a swimming pool, get out of the water immediately.

Do not touch metal objects, such as golf clubs or bicycles.

Inside a car is relatively safe, but do not touch interior metal.

If your hair stands on end, you may be a target. Crouch low on the balls of your feet and keep your knees and hands off the ground.

WCEC encourages you to always practice safety.



WHARTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



MESSAGE FROM YOUR GENERAL MANAGER/CEO
GARY RAYBON

CHALLENGES OF TREES & POWER LINES

RIGHT-OF-WAY MAINTENANCE ENSURES WHARTON COUNTY

Electric Cooperative delivers safe and reliable electric service. Clearing limbs and trees away from power lines not only helps prevent outages and blinking lights, it also reduces many potential hazards.

Vegetation, trees, shrubs and brush growing too close to power lines and distribution equipment lead to about 15% of power interruptions. That's why WCEC uses a system-wide right-of-way management program that includes various mechanical clearing methods and low-volume herbicide applications.

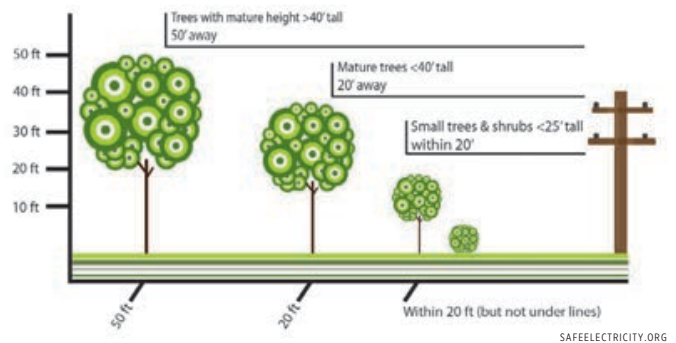
Why We Trim Trees

Safety. A very important reason for keeping rights-of-way clear is safety. Kids climbing trees can be a tragedy waiting to happen if they touch a limb in contact with an energized line or touch the line itself. The result can be severe injury or even death. Adults also are at risk if working around lines in trees. Never touch an electrical wire or anything it is in contact with; always assume it is conducting electricity and is dangerous.

WCEC must comply with National Electric Safety Code standards to keep trees out of power lines for safety reasons. If you are planning to trim or remove a tree near any power line, please contact us first. Our trained personnel can identify potential safety or reliability threats and advise you on what can be done.

Reliability. We also trim trees for service reliability. We all appreciate trees, which beautify our property, cool our homes and provide privacy. But we need electricity. Our members expect reliable electric service.

Trees that fall into power lines due to high wind or storms can knock out power to hundreds of members in a second. Not only do lines come down, but utility poles can snap due to the weight of fallen trees—potentially causing lengthy outages.



Pruning trees is only a stopgap because the trees will grow back. Therefore, trees sometimes must be permanently removed. Not all storm-related outages can be prevented, but we can certainly minimize the damage by keeping rights-of-way clear.

We Need Your Help

In working to keep a safe and reliable supply of power flowing to your home or business, we need your help. Let us know if you notice trees or branches that might pose a risk to our power lines.

Just as important, before planting trees in your own yard, think about how tall they could grow and how wide their branches could spread. As a rule of thumb, 25 feet of ground-to-sky clearance should be available on each side of our utility poles to give power lines plenty of space. Choose tree varieties carefully, and plant with power lines in mind.



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It's Not Too Late To Be Prepared

PREPARATION IS CRUCIAL TO STAYING SAFE DURING HURRICANE SEASON.

The chaos of a hurricane and the devastation of its aftermath are both dangerous. Wharton County EC urges you to take the time now to learn how to avoid electrical hazards related to hurricanes.

BEFORE A HURRICANE:

- ▶ Prepare your home. Have electrical problems inspected and repaired. Trim dead tree limbs. Contact a professional to trim trees near power lines. A prepared home will withstand extreme conditions better.
- ▶ When working to protect your home from a hurricane, take the time to look up and around you. Always be aware of the location of power lines, particularly when using long metal tools like ladders and pruning poles or when installing straps or clips to securely fasten your roof to the frame structure. Keep equipment and yourself at least 10 feet from lines.
- ▶ Know the location of your natural gas shutoff valve and breaker box.
- ▶ If you own a generator, familiarize yourself with the operator's manual and learn how to operate it safely.

DURING A HURRICANE:

- ▶ Pay attention to local media. Be prepared to evacuate.
- ▶ If instructed, turn off natural gas and electricity. This will make it safer to return to your home if it sustains damage. NEVER turn gas back on yourself. This is a job for utility professionals.
- ▶ If you cannot evacuate, go to a windowless room.

AFTER A HURRICANE:

- ▶ Treat all power lines as energized and lethally dangerous. Do not approach them or drive over them.
- ▶ Be careful near damaged trees and other debris, which can hide electrical hazards.
- ▶ Do not enter floodwaters on foot, in a car, or in a boat. Floodwaters contain unknown hazards and can quickly sweep you away.
- ▶ Do not use equipment if it is damp, you are damp, or you are working in damp conditions.
- ▶ If you smell natural gas, evacuate and report it immediately. Do not use candles or anything with a spark that could ignite the natural gas.
- ▶ Follow all safety precautions in operating a generator.

For more information on hurricane preparation, visit our Outage Central at MyWCEC.coop.



PROTECT AGAINST SCAMS

- ▶ Do not respond to calls or texts from unknown numbers or any others that appear suspicious.
- ▶ Never share your personal or financial information via email or text message or over the phone.
- ▶ Be cautious if you're being pressured to share any information or make a payment immediately.
- ▶ Scammers often spoof phone numbers to trick you into answering or responding. Remember that government agencies will never call you to ask for personal information or money.
- ▶ Do not click any links in messages. If a friend sends you a message with a suspicious link that seems out of character, call them to make sure their accounts weren't compromised.
- ▶ Always check on a charity (for example, by calling or looking at its actual website) before donating.

Avoid COVID-19 Scams

AS THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC CONTINUES TO AFFECT THE United States, phone scammers have seized the opportunity to prey on consumers, including electric co-op members in Texas.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has received reports of scam and hoax text message campaigns and scam robocalls offering free home testing kits, promoting bogus cures, selling health insurance and exploiting virus-related fears.

Scammers sometimes call to say that an electric bill is past due and try to collect personal information, such as Social Security numbers, or immediate payment through wire transfers, prepaid debit cards, gift cards or other untraceable currency. Members should be especially wary if anyone comes to your door to collect payment.

When Wharton County Electric Cooperative calls you, we will have your name and address; our member service representatives will not ask for that information over the phone. Never give out personal information to a stranger over the phone or at the door, and don't let strangers inside your home.

If you are suspicious or feel threatened by a caller or visitor, call law enforcement immediately. If you get a call from a scammer pretending to be from your electric cooperative, hang up and call WCEC directly.

Opportunists are also offering air conditioning duct cleaning as a way to "protect" your home and family from the virus.

The FCC warns of an increase in messaging scams, in which an email or text may falsely advertise a cure or an offer to be

tested for coronavirus. Do not click on these links.

Some text scams impersonate government agencies. The FCC has learned of a text scam claiming to be from the "FCC Financial Care Center," offering \$30,000 in COVID-19 relief. There is no such FCC program.

The Better Business Bureau is also warning of a text message scam impersonating the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that informs recipients that they must take a "mandatory online COVID-19 test" or that diabetic patients can receive a free testing kit and blood glucose monitor using an included link. Again, don't click the link.

Text message hoaxes may claim that the government will order a mandatory national two-week quarantine or instruct you to go out and stock up on supplies. These fake messages may even appear to be from a "next-door neighbor."

Fraudsters are also preying on financial fears. The FCC is aware of scams based on COVID-19 work-from-home opportunities, student loan repayment plans and debt consolidation offers. Small businesses are also getting scam calls about virus-related funding or loans.

WCEC encourages our members to always be aware of potential scams. If you think you've been a victim of a coronavirus scam, contact law enforcement immediately.



SPOTLIGHTING YOUR HOME TEAM

Meet WCEC'S Selena De La Peña

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 SPOTLIGHT features Selena De La Peña.

Selena began her career at WCEC seven years ago as a part-time VOE student in high school. She is now a full-time Consumer Service Representative.

"A friend told me about the job at WCEC," Selena says. "I am so grateful. I have loved my job since the beginning."

Selena comes from a large family. She is one of six girls and also has two brothers.

"My parents worked very hard to provide for us. My dad worked two jobs, and my mom stayed home to raise us. They are my biggest supporters, and I am very happy that I can show them that their hard work and support has paid off."

Throughout her first years at WCEC, Selena worked two part-time jobs and attended Wharton County Junior College. Three years ago, she was promoted to full-time and was able to take advantage of the co-op's education assistance program.

As a result, she recently graduated from the University of Houston-Victoria with a Bachelor's in Business Administration concentrating on Human Resources.

"I am thankful to the co-op for investing in my education. I am looking forward to putting my degree to work for the good of the co-op and its members."

As a CSR, Selena can be found in our front office assisting members with new applications, payments or answering any



questions they may have. She enjoys hearing their stories and getting to know them.



"I also enjoy working for Wharton County Electric because they make you feel like family. This is a very family-oriented company. The people I work with are wonderful and are always there to help me if needed."

Selena and her fiancée Nate Chapa have one daughter, Haisley. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with family especially her daughter. She also enjoys movie nights and shopping.

The greatest advice she's ever received came from her mom. "She told me to never depend on anyone and never stop working for what you want to achieve. I was taught this from a young age. I have worked since I was 11 years old at my aunt's restaurant. If I wanted something, I worked hard for it so my parents didn't need to spend money on me. I wanted to achieve everything on my own. Thanks to my parents, I am where I am today."

In ten years, she sees herself still with the cooperative. "I'm one lucky girl to work for such a great company, and I look forward to growing in my career with them," she says.

Selena is determined, dedicated and hard-working. WCEC is proud of her accomplishments and is looking forward to seeing how she will help shape the co-op in the future.

We are proud to have Selena on your HOME TEAM.



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Have a Safe Fourth of July

FIREWORKS ARE A MUCH-ANTICIPATED HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOURTH OF JULY BUT ALSO present a significant danger.

The best option is to attend a public fireworks display and leave it to the professionals, but if your holiday isn't complete without setting off a few of your own, **please take these precautions:**

- ▶ Follow all local laws, and read and follow product directions.
- ▶ Do not allow children to handle fireworks.
- ▶ Make sure fireworks are used on a hard, stable surface in an open, clear area, and never attempt to relight a "dud."
- ▶ Make sure there is water nearby in case of an emergency.
- ▶ Wear ear protection.
- ▶ Never light fireworks in a container.
- ▶ If swimming is part of your plan, make sure children are always supervised in or around the water. Take responsibility for your children even in the company of other adults. Consider hiring or nominating a lifeguard.
- ▶ Many people travel over the holiday, and congestion, accidents, road rage and impaired driving can quickly turn the holiday into a tragedy. Make sure your car is in excellent condition and that you are rested, alert and sober if you are driving. Plan ahead for a designated driver if appropriate.
- ▶ If barbecue is on the menu, be careful when lighting the grill, and make sure an adult is always present around a heated grill. Be sure to put away perishables to avoid eating spoiled food. Make sure to cook meats thoroughly on the grill.
- ▶ Watch out for signs of heatstroke, such as hot, red skin; changes in consciousness; a rapid or weak pulse; and rapid or shallow breathing. If you suspect someone is suffering from heatstroke, call 911.
- ▶ And don't forget to take special precautions with your pets. Fireworks can be terrifying for them, so keep them indoors or in another safe place.
- ▶ Drink plenty of water, wear sunscreen and have a wonderful Independence Day.



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Independence Day

HAPPY 4TH OF JULY!

Saturday, July 4

Our offices will be closed Friday, July 3, in observance of the holiday.



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RECIPE OF THE MONTH



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Handle Food Safely When Grilling Outdoors

ONE OF AMERICA'S FAVORITE SUMMER PASTIMES IS GRILLING, AND SAFE GRILLING starts with proper food handling.

Here are a few simple guidelines for grilling safely:

Wash away harmful bacteria. Avoid providing a hotbed for bacteria. Unwashed hands are a prime cause of food-borne illness, also known as food poisoning, as are unwashed perishable foods such as meat, seafood, and peeled or cut fruits and vegetables.

Keep perishable foods cold. If you'll be meeting up with friends away from your backyard grill, it's best to transport all perishables in an insulated cooler kept cold with ice or frozen gel packs.

Throw away any perishable leftovers that have been out of a refrigerator or cooler for more than two hours—one hour if the temperature is above 90 degrees.

Keep coolers out of direct sunlight and avoid opening them frequently, to keep the cold air inside.

Marinate safely. Marinated meats should be stored immediately in a refrigerator or cooler, not on the kitchen counter or outside next to the grill. As long as a marinade is stored in a cool environment, it can remain there safely for several hours or days.

Do not use marinade from a raw meat/marinade mixture as a sauce on cooked meat, unless you first cook the sauce to a boil for at least three minutes to kill harmful bacteria.

Use grilling shortcuts. Precooking food partially indoors before putting it on a preheated grill will give you quick results when your friends are hungry or your grill is slow or small. Conversely, flame-grill meat for a smoky, charbroiled flavor, then bake in an oven until it's cooked properly.

Cook thoroughly and use a meat thermometer. It's best to cook food to the safe minimum internal temperature to destroy harmful bacteria. On the grill, meat and poultry will brown quickly, but the inside might only be cooked partially. To be sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature, use a meat thermometer.

Here are some safe minimum internal temperatures:

- ▶ Chicken: 165 degrees
- ▶ Beef hamburgers: 160 degrees
- ▶ Beef, veal and lamb (steaks, roasts and chops): medium-rare 145 degrees, medium 160 degrees
- ▶ Pork: 165 degrees

With proper refrigeration and thorough cooking, your backyard barbecue will be a tasty success.

Basic Barbecue Rub

- 4 parts salt
- 4 parts brown sugar
- 4 parts cracked or coarse-ground black pepper
- 4 parts paprika
- 2 parts garlic or onion powder
- 1 part chili powder
- Ground red pepper (cayenne, ancho or chipotle, for example), to taste

1. Thoroughly mix spices in a bowl with a tight lid.
2. Rub a generous amount of spice mix on all surfaces of meat before grilling or smoking. Keep surplus rub covered.

COOK'S TIP When using this rub with pork, try adding ginger, dry mustard or turmeric. For beef, crank up the red pepper. Toss in a little lemon pepper or citrus zest with chicken.

Find this and more delicious recipes online at TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM

Electric Cooperatives Are Economic Engines

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES ARE NOT JUST DISTRIBUTORS OF ELECTRICITY; THEY ARE ALSO economic engines within the communities they serve. Collectively, their impact goes far beyond the area.

“Affordable and reliable electricity is a key ingredient for a successful economy,” says Jim Matheson, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO. “Because electric cooperatives were built by, belong to and are rooted in the communities that they serve, they play a vibrant role as economic cornerstones for millions of Amer-

ican families, businesses and workers.”

About 611,600 jobs are supported every year by electric cooperatives in the United States, according to a study commissioned by NRECA. That includes direct employment of 68,200 co-op jobs, 97,600 contractor jobs, 170,900 supplier jobs and 274,900 consumer spending jobs. Overall, the electric power industry, of which co-ops are a part, supports more than 7 million jobs, counting direct and induced jobs.

“Affordable and reliable electricity is the heartbeat of the American economy and is essential to the nation’s economic growth,” Matheson says. “As not-for-profits owned

by the members we serve, our broader purpose is to empower local communities to thrive. Co-ops are proud to continue recruiting top-tier talent from local communities as we work to meet tomorrow’s energy needs.”

Through their operation, electric co-ops contribute \$88.4 billion to the U.S gross domestic product each year and generate more than \$22 billion in federal, state and local taxes. Additionally, co-ops invest \$12 billion annually in local economies nationwide, according to the study.

In 2017, America’s electric cooperatives returned more than \$1.1 billion in excess revenues, or capital credits, to their members. Those dollars filter back into local economies.

“For decades, America’s electric cooperatives have played a vital role in the U.S. economy,” the study concludes. “Electric co-ops ... are locally engaged in their communities, driving economic activity and fostering development.”

This local, member-driven structure is also one reason why cooperatives enjoy the highest consumer-satisfaction scores within the electric industry, according to J.D. Power and Associates and the American Customer Satisfaction Index.



DEAN SMITH/EC



**Wharton County
Electric Cooperative**

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Gary Raybon

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Civil War collectibles are among today's most popular and sought after artifacts. But no Civil War collection can be complete without including one of the very FIRST-EVER Civil War commemorative coins struck by the United States Mint: The 1925 Stone Mountain Silver Half Dollar.

Both the coin and the Stone Mountain Memorial near Atlanta, Georgia feature Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson on horseback. The Stone Mountain Memorial was designed by famed sculptor Gutzon Borglum, whose next masterpiece would be the magnificent Mount Rushmore.

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A Town Tormented

The 1927 Rocksprings tornado ranks among the state's deadliest

BY MELISSA GASKILL

ON APRIL 12, 1927, A TORNADO TORE through the Edwards County town of Rocksprings, killing 74 people and injuring more than 200. Among Texas tornadoes, it ranks as the third deadliest, behind one that struck Waco on May 11, 1953, killing 114 and injuring 597, and one that hit Goliad on May 18, 1902, also killing 114 and injuring 250.

The damage scale for twisters goes from EF0 to EF5, with EF5s inflicting the most damage. Since 1950, when official record keeping began, the National Weather Service has determined that 59 tornadoes qualify as EF5, six of them in Texas: Jarrell, May 27, 1997; Brownwood, April 19, 1976; Valley Mills, May 6, 1973; Lubbock, May 11, 1970; Wichita Falls, April 3, 1964; and the 1953 Waco twister.

Rocksprings, 100 miles west of San Antonio, became the seat of Edwards County in 1891, complete with a courthouse. Townspeople built a public school in 1893, and by 1914, the town had 500 residents, a hotel, saloons, a general store and bank. A high school opened in 1916.

On that afternoon in 1927, enormous black clouds gathered, producing large hail and winds that took out the power. The tornado touched down 3 miles to the northwest and moved southeast, growing to almost a mile wide as it crossed Rocksprings. It continued southeastward for at least 35 miles and may have traveled as far as 65 miles.

The second floor of the high school, where a music recital had been planned



Only eight buildings remained after the milewide tornado ripped through Rocksprings.

for that evening, was gone. “If it had happened an hour earlier, the whole town would have been in the school auditorium,” says Andrew Barnebey, president of the Devil’s Sinkhole Society in Rocksprings. Its visitor center has a small display on the tornado. “Only eight buildings in town were not damaged.” The twister destroyed all the town’s churches, damaged the courthouse (but not the jail) and toppled the water tower. The town of Junction, 47 miles northeast, gave Rocksprings a new one, Barnebey adds.

“The telephone operator had to go out of town to find a live telephone line to tell the rest of the world about it,” he says. “People came from throughout the surrounding countryside and even Mexico to help. The first rescuers were soldiers on horseback from Fort Clark.”

The town held a commemorative ceremony on the event’s 90th anniversary, in 2017. Edwards County Historical Commission chair Kari Cloudt says research for the event turned up many heartbreaking stories, including entire families lost. Others show the goodness in people, she

adds, such as the 1,000 doses of tetanus vaccine sent by what is now Bristol-Myers Squibb to San Antonio’s Kelly Field, whose pilots airdropped them into town.

The twister damaged the original, wooden circa-1916 Rocksprings Hotel, but a concrete wing added in 1926 served as a temporary hospital for those not seriously injured, says Debra Wolcott, current owner. Those with serious injuries were taken to hospitals in San Antonio via train.

The town quickly replaced the school with a larger one and rebuilt churches and the hotel. The 2010 census counted 1,182 residents. Visitors know Rocksprings as the Angora goat capital of the world and for the nearby Devil’s Sinkhole State Natural Area, famous for a seasonal population of 3 million Mexican free-tailed bats.

But locals can’t escape memories of 1927.

“A 14-year-old girl taking a bath when the tornado hit flew about 2 miles in the bathtub and landed in a debris field. There is still debris there,” Cloudt says. “A lot of people who are still here lost family members. It must have been just a hideous storm.”

Read more about **Melissa Gaskill’s** work at melissagaskill.blogspot.com.

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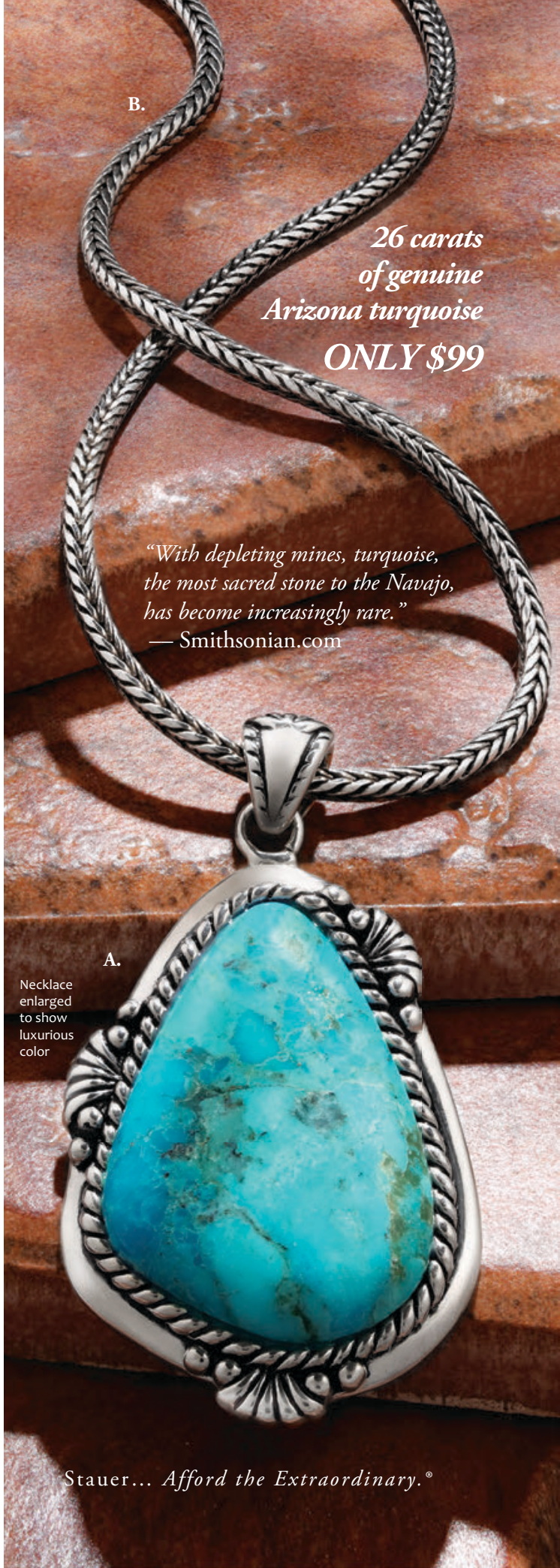
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Hot Off the Grill

WE'RE LUCKY IN TEXAS THAT GRILLING season often lasts all year long. I take advantage by branching out from hamburgers and hot dogs to experiment with other flavors on the grill, which resulted in this recipe.

For a moist burger, you'll need chicken breast and fattier chicken thigh meat. Take care not to press the patties onto the grill, which will make the juices run out.

Make the optional slaw in advance to let the flavors meld while you prepare the burgers. Brown rice vinegar and sesame oil can be found in the Asian section of your grocery store. If you can't find Thai basil, regular basil will do.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Thai Peanut Chicken Burgers

SLAW

- ½ cup shredded red cabbage
- ½ cup shredded carrots
- ¼ cup radish matchsticks
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
- 1–2 teaspoons chopped fresh mint
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 2 teaspoons brown rice vinegar

BURGERS

- ½ pound ground chicken breast
- ½ pound ground chicken thigh
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Thai basil
- 2 whole wheat hamburger buns

SAUCE

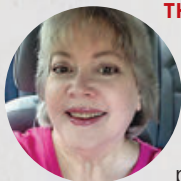
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1½ teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon brown rice vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- Crushed red chile flakes, to taste
- Chopped peanuts

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



Recipes

Hot Off the Grill



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

STEPHANIE BALDOCK | WOOD COUNTY EC

Moist and flavorful, this dish is a hit for those who love jalapeño poppers. The marinade ensures the chicken stays juicy on the grill, and its sweet tang provides a nice contrast to the bacon and heat of the pepper. When grilling, make sure to start with the side that has the loose bacon ends, as it will help adhere the bacon to the chicken.

Devil Chicken

- ¾ cup teriyaki sauce
- ¾ cup Italian salad dressing
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- 12-14 boneless, skinless chicken tenders
- 12-14 slices jalapeño pepper
- 12-14 slices bacon

1. Whisk together teriyaki sauce, salad dressing and brown sugar until sugar is dissolved.
2. Place chicken tenders in a bowl or 1-quart baking dish. Pour marinade over the chicken and turn chicken to coat

thoroughly. Cover and let marinate in a refrigerator at least 2 hours or overnight.

3. When ready to cook, prepare grill for cooking over a medium flame. Place one slice of jalapeño on top of each tender, then wrap a slice of bacon around the length of the tender.
4. Grill bacon-wrapped chicken tenders 6-7 minutes on each side, until they reach a temperature of 160 degrees and juices run clear when cut into. ▶ Serves 4.



\$500 Recipe Contest

Does your family favor turkey, ham, beef or another main dish for the holiday table? Tell us what you serve for **The Main Event**. Enter our December contest by **July 10**. Featured recipes will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

ENTER ONLINE at 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.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

1. **SLAW:** In a bowl, mix together all ingredients. Set aside.
2. **BURGERS:** In a large bowl, mix together all ingredients. Form mixture into two patties and set aside.
3. Prepare a grill or stovetop grill pan.
4. Cook patties 5-6 minutes on each side over medium heat, until completely cooked through.
5. **SAUCE:** In another bowl, whisk together peanut butter, soy sauce, honey, rice vinegar, garlic, sesame oil and crushed red chile flakes.
6. Assemble chicken patties, slaw and peanut sauce on buns. Sprinkle on chopped peanuts, add top bun and serve. ▶ Serves 2.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Lemony Grilled Potato Salad.

Butter Lover's Steak

JESSICA DEEMER | PEDERNALES EC

This rib-eye recipe gets a boost from a butter rub and a simple finishing sauce. "This is the creation of my 8-year-old son, Mason, who is a huge butter lover," Deemer says. The sauce will thicken as it stands, so make it just before serving. Whisk in additional milk for a thinner sauce.

- 4 rib-eye steaks
- 1 stick (½ cup) butter, softened, divided use
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 ounces cream cheese, cut into small pieces
- ⅓ cup whole milk
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon olive oil

1. Preheat grill to high heat.
2. Using a sharp grilling fork, poke 4-8 holes in each steak to allow butter to be absorbed. Rub both sides of the steaks generously with about half of the butter. Season steaks with salt and pepper on both sides.
3. Slice remaining butter into 4 pieces and set aside.
4. Sear steaks 1 minute on each side, then move to indirect heat and place a piece of butter on each steak. Grill 3-4 minutes per side, then remove from heat and tent steaks with foil to keep warm.

5. To make the sauce, place the cream cheese and milk in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Stir until cream cheese is almost completely melted, then remove from heat and continue to stir until the sauce is smooth and lump-free. Stir in garlic powder, olive oil and salt to taste.

6. Transfer steaks to a plate and pour the sauce on top, or serve it on the side.

► Serves 4.

Kielbasa Kebabs

PEGGI TEBBEN | TRI-COUNTY EC

If using wooden skewers, be sure to soak them in water before assembling kebabs to prevent them from catching fire while grilling.

- 4 packages (12 ounces each) kielbasa, cut into bite-size chunks
- 2 cans (20 ounces each) pineapple chunks, ½ cup juice reserved
- 16 ounces whole button mushrooms, cut in half from top through stem
- 3 bell peppers, cut into bite-size chunks
- 2 onions, cut into bite-size chunks

- 1 cup soy sauce
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon California-style garlic seasoning with parsley
- 1 teaspoon Montreal steak seasoning

1. Assemble the kebabs by layering sausage, pineapple, mushroom, bell pepper and onion onto barbecue skewers. Repeat, pushing layers tightly together, until skewers are completely full, beginning and ending with sausage.
2. Place kebabs into a large casserole or other dish that allows them to lie flat.
3. Whisk together reserved pineapple juice, soy sauce and brown sugar until sugar is dissolved. Pour over the kebabs and then turn kebabs to coat.
4. Cover and place in the refrigerator overnight, turning kebabs every so often.
5. When ready to cook, prepare grill for cooking over a medium flame. Brush kebabs with excess marinade from the pan, then sprinkle seasonings on both sides.
6. Grill kebabs over indirect heat 10 minutes per side. ► Makes 30 kebabs.



Marinade Tips

Marinades are one of the easiest ways to liven up your grilled foods. A few tips:

INGREDIENTS CAN VARY, but don't forget salt, which helps the meat absorb even more of the marinade's flavor.

POKING SMALL HOLES into your meat before marinating will help it absorb the sauce.

COMPLETELY COVER MEAT with the marinade, and let it rest in the refrigerator to prevent food-borne illnesses.

MEGAN MYERS

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—T.S. Eliot, poet and literary critic

GRACE FULTZ

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



▲ **LORY VON STADEN**, Heart of Texas EC: “Exploring murals and downtown Brenham.”

▼ **J. REAGAN FERGUSON**, Central Texas EC: “Exploring the Longhorn Caverns State Park in the summertime is a great way to cool off.”



▲ **DENISA MCBEE**, Southwest Texas EC: “While on a visit to our farm, our grandson, Max Dawson, was exploring his granddad’s tractor. He found the perfect spot for a rest.”



▲ **STEVE COYLE**, Pedernales EC: “I captured this image of my friend Paul midway through our five-day kayak trip down the Devils River in West Texas. It was definitely one of the more adventure-filled journeys of my life.”

AROUND TEXAS ▶ TCP's monthly list of local events has been suspended due to COVID-19 cancellations. Always call or check an event's website for scheduling details.



◀ **LENORA ISENHOUR**, Pedernales EC: "Cousins Ava Isenhour and Nora Lynn frolic on the beach at Port Aransas."



▲ **JOHNATHAN KANA**, Bluebonnet EC: "The kids were fascinated with the flourishing ecosystem in a pool of water atop Enchanted Rock."



UPCOMING CONTESTS

NOVEMBER EXTREMES	DUE JULY 10
DECEMBER ON WHEELS	DUE AUGUST 10
JANUARY DINERS	DUE SEPTEMBER 10

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▲ **KIM LEATHERWOOD**, United Cooperative Services: Santa Elena Canyon, Big Bend National Park.



▲ **MARVIN MILLER**, Pedernales EC: "Christin Miller has helped her dad explore and survey Texas caves for years."



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Something's Fishy Here

Catfish Plantation in Waxahachie takes you deep-fried to the other side

FOR GENERATIONS, FRIED CATFISH, WITH its faithful sidekicks french fries and hush puppies, has served family reunions and Southern potlucks. Waxahachie's Catfish Plantation provides this country classic but requires visitors to go beyond the normal.

Waxahachie, the Crape Myrtle Capital of Texas, is also known for its dozens of ornate historic homes. I discovered that one of these 19th-century gingerbread houses delivers some of the best catfish in Texas from one of the state's strangest dining rooms.

I knew something was different about the Catfish Plantation when I noticed two cartoon ghosts dancing on the restaurant's logo. Once I stepped inside, I realized the ghost theme continues throughout the building, appearing in framed pictures, salt and pepper shakers, and even the peppermint dish. This would have made sense at Halloween, but my visit was in April. The hostess confirmed my suspicions that by all accounts, the house is haunted. I asked if she believed in ghosts, and she said, "After working here, absolutely."

I took a seat in the parlor to wait for my table and noticed two binders filled with handwritten customer stories about experiences of the paranormal kind. I couldn't resist reading spooky stories ranging from disappearing silverware to unexpected taps on the shoulder. There were even a number of customer photos that, if tilted just right, captured a face in the window.

The house was built in 1895, and since



Chet was expecting a frying catfish, not a flying catfish.

it was converted to a restaurant in 1984, otherworldly occurrences have become as common as the catfish. The Landis family purchased this institution more than a decade ago. Shawn Landis, the executive chef and family matriarch, provides background to support customer and staff ghost stories. She recounts tales of the antique crank-style doorbell ringing on its own and the light switches that sit inside a glass case flipping off without warning. Even so, she was quick to assure me that nothing sinister ever happens. "Customers may come for the ghosts, but they come back for the catfish," Landis said.

Before I could dine, I felt obligated to brave the most haunted room in the house: the men's restroom. That room is notorious for shadowy figures appearing in the mirror and for the latch unlocking without help from human hands. I took a deep breath and tried not to look in the mirror as I washed my hands.

The hostess seated me in the front room, where I looked over a menu filled with options including steak and grilled quail. I couldn't pass up the house special Cajun catfish, which features a layer of spice beneath the golden cornmeal crust. It was some of the best catfish I've eaten on the road, which made me wonder why they needed to embrace a gimmick like ghosts in order to fill seats. The food could speak for itself.

These thoughts left me with the uneasy conclusion that the ghost stories were not a marketing ploy but actually were true. I was not going to believe the stories until I had a ghostly experience for myself. With that in mind, I had no choice but to order a piece of homemade bread pudding topped with white chocolate sauce, just to give the ghosts a little longer to haunt me.

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 of the ghostly Catfish Plantation in Waxahachie.

COURTESY CHET GARNER

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