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September 2021



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08 Second to None

Texas Tech University's long-awaited veterinary school begins mission of bolstering rural communities.

*By Chris Burrows
Photos by Dave Shafer*

Current Events His Way

When West Hansen needs an escape from society, he just goes with the flow.

*By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

ON THE COVER

Paris veterinarian Wally Kraft with his sons—Jack, left, who is in veterinary school at Oklahoma State University, and Trey, also a vet.

Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE

West Hansen negotiates boulders in the Río Gashan in Peru.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

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Ocean Currents

UNDERWATER VOLCANOES generate so much energy that they could power entire continents. But there's a catch, say the British scientists researching such eruptions.

"I would say there is effectively zero chance of capturing the energy for all sorts of reasons, such as we don't know when or where the eruptions will happen, very tricky to access, etc.," volcanologist David Ferguson, of the University of Leeds, told Vice. "The point of the comparison was really just to illustrate how powerful/energetic these things are."



“I never think of the future. It comes soon enough.”

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

THE SWEETEST SOUND IN THE WORLD IS ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Below are some of the responses to our July prompt: **I should have paid more attention ...**

To my mother's way of preparing hearty and flavorful meals with simple ingredients on a shoestring budget for our family of seven.

DEBORA MARINO
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
KOPPERL

To my retirement 30 years beforehand.

THOMAS ALAN MOORE
VIA FACEBOOK

To my parents telling me to enjoy childhood because once you're an adult, you're an adult FOREVER.

KAY RAY
VIA FACEBOOK

To the fine print.

GARY L. GALLOWAY
TRI-COUNTY EC
WEATHERFORD

When he said "sign here" at the draft board.

ED FAHSOLTZ
VIA FACEBOOK

To see more responses, read Currents online.



STEP UP TO SAFETY

Aluminum ladders can conduct electricity and so can nonmetallic fiberglass ladders when they're dirty or wet. When working outdoors with a ladder, keep it at least 10 feet away from power lines and always carry it horizontally to avoid hitting a line.



Earliest Inconvenience

ON HIS PREGNANT WIFE'S BIRTHDAY last year, Casey Walls wasn't celebrating. Instead, the Wood County Electric Cooperative lineworker was packing his bags August 28, preparing for long days of hard work after Hurricane Laura left tens of thousands of East Texas electric cooperative members in the dark.

Walls wasn't worried either because Shea wasn't due until November.

But around 5 a.m. about four days into his trip, Walls was awakened by his cellphone, which showed dozens of missed calls. His father was on the line. Shea had gone into labor hours earlier. Walls rushed to Tyler, where Shea gave birth just 20 minutes after he arrived.

Twins Braxten, above left, and Casen celebrate their first birthdays September 1.



Fungi to the Rescue

Don't ever underestimate the power of a fungus, the extraordinarily versatile life-form that produces mushrooms. Fungi can be trained to eat cigarette butts, used diapers, oil spills and even radiation.



TCP *Contests and More*

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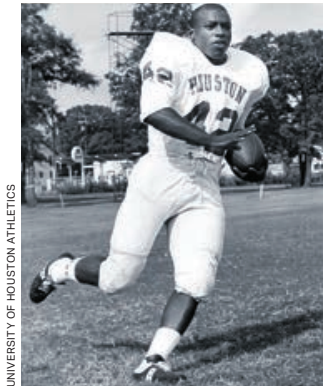


More About McVea

Groundbreaking Cougar [Currents, July 2021] reminded me of a game Warren McVea played in 1963. San Antonio Brackenridge faced crosstown Robert E. Lee in one of the most entertaining high school football games ever played. My dad and I watched it together at Alamo Stadium.

It had two of the most explosive running backs in the country, McVea and Lee's Linus Baer. Each team scored just about every time they got the football—McVea dancing and speeding around Lee defenders, and Baer running through and over Brackenridge defenders. Lee won, 55-48.

Rick Covington
Pedernales EC
Cedar Park



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ATHLETICS



I loved the story and the illustration [Parent Imperfect, June 2021]. Martha Deeringer wrote a wonderful tribute to her father while also reminding us to forgive ourselves for having once been teenagers embarrassed by a parent or grandparent.

LINDA PIAZZA
VIA FACEBOOK

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An Unlikely Blueprint

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DANIEL SVETLIK
PEDERNALES EC
VICTORIA

Slice of Heaven

We agree Dala Burk's Tangy Tomato Slices [June 2021] are a winner.

We used Big Beef tomatoes, Texas 1015 onions, fresh basil and parsley—all grown in our garden.

We read *Texas Co-op Power's* recipes enthusiastically every issue and have for the past 25 years. However, we had never made any of them. But with a counter full of tomatoes from the garden this year, we couldn't resist.

We could not wait for the dish to marinate in the refrigerator and had to try it once done. OMG!

Marilynn Schmidt
Bluebonnet EC
Somerville

Minor Typo, Major Figure

Chet Garner's article about the funeral museum was interesting, but I need to correct one thing [A *Serious Undertaking*, July 2021]. The millions of Catholics in Texas will know that we buried our beloved Pope John Paul II. We haven't had a III yet.

Theresa Phinney
Bryan Texas Utilities
College Station

TCP WRITE TO US

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

Texas Co-op Power

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Paris veterinarian Wally Kraft, with help from his son Jack, wraps a quick-set cast on a horse. OPPOSITE As Texas Tech University graduates new vets, relief from long workdays could be on the horizon for rural vets like the Krafts.

Second to *None*

Texas Tech University's long-awaited veterinary school begins mission of bolstering rural communities



family, but working 50–60 hours a week made that a challenge. “I was like, ‘If we go into rural practice, we are never going to have a life.’”

Solomon Schilling and 31 other faculty members began reshaping that reality in August, when they welcomed the inaugural class to the Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine in Amarillo—Texas’ first new vet school in more than a century. Decades in the making, Tech established

BY CHRIS BURROWS • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

Bethany Solomon Schilling still cringes when she hears the ring tone. The ring tone that years ago interrupted dinners, events and sleep to let her know there was an emergency at one of the Central Texas clinics where she worked as a veterinarian.

She grew up surrounded by animals on a ranch and earned a scholarship to help pay for her veterinary schooling. The field combined everything she loved: science, medicine and agriculture.

But then Solomon Schilling went to work caring for animals at those clinics in Lockhart and Luling, where workweeks ran into weekends and that ring tone stretched workdays into nights. Gone were the “referral zebras” of her university’s teaching hospital, she said, replaced by the everyday rigors of mixed-animal veterinary medicine, where demand far outpaces supply in many parts of Texas, leading to burnout among vets.

“At some point you think, ‘Is this sustainable?’” Solomon Schilling said. She and her husband were trying to start a

the school with the specific intent of recruiting passionate students from small towns and forming them into career-ready practitioners prepared to help address the shortage of veterinarians, especially in rural Texas.

“There’s a high demand in Texas, but it’s not being met in these rural communities where we need them,” said Clayton Cobb, another professor. “That’s where Tech comes in.”

Texas counts 6,600 practicing veterinarians but needs 1,300 more to reach the national average for the state’s population, according to Tech. Fewer than 200 of those vets work exclusively on livestock in rural parts of the state that has nearly double the number of cattle of any other state and hundreds of thousands more horses and almost a million more goats than any other state.

But many Texas vets say a new veterinary school—especially one focused on rural students and underserved communities—is long overdue.

“If you’re going to select all the kids out of Houston, Dallas and places like that, you’ve got very little hope of getting very many of those to ever go out past those metropolitan areas,” said Kynan Sturgess, a Panhandle veterinarian whose clinic is



served by Deaf Smith Electric Cooperative. “They didn’t grow up around farming and ranching; there’s no guarantee they’re going to stick around. But you’ve got a lot better shot of taking a kid from Dimmitt, Texas, and maybe expecting him to go back to some area like that.”

Sturgess is one of just four veterinarians permanently based in Deaf Smith County, where more than 600,000 cattle outnumber humans about 33 to 1. The Panhandle has the highest density of cattle in the country, but three veterinary schools in three other states are closer than Texas’ only other vet school—at Texas A&M University.

Sturgess has had to advertise openings at his Hereford clinic in other states—one reason he’s advocated for a school like Tech’s for years.

“The whole state, from a rural standpoint, is having problems,” he said. “I have colleagues all over the state that are constantly looking for somebody.”

About 40% of Texas’ working vets earned their degree outside the state; the rest went through Texas A&M University’s College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences—founded in 1916 and one of the best and largest vet schools in the nation.

As the second school in the state, Tech has the advantage of a specialized focus. “We don’t have to cater to everybody,” Cobb said.

Cobb grew up on a ranch in Northeast Texas and as an

‘A slow day is kind of unusual. We pretty much have to take care of everybody who walks in the front door. If you don’t love it, you’re not going to do it.’

undergraduate at Tech about 20 years ago, he advocated for a veterinary program before moving on to vet school at A&M. So when he heard about the Legislature including just that in the state’s 2019 budget, allocating \$17.35 million in operational support for the program (which donors supplemented with \$90 million for construction costs), he was thrilled. Then he got the call to come work there.

“When they said, ‘We’d like to extend you an offer. When do you think you could start?’ I told them, ‘Six hours and 36 minutes. Give me time to get there. We are starting today,’” Cobb said.

With firsthand experience in rural animal care, Cobb has tremendous respect for those who do it—and especially for Wally Kraft, his childhood vet, who still treats animals of all sizes at his Paris clinic.

“A slow day is kind of unusual,” said Kraft, 76, a member of Lamar Electric, who still pulls calves, sews up horses,



LEFT Kraft, assisted by vet tech Emily Odell, removes a benign tumor from a Doberman pinscher. BELOW In August, Texas Tech welcomed the first 64 students to its Amarillo campus—the 33rd veterinary school in the country.



“If you want to go into dairy, we’ll send you to dairies. If you want to go into feedlots, we’ll send you to feedlots,” Cobb said. It’s a way to immerse students in the life and lifestyle of rural animal care, preparing them for the everyday rigors and rewards of the job.

That’s part of what Solomon Schilling was missing from her own vet school experience.

“I felt very prepared intellectually but not for things that I saw day in and day out,” she said. “Communication, training, interpersonal relations, stress management, work-life balance, financial management ... things like that are the reasons people leave the profession or leave practice. It’s not the medicine that runs them off.”

Tech’s model aims to turn out confident, competent vets who are ready for that late-night phone call—because they’ve already experienced it.

“When you’re at a teaching hospital, certain services will only see a handful of patients a day, whereas in a very busy private practice, you can see 25, 30 patients a day per doctor,” Solomon Schilling said. “It’s a lot more volume and a lot more exposure.”

The 64 students who comprise Tech’s first class started their studies in Amarillo at the newly completed School of Veterinary Medicine, which houses 185,000 square feet of labs, offices and classrooms. A large-animal clinical

skills facility is about 2 miles northwest.

Access to the state-of-the-art facility won’t cost the class of 2025 as much as some schools. The average in-state veterinary medicine degree costs more than \$200,000, according to the VIN Foundation, but Tech students will pay \$88,000 for tuition (plus more for books and supplies). The hope is that saddling vets with less debt will allow them to work wherever they’re needed.

“A lot of people think we’re just raising country vets to work cows,” Cobb said. “That is not true at all. We could graduate our first four classes of veterinarians and send them all to El Paso and Laredo, and they would still be underserved communities.

“The people in those clinics and those communities out there are in desperate need. Nobody is really looking at them and trying to help them. That’s exactly the point of what we’re doing.” ■

and vaccinates and treats more and more dogs and cats as the Metroplex creeps toward the country. “We pretty much have to take care of everybody who walks in the front door. If you don’t love it, you’re not going to do it.”

Two of Kraft’s veterinarian sons are on their way to one day taking over his practice, but most of Texas’ aging vets don’t have that kind of security—even while demand swells. Texas added 4 million people since 2010—more than any other state—according to census data, but 41% of vets in rural Texas are older than 60.

“Everything has grown,” Sturgess said. “I’ve taken on more feedlots; I’ve got more horse clients and way more small animal clients.”

Tech is hoping to stem that tide using what it calls a distributed veterinary learning community to turn out well-rounded, practice-ready generalists. Unlike traditional vet schools like A&M, where fourth-year vet students practice at a teaching hospital, Tech students will do 4- to 6-week rotations at private practices across the state in their final year.

TCP WEB EXTRA See a timeline of veterinary education in Texas.

Current Events **His Way**



RIGHT Austin adventurer West Hansen at the San Marcos River. BELOW Hansen, right, and a guide navigate Mantaro River rapids in Peru. OPPOSITE Hansen makes a satellite phone call after his team's raft flipped in white water.



When **West Hansen** needs an escape from society, he just goes with the flow

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL



n a warm fall afternoon,

West Hansen glides a sleek, narrow racing canoe beneath a row of towering cypress trees on the San Marcos River.

He dips in a paddle, steers nimbly around a partially submerged log, then rides a riffle of blue-green water over a natural rock spillway as he makes his way from the tiny town of Martindale to the even tinier community of Staples, downstream from San Marcos.

The 6-mile, leisurely cruise takes less than two hours—barely a blip on the odometer for Hansen, 59, an endurance paddler who led an expedition 4,200 miles down the entire Amazon River in 2012 and paddled 2,100 miles down the Volga River in Russia two years later. As he pulls ashore, he tips back his cowboy hat—a trademark piece of attire for the leader of the Arctic Cowboys, who next year plan to become the first paddlers to kayak 1,900 miles through the Northwest Passage in the Arctic Archipelago.

“As our world has gotten busier and technology has evolved and we have 24/7 news cycles, it’s nice to get away,” he says.

Hansen, a social worker who helps seniors navigate the ins and outs of health care through his family’s home health care business in Port Arthur, is opinionated and bull-headed, traits that serve him well as an expedition leader. He tucks a notepad and pen in his front pocket, scribbling thoughts wherever he goes. In 2018 he ran unsuccessfully for U.S. Congress in the 25th district of Texas and won’t rule out the possibility of running again.

Hansen started paddling in the early 1980s when he took a whitewater kayaking class at what was then Southwest Texas State University. A few years later, he learned about the Texas Water Safari, a 260-mile paddling race from San Marcos to Seadrift on the Texas coast. Since then he’s finished the event—during which sleep-deprived paddlers navigate rapids, drag their boats over bobbing logjams, endure heat and exhaustion, and dodge alligators—21 times. He is also a

four-time winner of a 340-mile paddling race down the swift Missouri River. He endures miseries like chafing, sucking mud, nausea and biting insects, he says, because he enjoys the camaraderie and the escape from modern life.

“In every race, I think about quitting, even the ones I’ve won,” he says. “But I know how bad it’ll feel to pull out.”

Hansen funds his trips through donations and hard work, taking on odd carpentry jobs on weekends and raising money through his nonprofit organization, Worldwide Waterways.

In 2008, Hansen, who lives in Austin with his wife, Lizet, traveled to Iquitos, Peru, for the Great River Amazon Raft Race, where teams use eight 16-foot balsa logs to build a raft and sprint nearly 100 miles. Until that year, competitors lined all their logs side by side to make a wide raft. Hansen’s team instead spliced two rows of logs end to end. They won and set an overall record of 12 hours and 19 minutes.

More importantly, Hansen was hooked.

“The [Amazon] river really is the biggest river on the planet. It’s shocking to see that amount of anything in motion,” he says. “It was just so powerful, and it really moved me.”

On the flight home, one of his race partners lent him Joe Kane’s book, *Running the Amazon*. “Before I got back to Houston, I had pretty much read the entire thing,” he says. “By the time I landed in Austin, I thought, ‘OK, I can do this. I can paddle the entire Amazon River.’”

Hansen spent the next few years researching the river and lining up sponsors. He made a scouting trip to Peru in 2011. In 2012 he launched his expedition—the first to paddle the Amazon from a newly determined source high in the Andes Mountains to the sea. His wife and daughter, Isabella, who graduated from Georgetown University last spring, traveled there to watch for a few days.

“It’s very shallow, just a stream [at the start],” he said. “A lot of times we had to get out and drag our boats. A lot of times we were in whiteout snow conditions.”

Hansen wrote a book about the experience, *The Amazon From Source to Sea: The Farthest Journey Down the World’s Longest River*, which details the 111-day adventure, including the day they spotted a sloth swimming across the river and other days when they saw frolicking pink dolphins. They were held at gunpoint five times, discovered floating bales of marijuana and dodged boulders as big as refrigerators that rained from canyon walls where crews were building a dam.

Longtime friend Jeff Wueste was part of the Amazon team and Hansen’s only partner on the Volga trek. They met in 1992 and have teamed up for the Texas Water Safari several times. Wueste, who will paddle the Northwest Passage with the Arctic Cowboys, describes Hansen as determined and well prepared, someone who does the due diligence needed to accomplish big things.

'I love to be far away from everybody and the stimulus that's constantly coming at us.'



"He's good to the core," Wueste says. "Ultimately, he's driven to an end goal. But as many expedition leaders are, they're as egotistical as they can be. You're not going to find any wallflowers leading expeditions."

When the originally planned trip through the Northwest Passage in 2020 was postponed because of the pandemic, Hansen and four others set out to paddle 420 miles up the Texas coast instead.

They started at the state's sandy tail on South Padre Island and chugged to its refinery-studded tip at the Louisiana border, enduring tent-wrecking storms, campsites covered in enough ooze to host a mud-wrestling competition and swells so big they lost sight of one another. Their fingernails grew soggy and loose, and they labored to find a proper rhythm,



but they also paddled alongside pods of dolphins; pitched tents on small barrier islands covered in lush, lime-colored grass; and watched serene sunrises and sunsets.

When they finally pulled their 18-foot Epic sea kayaks ashore at Walter Umphrey State Park in Port Arthur, Hansen announced: "Well, that's done."

Underwater explorer and filmmaker Nancy McGee, who knows Hansen through the Explorers Club, a global organization whose members include astronauts, mountain climbers and aviators, describes him as the epitome of the 21st-century explorer.

"His goals are the stuff of dreams," she says, adding that he "has helped create a deeper understanding of the cultures he has encountered and the physical geography he has mastered."

For Hansen, who is already working on a second book, which will detail a history of Amazon expeditions, those accomplishments are only part of the motivation to explore.

"I love to be far away from everybody and the stimulus that's constantly coming at us," Hansen says. "I like doing things that haven't been done before, and that list is getting smaller and smaller." ■

ABOVE Hansen paddles down the Mantaro River. LEFT Hansen cruises the San Marcos River with author Pam LeBlanc.

TCP WEB EXTRA Check out more photos from West Hansen's 2012 Amazon River expedition.

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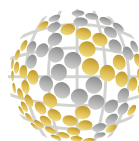
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3,000-Year-Old Beauty Secret Revealed

Turquoise — the original fashion icon — comes full circle for an amazing price.

She's been around for thousands of years, but she's never gone out of fashion. We're talking turquoise, one of the world's most ancient gems. Egyptian queens adorned themselves with turquoise jewelry more than 3,000 years ago. And the blue beauty is even more coveted now than she was a millennia ago.

Do you know someone who's even more beautiful now than when you first met? Then the Timeless Turquoise Pendant is for them — a stylish circle formed from seven total carats of natural turquoise and exquisite sterling silver metalwork. And the price? Let's just say we made sure timeless was attainable for less than you'd think.

Time is running out for timeless turquoise. Just because turquoise is timeless, doesn't mean supplies of it will last forever. Turquoise is only found a few places on Earth. Typically unearthed in arid climates like the American Southwest and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, turquoise requires a delicate balance of minerals and water to achieve its gorgeous range of blues. But even when conditions are optimal for turquoise to form, finding stones of gem-worthy quality is a challenge. There are very few turquoise mines left, and then, less than 5% of turquoise mined worldwide is of jewelry condition, making it rarer to come by than even diamonds.

There are turquoise and sterling silver pendants out there for over \$1,200. And while genuine turquoise can garner a pretty penny, there's no reason to be paying a designer price when we can bring you designer pieces for a remarkable price.

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— The Jewellery Editor, 2021



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MESSAGE FROM YOUR GENERAL MANAGER/CEO
GARY RAYBON

A Labor of Love

EACH SEPTEMBER WE CELEBRATE Labor Day, a national tribute to the contributions American workers make to the strength and prosperity of our country.

The word labor is defined as an expenditure of physical or mental effort, especially when difficult or compulsory. That definition is not lost on the employees of Wharton County Electric Cooperative. When the lights go off—whether due to thunderstorms, wildfires, hurricanes or ice storms—our lineworkers leave their families to work tirelessly in harsh and dangerous conditions to restore your power. Other employees handle your phone calls and dispatch crews to get electricity flowing to your home as quickly and safely as possible.

But that doesn't mean the job is a laborious punishment. It's a labor of love.



SWISHER EC

When the weather goes awry and the calls come in, employees who were safe at home often call in to see if there's anything they can do to help. We've had customer service representatives simply show up to help answer members' calls during a crisis. This is because they care about what they do. They care about the membership. And nothing is more important than making sure that every member is safe and sound—with the power humming—even during inclement weather.

And it's not just when the lights are off that our employees are working hard. Their dedication is evident every day.

Our lineworkers go through extensive training to ensure their safety and that of their fellow crew members. Our office staff is also trained to stay safe around electricity, and this, in turn, helps ensure your safety. WCEC is always here to educate you about the dangers of electricity, and through *Texas Co-op Power* and other

avenues, we pass along tips to help keep you safe and save you money by making energy-conscious decisions.

We don't do this because it's our job. We do it because we care about you, our members, who are our friends, family and neighbors.

Today I want to ask you, our member, to thank a co-op employee if you see one. Thank them for their commitment, their talent, their hard work and their service to the membership of this cooperative. After all, even though our offices will be closed for Labor Day on September 6, if your power goes out, we'll be on our way to fix it, holiday or no holiday. ■



CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY



WCEC GM/CEO Gary Raybon, WCEC Board Member Paul Phillips Jr., CASA Program Director Lucy May, CASA Recruiter Chris Mattingly, CASA Executive Director Bebee Manrique-McMillian, WCEC Board Members Judy Peter and Jim W. Harton.

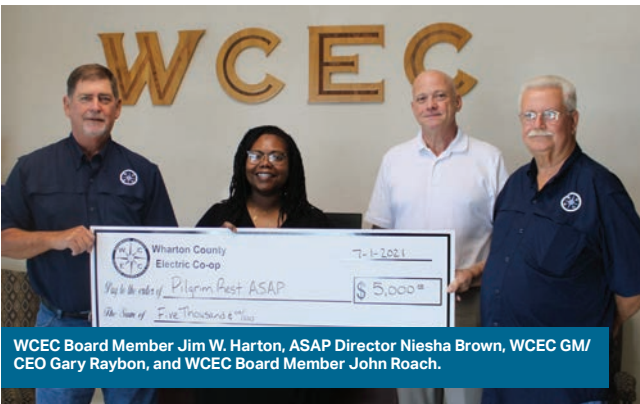
COBANK SHARING SUCCESS PROGRAM

One of Wharton County Electric Cooperative’s most unique and exciting community programs is the CoBank Sharing Success program, a matching grant opportunity open to local nonprofit organizations. Aimed at supporting local communities and people, the grant is made possible by our board of directors, in partnership with CoBank – a national nonprofit cooperative bank owned by the rural American cooperatives it services.



WCEC GM/CEO Gary Raybon, SPOT Supporters Rebecca Baron, Leeanna Shimek and Alexis Turner, SPOT President Christine Stransky, and WCEC Board Member John Roach. The puppies pictured were rescued near the El Campo City Landfill. They are being fostered by volunteers before heading to their forever homes.

“CoBank and WCEC have partnered in the Sharing Success matching grant program every year since 2012,” WCEC GM/CEO Gary Raybon says. “This grant program is a testament to CoBank and WCEC’s commitment to the communities and people that WCEC serves.”



WCEC Board Member Jim W. Harton, ASAP Director Niesha Brown, WCEC GM/CEO Gary Raybon, and WCEC Board Member John Roach.

CoBank’s Sharing Success fund matches charitable contributions made by its cooperative members, such as WCEC, to local nonprofits in their individual communities. The matching grant program is designed to celebrate the vital role that cooperatives play in individual communities across the country. CoBank states that collaborating with their customers to support worthy causes they care about is a great way for them to make a positive difference and fulfill its mission of service to rural America. Since its inception in 2012, the program has generated more than \$56 million in total charitable donations, primarily in rural areas across the country. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CoBank expanded the Sharing Success program to allow for a maximum match per local cooperative to \$10,000 and increasing the number of applications to four.



WCEC GM/CEO Gary Raybon, WCEC Board Member John Roach, Shall Not Hunger Representative Pastor Wayne Clement, WCEC Board Members Jim W. Harton and Paul Phillips Jr., Shall Not Hunger President Karl Rosenbusch, and WCEC Board Member Rick Graff.

In 2021, WCEC took advantage of this expansion by awarding four local nonprofit organizations with CoBank Sharing Success grants. Gulf Coast Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Wharton County Stray Pet Outreach Team (SPOT), Pilgrim Rest After School Activities Program (ASAP), and Shall Not Hunger each received \$5,000 - \$2,500 from WCEC with matching funds of \$2,500 from CoBank.

For more information on these organizations, visit:

www.CASA-MW.org

www.WCSPOT.org

www.PilgrimRestElCampo.org

www.ShallNotHungerEC.org

HOME TEAM SPOTLIGHT

Meet WCEC's Ashley Wells

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.

This month's HOME TEAM SPOTLIGHT features Ashley Wells.

Ashley is one of the newest members of the WCEC HOME TEAM. She began working at WCEC just a few short months ago.

Before coming to the co-op, Ashley worked for Child Protective Services, and although she found the work rewarding, she had always thought WCEC was an ideal match for her.

"I have always heard nothing but great things about working at the co-op. From the benefits to the co-workers who seem to be like family, I had my eye on a career here," she says. "When I learned of an open position, I jumped at the chance. So far, I love it!

"Everyone is like family here, and the co-op is very family-oriented. As a mom, I appreciate all that management does to make work/life balance easier. There is only one downfall to working here - you just can't follow a healthy diet as there is always someone bringing goodies to the office!"

Ashley is a Consumer Service Representative (CSR). She began part-time, and is already transitioning to a full-time position.

"Being a CSR is so rewarding! I am able to help our mem-



bers every day. Providing the highest level of satisfaction to our members is something that I value the most."

Ashley was born and raised in El Campo. She loves the small town living.

She says, "I have never wanted to leave the area. I've always been a fan of country living and couldn't imagine living anywhere else. You can't go anywhere without seeing someone you know."

Ashley is married to her high school sweetheart, Jonathan, who is a train engineer. The couple have two young children - son, Jaxon, and daughter, Brigstyn.

In her spare time, she enjoys bowling. A hobby that took her to the national tournament in Las Vegas this year. She also enjoys wade fishing.

"I grew up wade fishing with my grandpa. At the age of 7, I was already in the waters of Matagorda Bay," she says. "It was my favorite activity to do with him!"

Ashley dreams of visiting Canada one day.

"I would love to visit Banff in Alberta. The views are just beautiful!"

In ten years, she sees herself growing in her career here at WCEC.

Ashley describes herself as outgoing, supportive, and spontaneous. We couldn't agree more. She is already dedicated to learning as much as she can to serve our members, and we know she will support the growth of the co-op into the future.

We are proud to have her on your WCEC HOME TEAM. ■



FLUXFACTORY | ISTOCK.COM

Fall Brings National Farm Safety and Health Week

EACH YEAR SINCE 1944, the third week of September has been recognized as National Farm Safety and Health Week. This initiative was launched by the National Safety Council and has been proclaimed as such by each sitting U.S. president since Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the first document.

This year, National Farm Safety and Health Week is September 19–25, promoted by the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety to help protect the nation’s more than 2 million farm employees.

The agricultural sector is still the most dangerous in America, according to 2019 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which reveals that there were 573 fatalities, or an equivalent of 23.1 deaths per 100,000 workers that year.

Farmworkers are at high risk for injuries, work-related lung diseases, heat exposure, confined-space hazards, noise-induced hearing loss, struck-by and fall hazards, skin diseases, and certain cancers associated with chemical use and prolonged sun exposure, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The designated week in September corresponds to harvest season for many farm operations and is an apt time to remember safety guidelines.

The Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center offers useful checklists for farm safety, including one called Stop-Think-Act, that are relevant nationwide.

“This is a simple yet powerful safety tool that encourages everyone on the farm to consider the task or chore at hand, to ask themselves how their own actions could contribute to

Stop-Think-Act Checklist

Stop

- ▶ What could go wrong?
- ▶ How bad could it be?
- ▶ Has anything changed?

Think

- ▶ Do I clearly understand the task?
- ▶ Am I physically and mentally ready?
- ▶ Do I have the right tools and equipment?

Act

- ▶ Make it safe.
- ▶ Use the right tools.
- ▶ Follow the proper procedures.
- ▶ Reduce risks.
- ▶ Stop the task if it cannot be done safely.

a safe and productive outcome and stop if it can’t be done safely,” UMASH writes.

The Stop-Think-Act checklist can be downloaded from the UMASH website and distributed on farms. It’s meant to be completed before approaching a job.

Other useful and printable checklists cover topics such as working alone, anti-microbial resistance and preventing building fires.

This September and always, take time out for safety to protect farmworkers and family members from harm. ■



LISA BRONITTI | ISTOCK.COM

Understanding Power Blinks and Surges

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED your lights blink during a thunderstorm? Or perhaps you've returned home to find your microwave clock blinking despite a sunny day. When this happens, your home has likely experienced a brief disruption to your electric service, which could result from a power blink or surge. While the symptoms of blinks and surges can appear similar, what's happening behind the scenes can be quite different.

Power Blinks

Power blinks are brief service interruptions typically caused by a fault (short circuit) on a power line or a protective device that's working in reaction to the fault. Faults are caused by a variety of disturbances, like squirrels, birds or other small animals contacting an energized power line; tree branches touching a power line; or lightning. In fact, when it comes to power disruptions caused by critters, squirrels reign supreme. In 2019 alone, squirrels were responsible for more than 1,200 outages.

You may also experience a brief interruption when protective devices are working to detect the fault. Believe it or not, these brief power blinks caused by protective devices are actually good because that means the equipment is working as it should to prevent a prolonged outage.

Regardless of the outage cause, Wharton County Electric Cooperative crews will be on their way to inspect the damage and make necessary repairs. Any time you experience repeated power disruptions, please let us know so we can help you determine the cause and minimize future issues.

Power Surges

Power surges are brief overvoltage spikes or disturbances that can damage, degrade or destroy electronic equipment at your home or business. Most electronics are designed to handle small variations in voltage, but power surges can reach amplitudes of tens of thousands of volts, which can be extremely damaging to electronic equipment.

Surges can be caused by internal sources, like air conditioning systems, or external sources, like lightning and damage to power lines and transformers. We encourage all members to install surge protective devices to safeguard your sensitive electronics. ■

**ALWAYS
CALL
BEFORE YOU
DIG**



FALL IS THE PERFECT TIME to plant trees, shrubs and other plants. But before reaching for that shovel, you need to call 811. This is the national number that connects you to your local call-before-you-dig center, where you can ask for the approximate location of buried utility lines to be marked.

Many homeowners incorrectly believe they don't need to call 811 before breaking ground on projects such as tree and shrub planting. A call must be placed to 811 before every digging project, not just for tree and shrub planting, but also for projects such as building a deck, putting in a pole for a basketball goal or installing a mailbox.

There are more than 200,000 unintentional hits to underground utility lines annually across the country, and almost 40 percent of those happen because someone chose to make a judgment call instead of a phone call to 811.

Unintentionally striking an underground utility line while digging can cause harm to you or those around you, disrupt service to an entire neighborhood, and result in bills to cover repair costs and even fines in some areas.

So play it safe and call 811 before you dig. ■

Energy Savings for Fall

IT MIGHT NOT seem like it now, but colder weather is on its way, even if it takes a while to get to Texas. September is a good time to start planning how you're going to save energy in your home during the colder months.

During the fall and winter, keeping cold air out is the goal. To maintain a warm indoors, there are simple steps you can take to increase energy efficiency.

There's no better time to examine seals on doors and windows to check for air leaks. Caulk and weatherstrip as needed to seal in warm air and energy savings. Similarly, examine electrical outlets for air leaks, and where necessary, install foam gaskets behind them to prevent drafts.

During the day, open curtains or drapes on south-facing windows to let sunlight heat your home naturally. Close window treatments at night for an added layer of insulation.

As the temperature drops, schedule a service appointment for your heating system to ensure that it can operate at an optimal level.

Low-cost or no-cost steps for energy savings include taping or affixing heavy, clear plastic to the insides of your windowpanes to create an additional barrier against cold air. Ensure that the plastic is sealed tightly to the pane to help reduce infiltration.

Use a programmable thermostat to set the temperature as low as is comfortable when you are home (ideally around 68 degrees). When you are asleep or away, turn the temperature down. A downward adjustment of 10–15 degrees over long stretches of time can save 10% a year on heating and cooling costs, according to the Department of Energy. ■




LAURI PATTERSON | ISTOCK.COM

Beach House Pasta

- 2 teaspoons dried shrimp**
- 1 pound angel hair pasta or linguine**
- 3 tablespoons olive oil**
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced**
- Pinch crumbled chile pequin**
- 1 pound rock shrimp or other small shrimp, peeled and deveined, cut into small pieces**
- Kosher salt**
- 1 tablespoon chopped tarragon**
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley**
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon**
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice, plus more to finish**
- 3 tablespoons cold butter, diced**
- 2 scallions, sliced**

1. Grind dried shrimp with mortar and pestle; set aside.
2. Cook pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water until al dente. Drain it, reserving 1½ cups liquid.
3. Meanwhile, heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and chile and cook, stirring, about 1–2 minutes. Add rock shrimp, season with salt and cook, tossing, 1–2 minutes. Add the tarragon, parsley, lemon zest and juice, pasta, ¾ cup pasta cooking liquid, and butter, and toss to coat. Cook, tossing and adding more of the cooking liquid as needed, until sauce is glossy and coats pasta, and shrimp are cooked, about 3 minutes. Season with salt if needed.
4. Divide pasta among bowls and top with scallions and reserved dried shrimp.

 Find this and more delicious recipes online at TexasCoopPower.com.



Making A Difference...One Cent At A Time

Operation Round Up is a community service program funded by the members of Wharton County Electric Cooperative, Inc. All participating residential and small commercial members' bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar, and the extra change goes into the WCEC Charitable Fund which is distributed to local nonprofit organizations. The average annual tax-deductible contribution is about \$6 per account enrolled.

Since 2003, over \$300,000 has been given to local nonprofits through Operation Round Up. PROOF THAT YOUR CHANGE CAN GO A LONG WAY!

Find out more at MyWCEC.coop/RoundUp.

Electrical Safety Basics for Children



PIXELFT | ISTOCK.COM

PARENTS SHOULD TEACH children a valuable, potentially lifesaving lesson: Respect electricity.

Here are electrical safety basics every child should know:

Mixing water and electricity can kill you. Teach children not to use electric toys or other devices near water or in the rain.

Plugging multiple devices into a single outlet or power strip can create sparks and even cause a fire if that outlet can't handle the load. Teach kids to plug into surge-protected power strips or to use one device at a time and unplug the rest.

When they unplug those devices, they should grab them by the plug, not the cord. Yanking a cord out of an electrical outlet can damage the appliance, the outlet or the plug.

Electrical cords can be strangling hazards and might cause electrical burns if they are misused. Make sure youngsters keep cords away from their mouths and necks. It's best to hide cords so they aren't a temptation.

Electrical outlets are receptacles for electrical plugs only. Children should know from an early age that it's a no-no to put foreign objects or fingers into plugs. Sticking other items into an electrical socket can lead to electric shock or death. Use childproofing outlet covers.

Flying kites and climbing trees are never safe activities near power lines. If a tree has a power line running through it—or if it's even within reach of the line—it's not a safe place to play. If a kite gets caught in a power line, the child should not tug on it to get it loose. The string could conduct electricity and seriously hurt the child.

Electrical substations are fenced off to keep children and animals out. If a toy or small pet gets inside the fence, the child should tell a parent or teacher, who can call a trained worker to come and retrieve it.

WCEC offers electrical safety tips and activities specifically for children on our website at MyWCEC.coop/KidsCorner. ■



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Gary Raybon

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Patriot Day

Saturday, September 11

National Hunting and Fishing Day

Saturday, September 25

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France's Beef? Pigs

Ill-mannered hogs ruin France's attempt at a relationship with the newly independent Texas

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY MOLLOY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AFTER SECURING independence at San Jacinto, Texas was an independent country but one with no money and a shaky government. With no military force to secure its vast territory, Texas needed friends on the international stage and needed them quickly.

Texas turned first to the United States. Just months earlier, Stephen F. Austin had written, "We ought to get united to the United States as soon as possible."

Though the U.S. was not ready to pursue annexation, it was the first country to formally recognize the new sovereign nation. Congress made that move because it feared Britain or France might gain an inside track to the wealth of Texas.

The next country to recognize Texas

was France. A commercial treaty was signed September 25, 182 years ago, and it established import duties on Texas cotton in France and reduced import duties on French wines, brandies and silks in Texas ports. The French Legation was opened in Austin, and the Texas Legation was opened in Paris.

This recognition from France was of enormous significance because most European countries saw the Texas Revolution as internal unrest within Mexico and believed that Santa Anna might crush the rebellion and reclaim the wayward state.

Once recognized internationally, Texas needed support for its banking system. In 1841, Gen. James Hamilton, the Texas commissioner of loans, walked

TCP WEB EXTRA

Listen to W.F. Strong read this story.

into a French minister's office in Paris and asked for a \$5 million loan. The minister asked if he had any collateral, and the Texan said, "a territory as big as the kingdom of France."

At the time Texas was actually about 50% larger than France. It looked like this loan would sail through the French bureaucracy. Then some Texas pigs caused an international incident.

Back in Austin, hogs owned by the innkeeper Richard Bullock wandered onto the grounds of the French Legation and ate corn in the stable, tore up gardens and invaded the house. Dubois de Saligny, the chargé d'affaires of the legation, ordered his servant to shoot the pigs. An outraged Bullock wanted Saligny arrested, but Saligny claimed diplomatic immunity.

Bullock caught the servant outside the legation, beat him up and threatened to do the same to Saligny. The Frenchman cut off diplomatic relations with Texas before traveling to New Orleans. A year later, he returned to his post, but the pig war had effectively killed the loan.

Even so, Saligny's glowing reports of the unfathomable wealth and prosperity for which Texas was destined fueled France's interest in the nation.

By keeping close ties with Texas, France wanted to make a grab at the last foothold available for it in North America. Negotiations for a French colonization and stationing of 30,000 French troops along the Texas frontier continued un consummated until Texas was annexed by the U.S. in 1845.

France sacked Saligny for his ineptitude, and the trouble was all traced back to those pigs. As one French minister said of Saligny, "We can make mistakes, but we can't afford to look ridiculous." ■

Sweet Potatoes

Traditional holiday staple proves plenty versatile—from waffles to brownies

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Sweet potatoes are an ingredient that doesn't often get much love outside of the holidays, but these versatile spuds deserve a spot in your regular rotation. I try to make them at least once a week, changing up the preparation to keep my family from having dish fatigue. Mashed sweet potatoes are a great preparation, but we tend to have lots of leftovers each time. Enter sweet potato waffles, a lightly spiced way to brighten up any weekend breakfast.

Sweet Potato Waffles

2 cups flour
¼ cup packed dark brown sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
1½ cups milk
1 cup mashed sweet potatoes
¼ cup vegetable oil
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Spray oil, as needed

COOK'S TIP If you don't have a waffle maker, this recipe works beautifully for pancakes too.

- 1.** In a large bowl, combine flour, brown sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, ginger and nutmeg.
- 2.** In another bowl, whisk together milk, sweet potatoes, oil, eggs and vanilla until smooth.
- 3.** Pour wet mixture into dry and stir until completely incorporated and no dry bits remain.
- 4.** Preheat your waffle maker. Once hot, spray cooking plates with oil if needed, then scoop batter onto plates, close and cook according to the manufacturer's instructions. Keep waffles warm on a sheet pan in an oven set to low heat while you repeat with remaining batter.

SERVES 4

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Persimmon Sweet Potato Soup.





Oven-Roasted Sweet Potato Medley

BECKY POE
WOOD COUNTY EC

This easy side dish is excellent served with grilled proteins such as sausage or fish. Fresh cherry tomatoes added just before serving lend a pop of juicy sweetness, while the fresh jalapeño layers in heat.

- 1 pound sweet potatoes, cubed**
- 1 large poblano pepper, diced**
- 1 small red onion, cut into slivers**
- 1 cup cubed fresh pineapple, or 1 can (8 ounces) pineapple tidbits, drained**
- 2 tablespoons olive or avocado oil**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced**
- Juice of half a lime**
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, quartered**

1. Place a 12-by-18-inch rimmed baking sheet in the oven and preheat to 425 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, combine sweet potatoes, poblano, onion and pineapple. Add oil, salt and pepper and stir well to coat. Remove baking sheet from oven. Spread sweet potato medley onto heated baking sheet and roast 25 minutes, stirring halfway through.
3. Remove pan from oven and stir in cilantro and jalapeño. Drizzle with lime juice, then add cherry tomatoes and season to taste.

SERVES 4

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Texas Turkey Hash

HEATHER CARPENTER
TAYLOR EC



Spicy with a bit of sweetness, this hash makes an excellent breakfast, brunch or even dinner. Carpenter created the dish based on a favorite at an Abilene restaurant, making a few healthy substitutions along the way. Serve with a poached or fried egg for a more complete meal.

SERVES 4

- 2 cups cubed sweet potatoes, or 20 ounces frozen sweet potato cubes**
- 1 onion, chopped**
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped**
- 2 jalapeño peppers, sliced**
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt**
- 4 tablespoons grapeseed or olive oil, divided use**
- 1 pound turkey breakfast sausage**
- 2 pinches crushed red pepper flakes (optional)**
- 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Toss sweet potatoes, onion, garlic, jalapeños and garlic salt together with 2 tablespoons oil and spread onto a rimmed baking sheet. Roast in the oven 25–35 minutes or until fork-tender.
3. In a large skillet over medium heat, brown turkey sausage with red pepper flakes, if using. Transfer sausage to a bowl and set aside.
4. Using the same skillet, increase heat to medium high and add remaining oil and roasted vegetables. Add the maple syrup and stir once. Let potatoes cook, undisturbed, for a few minutes. Turn over a few pieces to check for browning; you want a crispy, brown potato.
5. Once potatoes are browned, stir in sausage and serve.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

PASTA DUE SEPTEMBER 10

From angel hair to ziti and manicotti to macaroni, pasta is a pantry staple. What's your prized dish? Enter at TexasCoopPower.com/contests by September 10 for a chance to win \$500.



Volcanic Sweet Potato Brownies

KANINA HADEL
PENTEX ENERGY

These brownies will surprise everyone at the dessert table. Supremely fudgy and rich, they're excellent topped with a dollop of whipped cream. This recipe makes a large batch but can easily be halved.

- 3 pounds sweet potatoes
- Butter, for the pan
- 2¾ cups (about 24 ounces) smooth almond butter
- ⅔–¾ cup molasses or pure maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup cocoa powder
- ½ cup almond flour
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt

COOK'S TIP For a less gooey brownie, refrigerate overnight before serving.

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees and place sweet potatoes on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake 50 minutes or until sweet potatoes are soft when pressed. Let cool.
2. Lower oven temperature to 350 degrees and butter a 9-by-13-inch pan.
3. In a large-capacity blender or food processor, purée sweet potatoes until smooth. Add almond butter and blend to mix well. Add molasses or maple syrup and vanilla and blend to mix.

4. In a medium bowl, stir together cocoa powder, almond flour, baking soda and salt. Add dry ingredients into sweet potato mixture and blend until uniform.
5. Pour batter into prepared pan and bake 40–45 minutes. Let cool completely before serving.

MAKES 32 BROWNIES

TCP WEB EXTRA We have more than 900 searchable recipes at TexasCoopPower.com, including a salad, casserole and stew that feature sweet potatoes. Just search for "sweet potatoes."

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

La Grange's Tribute

Monument Hill tomb honors Texans killed in two notable clashes

BY CHET GARNER

WE CELEBRATE THE Battle of San Jacinto as the grand finale of the Texas Revolution. In reality, the struggle was far from over in 1836. Mexico never officially ratified Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna's treaty of surrender and made numerous attempts to retake Texas.

I tripped to the Central Texas town of La Grange to learn more about a group of men who gave their lives in the name of Texas sovereignty.

La Grange is a charming town with an impressive 19th-century courthouse and plenty of places to grab an authentic Czech kolach. I discovered the best views just south of the square, on a bluff overlooking the Colorado River. At this scenic spot sits the Monument Hill State Historic Site along with the ruins of the Kreische Brewery, one of the state's first commercial beer producers. I wasn't looking for a historic pint; I wanted to learn more about the stories that had intrigued me since childhood.

Just past the visitors center, I found an above-ground tomb and a 48-foot-tall shellstone obelisk engraved with the story of the men laid to rest here. Many were killed outside San Antonio in the 1842 Dawson Massacre, after Mexican forces had successfully retaken control of the city. Others were from the 1843 Mier expedition in Mexico. Known as the Black Bean episode, 176 captured Texians had to draw beans to determine their fates. Those who drew one of the 17 black beans immediately faced a firing squad.

In 1848 residents of La Grange exhumed the remains of the fallen men from both sites and reinterred them in a tomb on this bluff. Even Sam Houston attended the ceremony. I paused for a solemn moment. Looking out over the Texas landscape, I pondered the lives lost to claim Texas. ■

ABOVE Chet at the Kreische Brewery State Historic Site.

TCP WEB EXTRA Join Chet in his latest video, which takes in this site overlooking the Colorado River. See all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Call or check an event's website for scheduling details.

SEPTEMBER

09

Addison Vitruvian Nights Live: Bidi Bidi Banda, (972) 590-8866, [udr.com/vitruvian-park-events](http://udr.com/vitruvian-park/vitruvian-park-events)

10

Fredericksburg [10-12] Fall Planting Days Kick-Off, 1-800-848-0078, wildseedfarms.com

11

Conroe American Cancer Society Relay For Life/Bark For Life, (936) 520-0718, relayforlife.org/mocotx

Luckenbach LuckenRod Car Show & Music Festival, (830) 997-3224, luckenbachtexas.com

New Braunfels Gruene 10K/5K, 1-877-806-3987, athleteguild.com

New Braunfels Lady A: What A Song Can Do Tour 2021, (830) 964-3800, whitewaterrocks.com

Gainesville [11-19] Gainesville Area Visual Arts Fall Art Exhibition, (940) 613-6939, gainesvilleareavisualarts.org

Palestine [11, 17-18, 24-25] Texas State Railroad Diesel Roundtrip, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

16

New Braunfels Come and Taste It, (830) 606-0093, grapevineingruene.com

Grapevine [16-19] Grape-Fest, 1-800-457-6338, grapevinetexasusa.com/grapefest

17

Grandview [17-19] Antique Alley Texas, (817) 666-5024, antiquealleytexas.com

Amarillo [17-25] Tri-State Fair and Rodeo, (806) 376-7767, tristatefair.com

18

Bay City Jason Anderson Memorial Golf Tournament, (979) 240-4575, jamgt.com

Blanco Classic Car Show, (512) 632-0648, blancoclassiccarshow.com

Bullard Wine on Main, (903) 894-4238, m6winery.com

Flower Mound Christ Child Fiesta, (972) 816-3862, christchildsocietydfw.org

Ponder Labor Day Roping, (940) 479-2043, dentoncountycowboychurch.org

Huntsville [18-19] Antique Show, (936) 661-2545, facebook.com/huntsville.antiqueshow

New Braunfels [18-19] Old Gruene Market Days, (830) 832-1721, playinnewbraunfels.com

21

Kerrville [21-25] Paint Kerrville, (830) 895-2911, kacckerrville.com

24

Brenham Aaron Barker and Allen Shamblin, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Austin [24-25] Capital of Texas Vintage Postcard & Paper Show and Sale, (512) 775-6796, ctxpc.org

MORE EVENTS >

TCP *Submit Your Event*

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

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Pick of the Month

Leander Educational Excellence Foundation MUDstacle & Family Fun Run

Cedar Park, September 18
(512) 570-0027
leef.tx.gov/mudstacle

The name is a mouthful, and the event itself can be too if you're not careful. Participants pass through seven levels of a mud forest and a sea of swirly noodles and then walk the plank before reaching the finish line.

SEPTEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

24

Galveston [24-25] Galveston Island Shrimp Festival, (409) 770-0999, galvestonislandshrimpfestival.com

Harper [24-25] Frontier Days Celebration, (830) 864-5048, harpercommunitypark.org

Victoria [24-25] Memories in the Making Quilt Show, (281) 506-8465, quiltguildvictoria.org

25

Lakehills Medina Lake Cajun Festival, (830) 460-0600, cajunfestival-medinalake.com

Mason Old Yeller Day, (325) 347-5758, masontxcoc.com

Paradise Main Street Festival, (940) 389-2654, paradisehistoricalsociety.org

Ingram [25-26] Texas Arts and Crafts Fair, (830) 367-5121, txartsandcraftsfair.com

26

Rosanky St. Mary of the Assumption Homecoming Festival, (512) 359-2448, stmarysp.church

30

New Braunfels [30-Oct. 2] Hollydays Market, (281) 788-4297, homefortheholidaysgiftmarket.com

OCTOBER

01

Arlington [1-3] Ramblin' Roads Music Festival, (817) 303-2800, ramblinroadsfest.com

Fredericksburg [1-3] Lone Star Gourd Festival, (512) 964-5540, texasgourdsociety.org

Fredericksburg [1-3] Oktoberfest, (830) 997-4810, oktoberfestinfbg.com

Georgetown [1-3] Popptoberfest, 1-800-436-8696, popptoberfest.georgetown.org

Kerrville [1-11] Kerrville Folk Festival, (830) 257-3600, kerrvillefolkfestival.org

02

Boerne Book and Arts Festival, (830) 249-3053, boernebookfest.com

DeKalb Oktoberfest, (903) 277-3519, facebook.com/dekalb.oktoberfest

Kerrville Kerr County 4-H Wild Game Dinner, (830) 257-6568, kerr.agrilife.org

Mason Mason County Republican Women's Home Tour, (325) 294-4016, masontxcoc.com

Rust and Decay

Some say it's better to wear out than to rust out. But our readers see more than an old rust bucket. We're nowhere near the Rust Belt, but just look at these beauties, weathered by the elements and taken over by nature.

BY GRACE FULTZ

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT

BRITNEY CASTILLO
CENTRAL TEXAS EC
Overgrown.

BETTY ALVARADO
COSERV

An old tractor near a city park in Round Rock.

KAY BELL
NUECES EC

"This car lies where it died, and the desert is slowly reclaiming the rusting hulk."

RAY LITTLE
KARNES EC

Granddaddy's Jeep.



Upcoming Contests

DUE SEP 10 **Fired Up!**

DUE OCT 10 **Public Art**

DUE NOV 10 **The Texas Experience**

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Focus on Texas on our website for more Rust and Decay photos from readers.



Sowing Perspective

Getting outdoors grants long-awaited inner peace

BY BABS RODRIGUEZ
ILLUSTRATION BY MITCH BLUNT

LIKE SO MANY Americans, as I've gotten older and with grown and flown children, I've found myself filling my time with more hours of my "day" job. When the pandemic had me stuck at home, I almost never left my desk. It was as if I came to believe that my industry—manacning nouns to verbs—was needed to keep the world ticking on.

Meanwhile, the backyard I worked so hard to tame when I first bought my house was manicured by a crew of strangers and less and less often enjoyed by loved ones. After winter's brutal last blast, I decided it was time to change all of that. I forced myself to put my phone down, turn off the cable news channel and wander outside.

I found the dandelion digger, es-chewed gardening gloves and, for two hours, stretched my back, legs and

arms pulling and twisting handfuls of weeds from the beds of drought-resistant natives. I was grateful for the gentle surrender the damp, soft soil afforded. I spoke to the pink buds of my Mexican buckeye and welcomed back the desert willow while whispering words of encouragement to the freeze-traumatized American beautyberry.

I did not curse the agave when it stabbed me, and I took the time to salute the bright yellow dandelion blossoms and profusion of purple buds on the henbit. I apologized that they had to go and acknowledged that in another world or age or garden, they might be the stars. Being assigned the status of weed seems subjective, after all. "Clover," I said, "the luck is not yours today." It offered up no four-leaf rebuttal.

And when my labor was done, I sat in my most seasoned lawn chair and listened to the birds. I tilted my head back and, with my eyes closed, I watched the patterns of clouds dart across my inner eyelids. I heard an ambulance siren in the distance and, without thinking, said the prayer the nuns taught me 50 years ago to say for those in need.

I took deep breaths and sat still for a long time, grateful that I have such a spot in which to gather myself. And I followed that mental garden path to plant seeds of gratitude for lessons learned in this past year, corners turned, memories recovered and priorities reorganized.

Now I am vowing to reap daily the harvest fruits of that day's labor, whether for 10 minutes or an hour of outdoor time on my creaky deck, watering my herbs, learning the names of the birds who visit. Sowing perspective has me harvesting an inner peace that had proved elusive while I labored so long without looking up. ■

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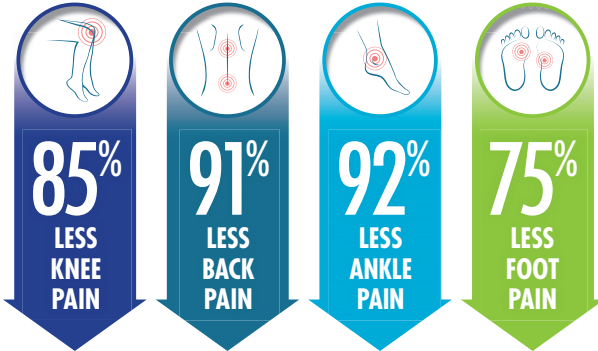


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 Qualification: Advertised price requires credit qualification and 24-month commitment. Upfront activation and/or receiver upgrade fees may apply based on credit qualification. Offer ends 11/15/21. 2-Year Commitment: Early termination fee of \$20/mo. remaining applies if you cancel early. Included in 2-year price guarantee at \$64.99 advertised price: America's Top 120 programming package, local channels, HD service fees, and Hopper Duo Smart DVR for 1 TV. Included in 2-year price guarantee for additional cost: Programming package upgrades (\$79.99 for AT120+, \$89.99 for AT200, \$99.99 for AT250), monthly fees for upgraded or additional receivers (\$5-\$7 per additional TV, receivers with additional functionality may be \$10-\$15). Regional Sports: RSN Surcharge up to \$3/mo. applies to AT120+ and higher packages and varies based on location. NOT included in 2-year price guarantee or advertised price (and subject to change): Taxes & surcharges, add-on programming (including premium channels), DISH Protect, and transactional fees. Premium Channels: 3 Mos. Free: After 3 mos., you will be billed \$30/mo. for Showtime, Starz, and DISH Movie Pack unless you call or go online to cancel. Remote: The DISH Voice Remote with the Google Assistant requires internet-connected Hopper, Joey, or Wally device. Customer must press Voice Remote button to activate feature. The Google Assistant Smart Home features require Google account and compatible devices. Google is a trademark of Google LLC. Other: Netflix streaming membership required. All packages, programming, features, and functionality and all prices and fees not included in price lock are subject to change without notice. After 6 mos., if selected, you will be billed \$9.99/mo. for DISH Protect Silver unless you call to cancel. After 2 years, then-current everyday prices for all services apply. For business customers, additional monthly fees may apply. Free standard professional installation only. Indiana C.P.D Reg. No. - 19-08615. ©2021 GoDISH.com. All rights reserved. Internet speeds, prices, and providers vary by customer address. \$40 price refers to widely available plan from multiple providers. Restrictions apply. Nationwide availability of 25 Mbps plan is subject to change without notice. The application of "Unlimited Data with no Hard Data Limits" varies by provider, but commonly mean that your access to the internet will not be stopped by going over a data limit, but that speeds may be lowered. Call for details. Internet not provided by DISH and will be billed separately.