

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

Noble Scholars
of the UIL

PLUS:

Texas Bird Year
Shrimply Delicious
Strawberry Festival



ON BOARD WITH BOATING SAFETY!

Boating

Did you know that people who hunt or fish from boats have one of the highest boat fatality rates? Or that more people die from falling off small boats (16 feet and under) than larger ones? Here are some tips for accident-free boating:


Safety Rules for Boating:

- Be weather wise. Bring a portable radio to check weather reports.
- Bring extra gear you may need. A flashlight and extra batteries, matches, map, flares, first aid kit, sunglasses and sunscreen should be kept in a watertight container or pouch.
- Tell someone where you're going, who is with you, and how long you'll be gone.
- Ventilate after fueling. Open the hatches, run the blower, and carefully sniff for gasoline fumes in the fuel and engine areas before starting your engine.
- Anchor from the bow, not the stern. Use an anchor line at least five times longer than the water depth.
- Know your boat's capacity. Don't overload it or put an oversized motor on it.

Have fun on the water.
Boat safely!



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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

A MAGAZINE ABOUT TEXAS LIVING

A Salute to Scholars

Our May issue gives an appreciative nod to those “Most Noble Scholars,” the competitors in the University Interscholastic League (UIL). The competitions stimulate the minds and broaden the horizons of thousands of Texas public school students each year.

Our “models” for the story are UIL contestants from Wimberley High School. For our cover, senior Ben Bond, who was named “Best Actor” in district one-act play competition, donned a period costume designed and produced by Wimberley theatre students. Our six models have competed in a total of more than 25 UIL academic events this spring, earning their school a district sweepstakes title.

Birds are the subject of two additional May features. “Mark Adams and His Very Big Year” recounts how Adams, an astronomer at the McDonald Observatory, became a superstar among Texas bird-spotters and counters. There’s also an article on “Backyard Birding” for those of us who want to view a little wildlife from the patio.

In Texas Living, shrimp recipes and the Pasadena Strawberry Festival should stimulate the palate. We have a wonderful variety of “Best Friends” photos in Focus on Texas, and Bandera is the subject of Texas, USA.

Enjoy!



Peg Champion
Vice President, Communications/
Publisher

**Contestants in UIL
Rural Junior Declaimers
contest, 1922.**



Courtesy of UIL



For two-thirds of their lives, 6-year-olds Annie McGinnis and Madi Boedeker have been best friends. The McGinnis and Boedeker families are members of Grayson-Collin EC. For more photos of best friends, turn to page 43.

Noble Scholars of the UIL 6

By Louie Bond, Photos by Geno Esponda

The University Interscholastic League academic program is sometimes the only outlet for students who choose to flex their brains instead of their biceps.

Mark Adams and His Very Big Year . . . 14

By Jane P. Marshall, Photos by Roy Hamric

Neither hail, nor speeding tickets, nor Texas' vast reaches could stay this astronomer from his quest to see a record number of birds in a single year.

Backyard Birding 18

By Jane P. Marshall

Encourage a natural habitat in your own backyard if you want to sip a cool one and watch birds from a patio chair.

Texas Living 34

Shrimply delicious recipes. 31st Annual Pasadena Strawberry Festival.

Focus on Texas 43

There's no friend like a best friend.

Texas, USA 46

By Gail M. Denkhaus

Bandera—Nature Is My Sustenance

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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LETTERS

Buy More Bait

My mother forwarded me the link to the February issue of *Texas Co-op Power* (www.texascooppower.com) as there was an article about a shrimper ["Bay Shrimper Blues"]. I thought it was a great article. I am a Marine stationed in Virginia and have visited my mom whenever my travels take me close to Texas. I have fished the bay for several years and really enjoy being with the folks down there. It upsets me that the fishermen and shrimpers work so hard to make a living and enjoy such meager benefits. I wish there was some way I could help out—guess I'll just have to keep coming down and buying bait!

Dave Murray, Virginia

Courthouse Clocks

I always enjoy reading your magazine and found the article on the Hood County Courthouse clock in your January issue to be very interesting. However, I thought it might interest you to know that it is not the only courthouse clock in Texas wound by hand. The courthouse clock in Colorado County is also hand-wound weekly. The clock was inoperative for several years but was later refurbished, leaving the clock in the top of the courthouse while its "workings" were brought down to the first floor, where it is a popular display and is wound weekly by County Judge Al G. Jamison.

Valerie Graves, San Bernard EC

Same "Hometown" Company

I recently moved from Montgomery, where my electric service was provided by Mid-South Electric Co-op. For seven years, I received outstanding service and repair from them. Upon moving to Cedar Creek, I was told that my electricity would again be provided by a co-op, Bluebonnet Electric, so I had high expectations.

When my February issue of *Texas Co-op Power* arrived in the mail a few weeks ago, I just assumed that my last issue from Mid-South had gotten stuck in the postal system while being forwarded to my new address. How glad I was when I realized that the issue was addressed to my new address

and that I was still part of the same "hometown" company. Yippee! I like your magazine so much that I actually considered subscribing to it until I found out that I still get it every month as part of the co-op's commitment to service.

To Mid-South, thanks for all the years of great service. To Bluebonnet, here's to many more years of great service. To *Texas Co-op Power*, thanks for a great magazine, issue after issue!

Julie Wienke, Bluebonnet EC

Many Pleasant Hours

We sold our rural property several years ago, but my husband, Harold, enjoyed the connection to his rural past so much that he continued to subscribe to your magazine. He passed away in September. I just wanted to thank you for the many pleasant hours he spent reminiscing with *Texas Co-op Power* and marveling at all the new developments in country living. We both liked the many articles and personal stories of your readers. Thank you for an informative and enjoyable magazine.

Leelah F. Sosebee, Portland, Texas

A Touch of Texas in Baghdad

I wanted you to know how much I appreciate your magazine. My husband sends it to me while I am participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am currently attached to Fort Hood's III Corps stationed in Baghdad. I miss Texas so much, but reading your magazine makes me feel as though I am there.

Susan Luker, Comanche County EC

When Plennie Came to Town

I am almost 82 years old, and I distinctly remember the day that Plennie Wingo came to our school ["Backwards Around the World Plennie Wingo Walked," February 2004]. I really had forgotten the year until I read your story. It sure brought back pleasant memories. I shall never forget the day that Mr. Wingo stopped at our school in Mankins, Texas.

I certainly enjoyed the article and I always enjoy *Texas Co-op Power* magazine. It's the best magazine I get, with good

recipes every time. Keep up the good work with a most enjoyable magazine.

My security light went out the other day and United Cooperative Services got it fixed promptly. Thank you for a very good magazine and for a very wonderful co-op.

Mrs. Huey F. Goodman,
United Cooperative Services

Editor's response: The article referred to in this letter did not appear in all local editions of *Texas Co-op Power*. Read these and other articles you might have missed on our website, www.texascoopower.com.

Written Just for Her

I always enjoy reading your magazine, but the April issue had to be written just for me. I'm a Master Gardener interested in xeriscape and native plants. G. Owen Yost's "Ten Tough Plants That Look Good Even in Bad Times" featured some of the same plants our Lamar County Master Gardener organization has been focusing on this past year. Then "Drive Yourself Wild" writer Elaine Robbins wrote about how the Panhandle Plains Wildlife Trail is helping not only to "open up new recreational opportunities for wildlife watchers" (that would include me), but she also told how the trail is providing a "much-needed boost to rural economies," a subject I used in my *Paris News* gardening column recently. And on top of that, she wrote about a rail-trail that starts in Caprock Canyon State Park. That piqued my interest since Paris is presently in the process of developing a new Trail de Paris for hikers and bikers.

Plus all that, you included some places in East Texas that I haven't visited yet, as well as Avery that I've been through lots of times. But best of all were the photos of some "big hair" that looked suspiciously like my wedding day coiffure!

Thanks for a fun issue of your great magazine.

Betty P. Lyke, Lamar EC

Don't Forget Where You Come From

Your article "Into the Woods" [April

2004] featured Nacogdoches and for just a little bit, I was back home canning pears as a little girl with my grandmother. This article has a special meaning for me not only for childhood memories, but because I am a ninth-generation Y'Barbo. The article reminds us of where we came from as we head into the future. And you're right—little remains of our Spanish heritage, except the Old Stone Fort located on the Stephen F. Austin State University campus.

There you can once again step back to a time long forgotten.

There you'll find countless pictures of my family members who helped to shape Nacogdoches

into the town it is today, not to mention artifacts ranging from weaponry to clothing.

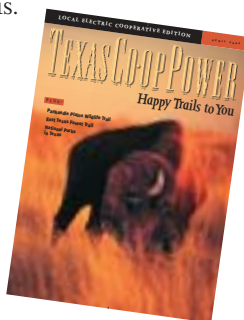
Not many people know that Nacogdoches is the Oldest Town in Texas, and most can't fathom the legend of the two [Indian] brothers [who are said to have founded Nacogdoches and Natchitoches]. Maybe this article has enlightened some and reminded others not to forget where you come from.

Michele Liston Lookingbill, Deaf Smith EC

Even Older Than We Thought

"Into the Woods" [April 2004] by Stephan Myers was a nice read, but I find it misleading in one respect. San Augustine, being the oldest Anglo town in Texas, or nearly so, has a history older than indicated in the article. Myers' history was mostly about the churches. The oldest building in use by a church is the Episcopal Church, Christ Church, built in the 1850s. The beginning of Presbyterianism in Texas was in the 1830s when many Cumberland Presbyterian ministers came here. Before the end of the 1840s, Presbyterian and Methodist congregations were established in San Augustine. Wesleyan College was established there in 1842.

Thomas J. Mowlam, Pedernales EC



We want to hear from our readers. Send letters to: Editor, Texas Co-op Power, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. Please include the name of your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and will be printed as space allows.

Dad Was on the Last Big Herd Drive

I was more than a little surprised to see the article "The Last Big Herd" in the January 2004 magazine since the author, my father, had been dead so many years. It was no mystery, however, since Jeff Sargent, who submitted the article, is my nephew. I'm sure he has heard many of the same stories passed down to me through the years. Dad was raised in the brush country near Alice and was a lifelong friend of author Frank Dobie. I heard many more stories about the Old West from my dad's father, Samuel Preston Turner. I was at first named after him, but my folks heard that my Uncle Charles had a son in California the same day and had named him Sam Preston, so they changed my name to Leo Jr. I never had the pleasure of meeting the man who stole my name.

My great-grandparents were killed by Indians just outside of Bandera. My grandmother, who was a baby at the time, was slashed on her back and carried the scars to her grave 60 years later.

My grandfather was my very best buddy when I was a lad and had many stories to tell. He was close friends with a number of Texas Rangers, as well as the well-known cattlemen of the time. He related stories of cattle drives he had been on—complete with stampedes, singing to the cattle, and seeing lightning dancing off the cattle horns. He told about being captured by the Indians and taken all the way to the Indian territory, now Oklahoma. He was later released and found his way back to Texas. He was a young boy during the Civil War and told many stories of the hardship of that time.

We enjoy our copies of *Texas Co-op Power* to the utmost.

Leo Turner Jr., San Antonio

Noble Schola

BY LOUIE BOND
PHOTOS BY GENO ESPONDA

The school bus is hardly visible in the pre-dawn drizzle as we pull into the high school parking lot on a Saturday morning. Annie, a freshman, is still in her pajamas, clutching a pillow, her backpack stuffed with “nice” clothes and makeup. Ben’s a senior and can’t be bothered with changing clothes in a strange bathroom, so he’s ready to go in his suit and tie.

No fanfare, no cheerleaders, no banners along the highway that leads out of our small town, just the rumble of the bus and a straggling herd of quietly determined students heading off to pit their brainpower against their peers across the state. Some will stand nervously before a judge to recite; others will sit at a desk trying to decipher questions tougher than most college exams.

We’ve set the alarm for 4 a.m. on many a Saturday morning during the past decade or so, as my four children have competed in University Interscholastic League (UIL) academic contests, like students at 5,400 schools (1,150 high schools, 4,250

elementary/junior high schools) in Texas who participate in everything from drama to physics, math to current events.

“Participating in UIL changed my life,” my daughter Sarah, now a college junior, says about her experience. “Competing in speech and drama helped me overcome my shyness and gave me confidence in myself. My success in journalism helped me choose a career I might never have considered otherwise.” Armed with a fistful of state medals in journalism and drama events, Sarah was able to finance her college career from direct and indirect scholarships garnered through UIL experience.

Although UIL gains a good deal of press coverage as the organizing entity of athletics and band competition across the state, you don’t hear much about UIL academics. But it is sometimes the only outlet for students who choose to spend their free time flexing their brains instead of their biceps.

“We’re not very visible—we don’t get 20,000 to show up for an accounting contest,” said Bobby Hawthorne, who has been with UIL since 1977, serving as director of academics since 1996. “There are not a lot of pep rallies, and the newspapers don’t cover us, but UIL is part of a small-town public school’s DNA. We’re the gifted

CURRENT EVENTS

Which statement about Medicare reform legislation is not true?

- A. It’s the biggest transformation of Medicare in almost 40 years.
- B. It provides private health organizations a new role in Medicare.
- C. It provides a prescription drug benefit for seniors.
- D. The plan is expected to save the U.S. almost \$400 billion over the next 10 years.

[Answer: D]

rs of the UIL

and talented program in many small schools. It's as much as anything they get in classrooms."

At the high school level, the league offers contests in journalism (news writing, editorials, features and headlines), debate/speech (Lincoln-Douglas, cross-examination, informative and persuasive speaking, poetry and prose interpretation), English (ready writing, spelling and vocabulary, literary criticism), math (accounting, calculator, computer science/applications, number sense), science (biology, chemistry, physics), social issues (social studies, current events) and one-act play.

To even the playing field, UIL splits public schools into conferences based on enrollment (1A through 5A, with 5A being the largest). After months of practice at invitational meets, the competition begins in earnest in February and March with district meets. The academic competitors who have made the team, usually three students per event, compete at the district level against the same four schools they play in football and band contests, schools that are roughly their size and located somewhere in a big Texas "neighborhood."

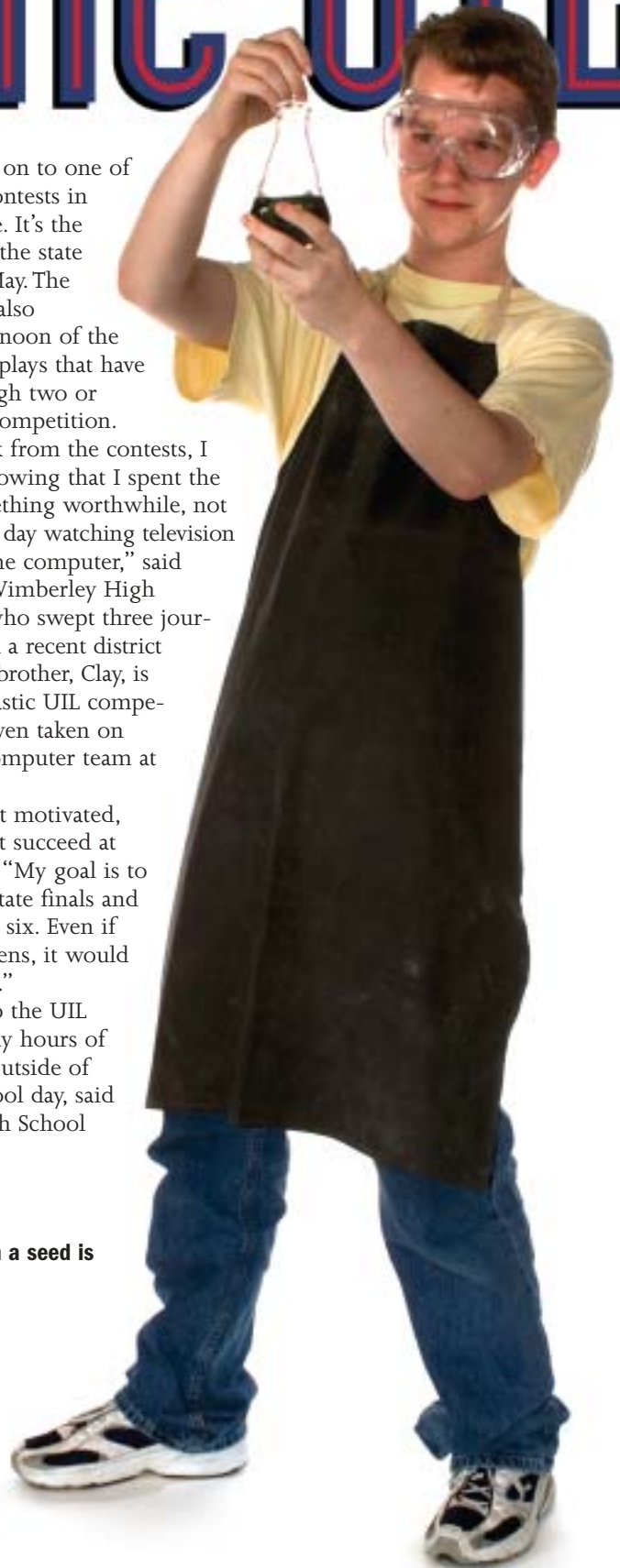
The top three finishers (or in team contests, four students who qualify together as a first-place team) at the

district level go on to one of four regional contests in each conference. It's the last step before the state finals in early May. The regional meets also include an afternoon of the six top one-act plays that have advanced through two or three levels of competition.

"Riding back from the contests, I feel satisfied knowing that I spent the day doing something worthwhile, not just wasting the day watching television or playing on the computer," said Tyler Smith, a Wimberley High School junior who swept three journalism events in a recent district meet. His twin brother, Clay, is also an enthusiastic UIL competitor who has even taken on coaching the computer team at this 3A school.

"If you aren't motivated, then you cannot succeed at UIL," Clay said. "My goal is to make it to the state finals and place in the top six. Even if that never happens, it would still be worth it."

To make it to the UIL finals takes many hours of self-discipline outside of the regular school day, said Wimberley High School



SCIENCE

The primary function of the endosperm in a seed is

- A. protection
- B. to produce pollen
- C. to produce plant growth hormones
- D. water storage
- E. food storage

[Answer: E]



Courtesy of UIL

Powers Boothe (playing Algernon Moncrieff) and **Millijon Smyth** in Snyder High School's UIL One-Act Play, Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest," at the 1965 state meet. Smyth was named to the All-Star Cast; Boothe wasn't.

Notable Texan UIL Competitors

Participation in UIL events has been a first step toward success for many notable Texans throughout the past century, including a U.S. president, an Academy Award-winning actress and the director of NASA. Here's a short list of a few former UIL competitors whose names you might recognize.

- Powers Boothe** (actor, pictured above)
- John Connally** (Texas governor)
- Barbara Smith Conrad** (mezzo-soprano)
- Robert Crippen** (NASA director)
- Horton Foote** (author)
- Pat Hingle** (actor)
- Lyndon B. Johnson** (U.S. president)
- Barbara Jordan** (U.S. congresswoman)
- Tom Landry** (football coach)
- Don Meredith** (football player)
- Bill Moyers** (journalist)
- Sandra Day O'Connor** (U.S. Supreme Court justice)
- Jane Pauley** (journalist)
- Ann Richards** (Texas governor)
- Sissy Spacek** (actress)
- Sherry Stringfield** (actress)

science teacher Ron "Doc" Richards, who has had five state champion science teams in his 20 years of UIL coaching. "UIL students enjoy learning on their own—they study because they want to learn," Richards said. "After they take a test, they don't put their heads on their desks and go to sleep—they open a book."

The rewards for that hard work come in the form of college scholarships for many competitors who qualify for the state finals. The Texas Interscholastic League Foundation (TILF) will award over \$1 million in scholarships this year to more than 500 college-bound seniors who were state qualifiers.

Those UIL scholarship opportunities provide the motivation for the teenaged protagonist of *Comfort* (Houghton Mifflin Company), a novel by New Mexico author Carolee Dean that is excerpted on page 13. Like Kenny Willson, her fictional 17-year-old poetry interpretation contestant, Dean's only chance at a college career was to become eligible for a scholarship by qualifying for state in at least one event. Even though her school couldn't afford to send her to the state competition, qualifying as an alternate in poetry interpretation provided Dean with enough scholarship money to attend college.

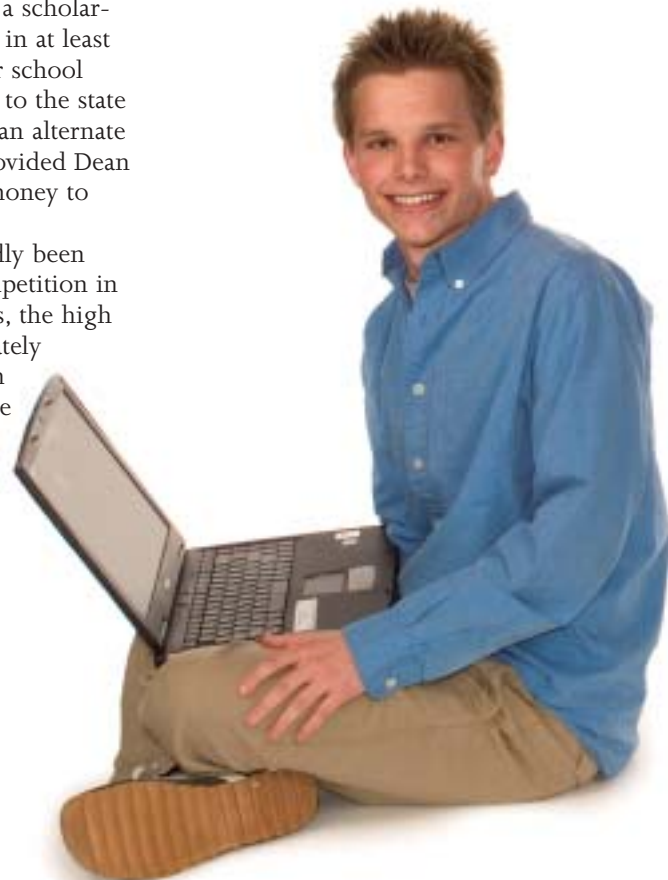
Although Dean had hardly been aware of the academic competition in her previous, larger schools, the high school junior was immediately recruited by her journalism teacher, Ilona Smith. "At the time, I thought she was a

taskmaster, forcing us to be disciplined, but that discipline really paid off for me. Only now do I see her kindness, taking so much time out of her life for us."

Dean thought her life was virtually over when her family moved twice during her high school career, once from Southern California to Lubbock, and then again just before her senior year to the West Texas town of Happy, population 588.

"It was a great irony that I thought life had ended when we moved to Happy," Dean says. "But instead, I wound up having opportunities that I wouldn't have had at a larger school." *Comfort* won the Texas Institute of Letters award for best young adult fiction in 2003 and will be released in paperback this summer. Dean also has written a 63-page teacher's guide to accompany the paperback release.

The UIL program is the largest interschool organization of its kind in the world, and has been used as a model for other state programs. In



Although fashions have changed since this 1927 photo, UIL contestants still gather in Austin each spring to test their brainpower against the best minds in the state.

1909, University of Texas registrar John Lomax (who later found fame as a musical archivist) set out across the country to gather ideas for a framework for educational competition in Texas. After interviewing university officials, Lomax returned with the idea of an organizational league that appealed to UT President Sidney Mezes. Public Speaking professor E.D. Shurter formed the Debating League of Texas with the approval of the Texas State Teachers Association. The league held its first meet in 1911 and merged with a similar UT organization for sports in 1912. The UIL was born.

In 1914, girls were allowed to participate, and the league divided the schools into classes based on enrollment to level the competition. By 1932, virtually every school in Texas was a member. Today, one of every two high school seniors has participated in a UIL event (academics, athletics or music) prior to graduation.

"The UIL academic program provides young people with the skills that



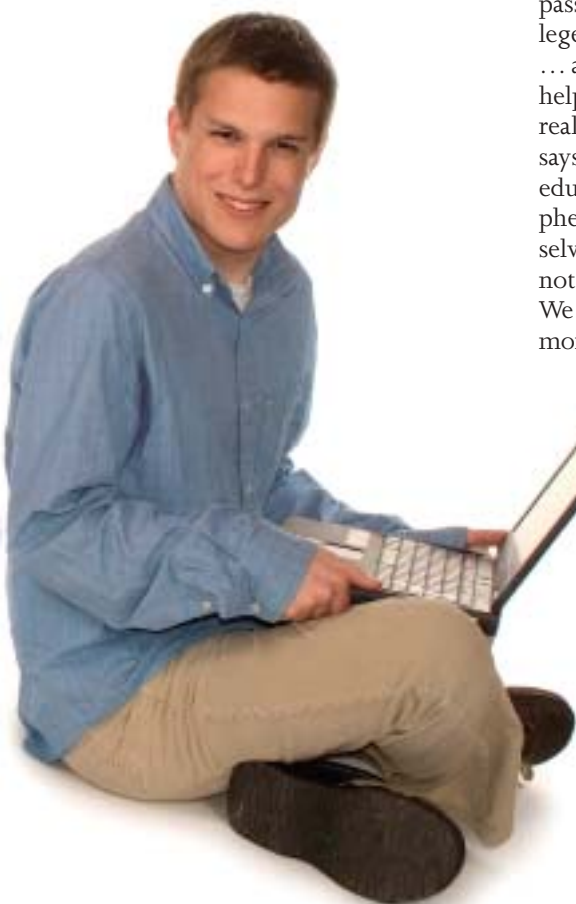
Courtesy of UIL

will get them hired, that will get them in the right college, that will help them pass their courses once they get in college, that will help them find a mate ... all the things that are necessary to help you grow up and become a fully realized human being," Hawthorne says. "There is a certain culture in education and society, a self-defeating phenomenon where kids dumb themselves down because they think it's not cool [to be smart]. UIL fights that. We say excellence is cool. You can do more; you can do better. And if you do better, maybe you can be the best."

For some, being the

best comes from starting young. UIL participation begins as early as second grade, with contests in creative writing and storytelling. Other elementary level events include art, music memory, spelling, ready writing and oral reading. At the junior high level, students continue to participate in these events, but may also begin one-act play, modern oratory, mathematics and science.

Craig Hertel had participated in UIL competition since second grade, but got hooked in seventh grade when his teacher took the class to the state finals of one-act play and debate. Today, as UIL coordinator for Lindsay High



SPELLING

Which word is misspelled?

- A. coelacanth
- B. shillalah
- C. gynandrous
- D. ecumenism
- E. majolica

[Answer: B, shillelagh, shillalah]



School in Cooke County near the Oklahoma border, he leads a team of teachers and students with one of the most impressive records in Texas—winning sweepstakes (highest total points) in state academics for eight of the past 12 years and placing second the other four years. Quite a feat from a tiny 1A school.

Fifteen years ago, Hertel, then an athletic coach, decided to switch to UIL academics and sent out dozens of resumes. Lindsay was one of only two schools to offer him a job. The once-strong UIL program there had struggled in recent years, and administrators who were looking for a boost found one in Hertel.

"I was really enthusiastic," Hertel says. "I didn't know that much, but I had enthusiasm." Hertel says it's actually "kind of cool to some degree" to be part of Lindsay's championship academics team. With only 160 students to work with, he sought out students without "A" averages. Even if they didn't always bring home the big trophy, he discovered, they found motivation and higher standards to

help better prepare them for college and careers.

"The coordinators and coaches are the best teachers in the

state—they're the most motivated and the most dedicated," Hawthorne says of Hertel and his peers. "They spend ungodly amounts of time and in some cases money before school, during school, after school and weekends. They'll spend four hours on a bus to get to a meet and then they're there all day, eating bad food."

UIL coordinators, the heart of the program at each school, spend a lot of time recruiting coaches and participants from a small pool of candidates, often coaching several events. Like Hertel, many are former UIL academic competitors themselves, passing on their passion to new generations.

Wimberley High School's Lydia Miller-Wyatt, who recently won the UIL's highest honor, the UIL Sponsor Excellence Award, has spent five decades competing and coaching in UIL academics. Students consider her and her husband/co-director, J. Gary Wyatt, a second set of parents. The couple teaches their students a lot more than how to win a contest—they learn teamwork, self-discipline and how to lose (and win) graciously.

"The real reward is the success of the kids," Miller-Wyatt says. "Success is not measured in winning; it is measured in personal achievement. The proudest I have ever been of a student is one I had many years ago who had been considered 'stupid' but competed anyway—his smile of

MATH

One of the factors of $20mn < 15m < 6 + 8n$ is:

- A. $4n + 3$
- B. $2m < 4n$
- C. $3m - 2$
- D. $5m + 2$
- E. $m - 6$

[Answer: D]

SMOOTH SAILING!

Don't let a safety accident spoil your boating fun. Remember these important rules and make sure that others observe them, too:

Safety Rules for Sailing:

- Before you put your boat in the water, take time to visually survey your marina or favorite launching area. Note any overhead wires and share the information with others.
- Stepping your mast or sailing anywhere near an overhead power line is dangerous! Masts, fishing poles or tall radio antennae could contact overhead wires.
- Make a habit of looking up to check for lines before moving or rigging your vessel.
- Check navigation charts for the location of any underwater cables, and don't take the chance of disturbing these cables by anchoring your boat near them.

And always stay out of the water—whether boating or swimming—during a storm. If you're already in the water when a storm threatens, get out as quickly, and safely, as possible. Follow these rules when boating and you'll always have more fun.



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DON'T GO OUT ON A LIMB!

Your safety is a top priority at your electric co-op. And it's even more important when it comes to our kids. They don't always know—or remember—what can be dangerous, so it's up to all of us to watch out for their safety.


Safety Rules for Tree Climbing:

- Don't plant trees or install tall playground equipment under or near power lines.
- Don't build tree houses in trees near electric lines.
- Don't allow children to climb trees growing near electric lines.
- Teach your children to always look up to check for power lines before climbing trees or any tall objects.
- Keep children away from any ladders, poles or work equipment that may be near power lines.
- Set a good example by following these rules yourself.

And the Number One safety rule for everyone to remember is this: Don't touch a power line or anything that's touching the power line. No one can tell simply by looking at a line whether it is energized or not, and contact with a power line can be deadly. Remember, electricity always seeks the easiest path to reach the ground, and, unfortunately, human beings are good conductors of electricity. Look up and live!



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self-satisfaction at the end of the contest was the most beautiful sight I've ever seen. It is still with me 25 years later."

As in any competition, the best UIL stories are those of the underdogs, the unlikely heroes. Hawthorne will never forget the young current events contestant who had lost her sight and long-term memory due to a head injury, but seemed to have an enhanced ability to retain recent input. Amazingly, she became the state champion that year.

2003 was a Cinderella year at Milano High School, a tiny 1A school with about 200 students. Director Mollie Marsh and her one-act play students had no stage, no lights, no costumes and a miniscule budget. The students juggled softball practice and homework with rehearsals. Marsh showed light technicians Daniel Evans and Erik Westbrook how to pantomime movements on a diagram; they never put their hands on a light board until competition.

"We really don't have any technical stuff," says Marsh, who grew up in nearby Caldwell. Marsh's mother is one of the most revered one-act play adjudicators in the state, Lou-Ida Marsh, and as a student, Mollie worked as a "techie" or technician in competitions at Caldwell High School. "When we say family here, it's in more ways than one. Just about everybody is either

a cousin or a friend of a cousin."

The sense of family in the town of 400 grew as "Opal," the story of a precocious French orphan, advanced through zone, district, area and regional competition.

Fundraisers helped provide a sound system and the students pooled their money for picnic suppers to squeeze rehearsals into their busy schedules. Prom Night was postponed due to a contest conflict. The ag department at Milano High School built a unit set, the multipurpose, oversized white building blocks used to stage the play. The principal filled in as third co-director/bus driver.

T-shirts were designed and sold to support the students' efforts on "Opal," and the competition for the limited tickets to the state finals was as intense as the contest itself.

"It's a lot better to see a production go so much further because the further you go, the better you get," Milano student Joey Scarpinato says. "If you don't get the chance to go that far, you don't even get to see what kind of production it might become."

The Milano students, many of whom will graduate this month, are proud of their new cafetorium stage, though they still worked without lights and with borrowed costumes on this year's play, Frederico Garcia

Lorca's tortured story of passion and betrayal, "Blood Wedding." For them, it's more about the acting than anything else. During regional competition at a small San Antonio theatre last spring, Kari Davenport, who played the young French orphan in "Opal," could see front-row audience members crying. "You know how people say they're a good actor if they can make themselves cry? Miss Marsh told us you know you're a good actor if you can make other people cry."

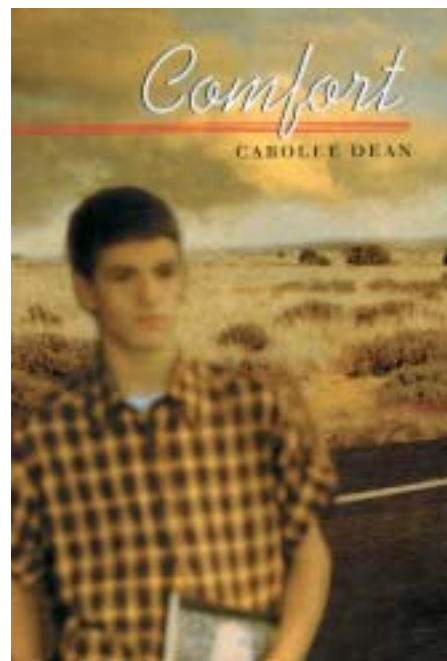
For my family, there will be many more Saturday morning bus rides. Sometimes the kids will bring home medals and trophies; sometimes, it will be a quiet ride home empty-handed. Either way, my children (and thousands of others across the state) are all winners, thanks to UIL.

Louie Bond is a copy editor and writer at Texas Co-op Power.

Special thanks to our UIL "models" for this feature—Wimberley High School UIL academic competitors Ben Bond (cover, in a costume designed and sewn by cast/crew members), Julia Trinidad (page 6), Brandon Land (page 7), Annie Bond (page 10) and Tyler and Clay Smith (pages 8-9).

"I walked up to the podium when they called my name, gave my introduction for my Words of Inspiration poems, and recited my selections by Frost and Shakespeare. Then I did something I'd never dared to do before. I looked out at the audience. They were on the edges of their seats, leaning toward me. Listening to me. Me. A scrawny kid from Comfort, Texas. I looked back at the empty pad in my notebook and realized that the future was a blank page. Anything was possible."

From *Comfort*, a novel by Carolee Dean about a 17-year-old UIL contestant.



MARK ADAMS AND HIS VERY BIG YEAR

**Long-tailed jaeger.
The magical words
jumped from Mark
Adams' computer
screen like a
neon sign in the
Chihuahuan Desert.**

BY JANE P. MARSHALL

PHOTOS BY ROY HAMRIC
AND TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE
DEPARTMENT

Adams opened the e-mail from Barry Zimmer on a Friday morning. The bird, an extraordinary rarity in Texas, had been spotted at the Fort Bliss sewage ponds. Obsession, like a poison ivy rash, cloaked Adams. He wanted to see it. He wanted to be there. Now.

But the astronomer and assistant director of the McDonald Observatory couldn't miss two scheduled meetings that morning. No matter how itchy his feet, how distracted his brain, how ravaging his hunger to see the bird, he had to wait.

By mid-afternoon Adams was heading toward El Paso, a three-hour drive from the observatory in the Davis Mountains of West Texas. A rainstorm hit, but he didn't stop to put the top on his Jeep. A 6-foot piece of metal flew off the windshield, but he drove on without it. A patrolman gave him a ticket for doing 80 mph; that cost him \$105 and 20 minutes.

Could he make it before dark?

Blue mockingbird.

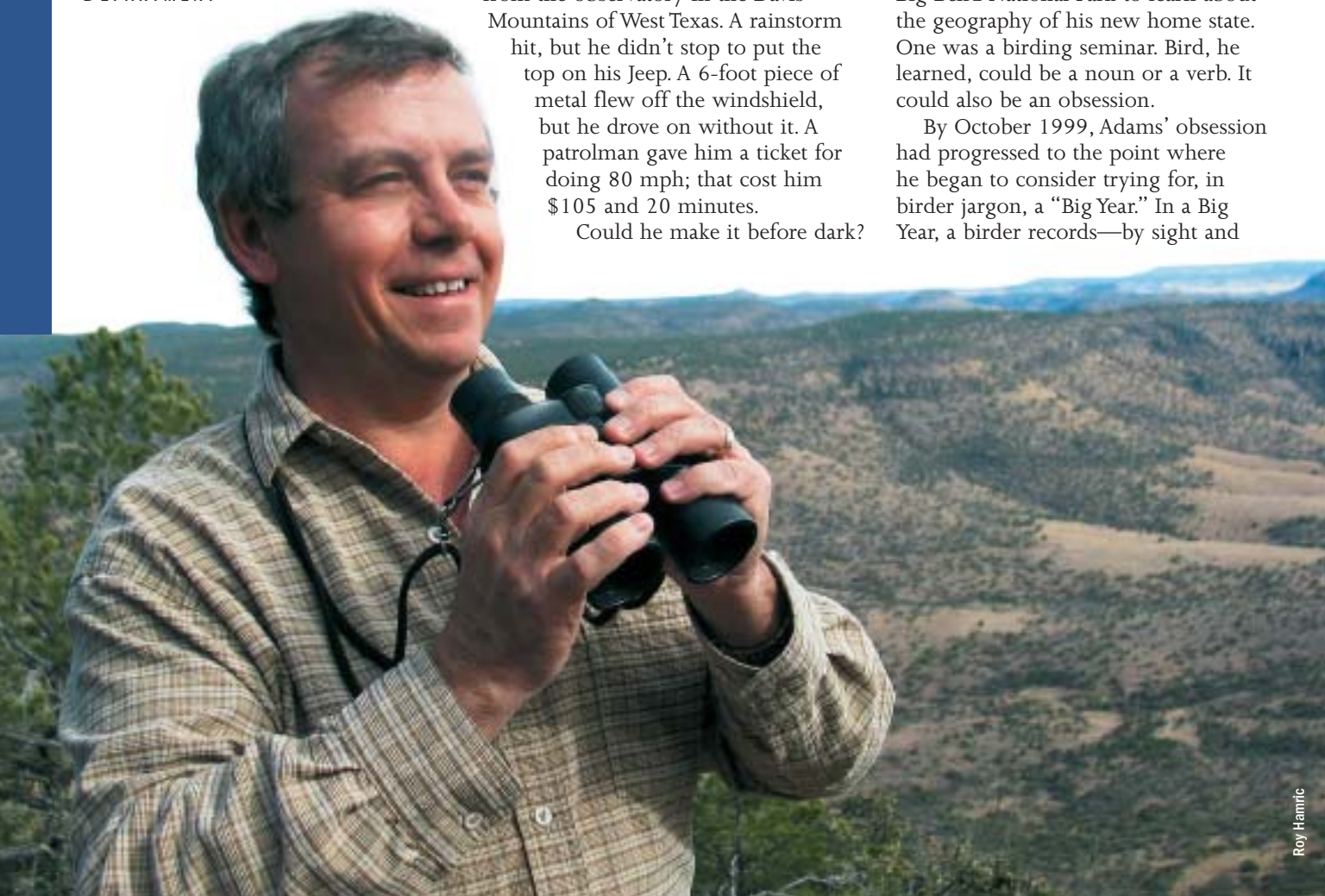


Would the jaeger wait for him? Should he turn around and try again on Saturday when an entire day was available?

This is a classic story of obsession and perseverance—a landlubbing Captain Ahab and small, feathered Moby Dicks. It's the story of the rare black-throated blue warbler that got away. It's the story of rising at 4 a.m., driving nearly three hours, searching for a specific bird for an hour, then driving back to begin the work day. It's the story of chasing birds across Texas using every means possible—plane, ocean-going boat, canoe and 4-wheel-drive vehicle.

When Adams moved to Texas in 1994, he took several expeditions into Big Bend National Park to learn about the geography of his new home state. One was a birding seminar. Bird, he learned, could be a noun or a verb. It could also be an obsession.

By October 1999, Adams' obsession had progressed to the point where he began to consider trying for, in birder jargon, a "Big Year." In a Big Year, a birder records—by sight and



sound—as many species as possible in a geographic area.

A Big Year would add structure and a sense of competition to the year's birding. Adams liked that, too. But there were bigger issues, like extensive traveling and blocks of time to pursue leads. Adams enjoyed traveling, and luckily, his job was flexible and he had built up weeks of time off. On the downside, some of the chase

450 birds perhaps. But making the record book was something he never considered.

On January 1, 2000, Adams worked all night to ensure Y2K didn't spawn an attack on the observatory's computers, so his Big Year began late (and rather inauspiciously) in his own backyard. By January 9, he'd birded in the Rio Grande Valley, compiling 158 birds on his list. The chase was on.

Long-tailed jaeger.



would involve flying, and the nearest airport was nearly three hours away in Midland.

Adams would need statewide contacts who would help find tricky birds like the crissal thrasher or the blue mockingbird. He had none, but Texas has a famously friendly and diligent birding community ready to share support, 4-wheel-drive vehicles and hot coffee with fellow birders.

With his decision made to undertake a Big Year, Adams' scientific mind plotted a strategy. He analyzed the problem—how to find the most birds in the least time. He must have a flexible plan and some luck. He had to be at the right place at the right time. When a rarity was reported on the Rare Bird Alert website or on the TEXBIRDS listserv (an Internet birding discussion group), he must join the chase immediately.

How many of the state's 621 species on the official Texas State List could he see? He might find 400 or

He was a gambler on a winning streak: Each bird he spotted fed his hunger for more. A varied thrush was sighted in an El Paso yard, so Adams grabbed camera, scope and binoculars, jumped in his Jeep and drove 300 miles to pursue a species seldom seen in Texas.

"Yes, I'd call it an obsession," he confesses. Admittedly, he's prone to obsessions, like playing ragtime and classical music on the piano, reading, and his newest fascination, butterflies. "So many things interest me," he says.

A Big Year is not for the faint-hearted.

Many birds thrive where humans do not. There were times when extreme heat, humidity, cold or wind conspired to block Adams. The size of the state proved both friend and foe. Due to its diverse habitat, Texas has more bird species living or visiting than any state within the continental U.S. It also has longer roads and bigger spaces.

An unsuccessful 380-mile drive through far West Texas looking for a black-legged kittiwake around reservoirs was part of the chase. So was a three-hour journey into the Gulf of Mexico searching for pelagic birds rarely visible from land, and a rainy sloop through the Anahuac marsh to flush yellow rails.

"Self-inflicted torture," Adams lovingly calls it.

At remote Imperial Reservoir in Pecos County, he got stuck wheel-deep in muck while searching for a Eurasian wigeon he never found.

About a fruitless trek to Marathon, Adams wrote: "Out of light and time ... I reluctantly started my Jeep and drove home without a painted redstart. This was only the first individual of this species to torture me in the year 2000. There would be others."

Endurance and patience are as vital to a Big Year as a good pair of binoculars. By the end of May, Adams had listed 435 species. He adjusted his goal up to 475 and looked at new strategies for locating 47 possibilities.

"For each of these, I considered when and where it was most likely to be found, and how much time and travel would be needed," he recalls. "Some I could confidently find myself. Others would require research and

Whooping crane.



consultation with more knowledgeable birders. I built several two- to four-day birding trips into my schedule for the remainder of the year, each with the goal of adding one or more new species."

He maintained a strategic plan on a spreadsheet on his personal computer, updating it whenever new information presented itself. Organization paid off as he slowly, one by one, added flycatchers, warblers, a colorful slate-throated redstart and others to his list.

As the clock counted down the final hours of the year, Adams intensified the chase. December 27 ... Adams spotted a rare white-winged scooter in the rain at a Fort Bend power plant cooling pond. December 28 ... A fruit-

less search along the coast from Quintana Jetty to Galveston's East Beach brought no new additions to Adams' list. December 29 ... Finally, he saw a black scooter near Rollover Pass on Bolivar Peninsula. On December 30, Adams was hot on the trail of a blue bunting that he finally saw at a trailer site in Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park.

One day left. How would he spend it? After checking hotlines and friends, he decided his surest bet was to get a

Roy Hamric



Adams spotted 489 birds in his travels.

long-eared owl in the Panhandle. He flew from the Valley to Lubbock, which was recovering from a blizzard, to search the two sites where the owls had been reported recently. He found fog, ice and a menacing black dog, but no long-eared owl. Adams would later chuckle painfully when he remembered this as the most expensive bird he didn't see.

At midnight on December 31, Adams' Big Year was over.

He had seen or heard 489 species, a whopping 92 percent of the total number reported in Texas that year. Adams' list tied the record held by Brush Freeman and Petra Hockey, who were among the many birding experts who helped him during his Big Year.

A book grew from the scientist's careful, detailed records. Texas A&M University Press published *Chasing Birds Across Texas* in 2003.

The book is an odd adventure story, one that those who love birds and Texas geography will savor. Adams continually used his scientific instincts and knowledge to report his observations. "On many days, the image degradation caused by solar heating can be horrendous," he wrote.

He's also a master of understatement. "Had the Jeep gone off the road just 30 feet further north, it would have tumbled into a steep arroyo with significantly less benign consequences" was how he reported his slide off an icy Texas highway en route to catch a

SEVERE WEATHER! ARE YOU READY?

Lightning

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

Lightning Safety Rules:

- Move to low ground.
- Avoid open fields.
- Do not seek shelter under a tree. Trees are targets for lightning.
- At the beach or in a swimming pool, get out of the water.
- Go inside a building and stay away from windows and doors.
- Stay away from metal objects.
- Avoid electric appliances and metal plumbing.
- Get off the phone.
- Do not touch metal objects, such as golf clubs or bicycles.
- Inside a car is relatively safe, but don't touch interior metal.
- If your hair stands on end, you may be a target. Crouch low on the balls of your feet and try not to touch the ground with your knees or hands.

Stay aware and play it safe during thunderstorms. Don't be a lightning rod.



Texas Electric Cooperatives

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PHOTO ©ALAN MOLLER

plane for his final birding trip along the coast.

The finish line crossed, Adams felt both happy and sad. He had added at least one bird to his list on 111 of the 174 days he spent birding. He birded for a total of 1,050 hours. He traveled 30,000 miles by car and 18,000 by plane, for an average of nearly 100 miles per bird.

He did not record the countless blisters, cups of cold coffee or new tires. Although he never found a tundra swan or a black-billed cuckoo, his passion did not pale.

Obsession's bounty transformed Adams into a recognized state birding expert, an author and an appreciative Texan. "I trekked many miles around my own 'backyard,' the Davis and Chisos mountains of Trans-Pecos Texas," Adams says. "Here, in one of the few frontiers remaining in the continental United States, I have been privileged to explore the heart of these fascinating 'sky islands.'"

The biggest find of his Big Year, Adams says, was not birds, but new friends. "People who had never met or talked with me went out of their way to assure that whatever time I devoted to their part of Texas would be maximally productive," he said.

In Austin, new friends showed Adams an eastern screech owl. In return, he showed them Betelgeuse, the bright red star on Orion's shoulder. How many others can identify constellations hundreds of light years away, as well as birds at 20 paces? In the Hill Country, he traded an astronomy lecture for a night's lodging.

Like laughter and the measles,

obsession with birding is contagious. Competitive counting is part of birding's spell.

In 2003, the Big Year total for Texas flew past Adams' number to set a state record. Eric Carpenter of Austin listed 505 species. "It was far in excess of even the wildest high count I and many others thought possible," he says.

Adams moved to Virginia at the end of January to work with the National Radio Astronomy Observatory.

Will he go for a Big Year there? Adams hasn't decided yet, but he is certain that birding is in his blood to stay. He is also certain to miss his new friends and this birding paradise called Texas.

Chasing Birds Across Texas can be ordered from Texas A&M University Press: 1-800-826-8911 or www.tamu.edu/upress.

Jane P. Marshall, a Houston-based freelancer, is an avid birder.



Painted bunting.



Flooding

Don't mess with floods. Flooding is the leading cause of weather-related fatalities in Texas. The simple decisions you make can mean the difference between life and death.

Flood Safety Rules:

- Never drive through water on a road. It can be deeper than it appears. Floodwaters can damage roadways.
- Quickly leave your car if it stalls in water. It takes only 2 feet of water to push a 3,000-pound car downstream.
- Don't attempt to walk through rapidly running water. As little as 6 inches can knock adults off their feet.
- Keep an emergency kit in your car, including a flashlight with extra batteries, drinking water and a battery-operated radio.
- If you have a cell phone, program the number for police or fire department rescue.

Take the high road when it comes to flood safety. Your life depends on it.



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BACKYARD BIRDING

More than 71 million Americans call themselves birders or bird-watchers, and most let the birds come to them rather than chasing them through the woods or into the wetlands. BY JANE P. MARSHALL

With three-fourths of all American birds represented somewhere in Texas, no one needs to go into the field to see them. An alternative is to create a mini-habitat on your own property. Melinda Parmer and P.D. Hulce have recorded 111 species of birds in the yard of their Houston home. Most people, however, don't fashion an urban refuge as elaborate as Parmer's and Hulce's, whose backyard birding gusto earned an official Backyard Wildlife Habitat certificate from the National Wildlife Federation.

Plants and feeders attract hungry birds, enticing migrating species to linger for dinner and encouraging

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department



Gray catbird.

locals to set up housekeeping and raise their families. First, learn food preferences of the birds you want to attract. Texas boasts the largest number of migrating species in the country—from hummingbirds to whooping cranes. Don't expect whoopers at your feeder but you can bribe hummers to return year after year.

Using native varieties when possible,

plant flowers, trees and shrubs that produce seeds or fruit, the main diet of many birds. Other plants in your backyard habitat, such as conifers, grasses and legumes, shelter and protect birds. Ample winter rains should guarantee good feeding this spring and summer. Check with your local nursery or extension agent to learn more about what meal tickets for birds grow best in your area.

Here are some specific suggestions:

■ To attract cardinals, robins and other winter birds, plant Mexican plum and yaupon. Cardinals also like to live in bamboo.

■ Purple coneflower, sunflowers, scarlet sage and redbuds beckon to finches and other seed-eating birds.

■ You may be able to double the number of species in your yard by providing water. A small pond or birdbath will do, but moving water, such as a slow drip, is better.



■ Fruits from mulberry, black cherry and beautyberry trees are favorites of songbirds.

■ Broken nuts and acorns from trees such as oaks, hickories and walnuts are eaten by a variety of birds.

■ Shrubs near feeders make birds feel secure, but if at all possible, don't provide easy access routes to feeders for squirrels and cats.

Mail order houses such as The Backyard Bird Company (www.backyardbird.com) can give you an idea of the countless varieties of houses and feeders that are available. You'll need to decide what kind of birds you want to attract and how you're going to keep competing critters at bay. Buy feeders that are easy to fill, large enough to avoid continuous refilling and easy to assemble and clean. Remove moldy seeds or droppings that may pose a health hazard.

Offer a variety of food in the appropriate feeders: sunflower seeds in tube, hopper or platform feeders; thistle in tube feeders; peanuts in peanut feeders; suet in suet cages; and mix seed on platform feeders or on the ground.

Some specific feeding suggestions:

■ Black-oil sunflower seeds are popular with the greatest number of bird species.

■ Cardinals like safflower seeds; cardinals, grosbeaks, jays, chickadees, titmice and



nuthatches like thick-shelled gray-striped sunflower seeds.

- Buy birdseed with little or no millet, the small yellow seeds that are good in bread but attract “undesirable” birds (such as house sparrows and grackles) to feeders.

- Remove seeds and droppings near feeders to reduce potential for disease.

- A brush pile near your feeder makes towhees, wrens and other shy birds feel at home.

More than a dozen species of hummingbirds visit Texas every year. To attract hummers, dish up their natural diet—flower nectar, tree sap, and small insects and spiders.

Here's how:

- Select red flowers, especially red tubular flowers, and feeders with red on them. Red seems to be a favorite color.

- Consider these trees and shrubs: coralberry, weigela, rose-of-Sharon, honeysuckle, beauty bush, currant, gooseberry, flowering crab, hawthorne, horse chestnut, tulip tree and black locust.

- Plants that attract hummingbirds are: American columbine, bee balm, blazing stars, butterfly-bush, clematis, coral bells, day lily, foxglove, garden phlox, gladiolas, hardy fuchsia, hollyhocks, honeysuckle trumpet and hybrids, hosta, moss

pink, nasturtium, penstemon, petunia, salvia, flowering tobacco, scarlet runner pole bean, scarlet trumpet creeper, wild blue phlox and zinnias. Nectar-producing plants also attract orioles.

- Hang at least two feeders to prevent an aggressive male from taking over.

- Fill feeders with a solution of sugar water. Boil together 1 cup water and 1/4 cup granulated white sugar (or any 4-to-1 ratio of water and sugar). Cool and fill feeder. Do not add red food coloring. Keep leftovers in the refrigerator and change every few days.

- Avoid using insecticide around flowers and shrubs that attract hummingbirds, which dine on the small insects.

- Keep feeders clean to prevent harmful mold.

Many cats hunt birds, which can be particularly problematic if your area is overrun with feral cats. You can bell domestic pets to give the birds a little extra warning that a predator is nearby.

Buy a good field guide. Many birders carry the National Geographic guide. Two fairly new and lauded are National Audubon Society's *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (Knopf) and Kenn Kaufman's *Birds of North America* (Houghton Mifflin). The more portable Kaufman book uses computer-enhanced photographs instead of paintings of birds.

Last, find birding buddies. A buddy can join you on the patio with a pair of binoculars and a glass of iced tea. Maybe you'll graduate to field trips, then weekend trips to a refuge or state park.

Jane P. Marshall, a Houston-based freelance writer, is an avid birder.

Tufted titmouse.



Ruby-throated hummingbird.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Prepare Your Central Air Conditioner for Summer

Spring is a good time for maintaining your air conditioner. If you keep the coils of your air conditioner clean, it can improve your comfort and reduce your electricity costs this summer.

Start by inspecting the outdoor condensing unit. The large outdoor coil—it looks like a car radiator—is where heat is dissipated from your home. The fan in the condensing unit has to move a whole lot of air through the coil, so make sure that there are no airflow restrictions around the condensing unit. Cut nearby grass, shrubs and tree branches so they are at least 3 feet away at the sides and 5 feet away overhead.

Most condenser coils are loaded with pollen and dust even when you can't see it. The longest a condenser should go without cleaning is two or three years, depending on how much it operates during the summer. If



your cooling season is four months or more, annual cleaning is an excellent idea. Turn off the power to the unit, and remove any visible grass and lint from the fins and louvers with an old hairbrush or whisk broom. Then put on a pair of rubber gloves and spray biodegradable outdoor coil cleaner into the coil. Wait five or ten minutes and flush the coil with a gentle water spray.

Your indoor coil might also need cleaning, even though you can't easily see it. If your air conditioner's filter or blower is dirty, then your indoor coil

is probably dirty, too. Cleaning the indoor coil is usually a job for professionals, unless you have easy access, as with a central heat pump. To help keep your indoor coil clean, make sure your filter fits well, is easy to change, and that you change it regularly. Have your air conditioning contractor make improvements to the filter, if needed, so it will be easy to get to. Change the filter often to help keep your indoor air conditioner coil clean and reduce energy consumption.

Kids and Electrical Safety

Talk to your children about the dangers of playing near electrical substations, high-voltage equipment and power lines. Here are some tips to pass along:

- If something that belongs to your child touches a power line, neither you nor your little one should try to retrieve it. Instead, call your electric cooperative for help.
- Tell your children that a "high voltage" sign means "keep out."
- If a ball or toy winds up behind the fence of an electricity substation, leave it there. Your child—or you—should not enter. Call your electric cooperative if the toy is worth retrieving.

Work at Home? Plan for Safety

If you work out of a home office—even one day a week—you don't have a safety expert looking over your shoulder as you would if you worked in a big office.

Be your own safety coordinator; take a few easy steps to make sure your home office is a safe place to work. Here's how to start:

- Create a fire evacuation plan—and practice it—so you can follow it in case of an emergency.
- Check your smoke detectors regularly and replace their batteries once a year. There's no smoke detector in your office? Install one today.
- Place a fire extinguisher in or near the office. Check the charge regularly.
- Computers are heavy. Place them on sturdy, level, well-maintained furniture.

- Choose adjustable office chairs with good supporting backrests.
- Locate your computer in a spot where glare from windows and lighting can't distract you. Place the monitor at a comfortable height that doesn't cause neck or back strain. Position your keyboard so you don't strain your wrists.
- Install good lighting and strategically place lights to avoid glare on the work surface.
- Connect all electrical equipment to grounded outlets.
- Don't overload electrical circuits. Doing so can start a fire.
- Keep power cords away from the path between the door and your desk.
- Power down your computer at the end of the day and unplug it during a thunderstorm.

*Happy
Mother's Day*

SUNDAY, MAY 9



May Is National Electrical Safety Month

According to a recent estimate, approximately three people die each day in residential electricity-related incidents in the home. A great many of those are related to problems with outlets, power cords and extension cords. To help reduce those numbers, the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) and your electric cooperative encourage consumers to “plug into electrical safety.”

Recent statistics show that between 1994 and 1998, an average of 165,380 electricity-related home structure fires accounted for an annual average of 910 deaths, nearly 7,000 injuries, and nearly \$1.7 billion in property damage. In 2000, there were an estimated 150 accidental electrocutions related to consumer products, down from an annual average of approximately 173.

“The key to preventing potentially fatal, destructive and traumatic electrical fires, shock injuries and electrocution is awareness,” says ESFI Executive Director Michael G. Clendenin. “Before plugging into electricity, plug into electrical safety.”

Following are some tips to help keep you safe:

Outlets

- Have a qualified, licensed electrician inspect your outlets and electrical system.

- Plugs should fit fully and securely into outlets, but should not be forced.

- Make sure there are safety covers on all unused outlets to protect children.

- If an outlet or switch wall plate is hot or discolored by heat, shut off the circuit and have it professionally checked.

- Have additional outlets installed where you need them instead of relying on extension cords and power strips.

Power cords and extension cords

- Check that all electrical items, including extension cords, are certi-

fied by a nationally recognized independent testing lab, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), CSA Group, ETL and MET Labs.

- Extension cords should only be used on a temporary basis; unplug and safely store them after every use.

- Do not place power cords and extension cords in high traffic areas or under carpets, rugs or furniture, and never nail or staple them to the wall or baseboard.

- Never remove the ground pin (the third prong) to make a three-prong plug fit a two-prong outlet.

- Make sure extension cords are properly rated for their intended use, indoor or outdoor, and meet or exceed the power needs of the appliance or tool being used.

- All electrical items and extension cords should be kept in good condition. If damage is discovered, take the

item to an authorized repair center or cut the cord and dispose of it safely.

GFCIs and AFCIs

- Make sure your home includes ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs), which prevent accidental electrocution by shutting off the circuit if they sense a “leak” of current off the circuit, and arc-fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs), which help prevent fires by shutting off the circuit if they sense arcing where electricity has to jump a gap. Consider installing GFCIs and AFCIs on all circuits except those serving major appliances, which may cause nuisance tripping.

- Test your GFCIs monthly and after every major electrical storm.

For more electrical safety tips, contact your electric cooperative or visit ESFI's website at www.electrical-safety.org.

Prepare for Spring Emergencies

Your household needs a plan in case there's a fire, flood, hurricane or other disaster, says the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Here's how to put one together:

- Assign emergency responsibilities to everyone in the family. At least one person should know first aid and CPR. Each adult should know how and when to turn off electricity, gas and water, and how to use a fire extinguisher.

- Create a disaster kit that contains enough bottled water, nonperishable food, clothing and personal items for each person for at least three days. Review supplies and replace water and food every six months.

- Choose two places to meet after a disaster: one right outside of your home, in case of fire, and the other



outside of your neighborhood, in case you have to evacuate the area.

- Practice evacuating your home twice a year. Drive your planned evacuation route and plot alternate routes on a map. Know the location of shelters in your area.

- Update your list of emergency phone numbers and make sure at least one phone in your house is not cordless.

- If someone in your family relies on electrically powered medical equipment, make arrangements for a back-up power source, such as a battery or generator, and contingency plans to transport that person to another location.

- Keep a battery-operated radio and extra batteries on hand so you can keep up with emergency bulletins.

Cabeza de Vaca Discovers 'Ill Fortune'

BY SPIKE GILLESPIE

Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca was 37 years old in 1527 when the king of Spain sent him as royal treasurer on an expedition to the New World. Though he and the other explorers did not find riches, Cabeza de Vaca found a place in history. Purely by happenstance, this intrepid accountant is said to have been the first European in what is now Texas. He relates his eight arduous years of wandering the area in his journal, *La Relación*.

Spanish ships delivered the expedition to modern day Florida in April 1528 and then sailed away. When hostile natives convinced the explorers that a hasty retreat by sea was in order, they lashed together crude barges to make their way around the Gulf Coast. After various mishaps of both man and nature, all but one barge, carrying Cabeza de Vaca and other survivors, had disappeared.

The barge washed up on an island on November 6, 1528. Gerald Ashford, in his now out-of-print book, *Spanish Texas, Yesterday and Today* (Jenkins Book Publishing Co. Inc., 1971) states that the island was Galveston. *The Handbook of Texas* speculates that the island was San Luis (now known as Follets Island). Since Cabeza de Vaca was the first to describe the territory, the lack of accuracy is understandable—no place he visited had yet been given a European name so he had only the local people, flora and fauna to describe. Whatever island they landed on, the Spanish named it *Malhado*, which means ill fortune.

Cabeza de Vaca offered beads and other trade goods to the island's Indians, who fed the Spaniards in return. It was a rough winter on the island, and to fend off death by starvation, some of the Spaniards engaged in cannibalism. As Cabeza de Vaca put it, they "were driven to such an extremity that they ate each other up until only one remained, who being left alone, there was nobody to eat him."

Ultimately, 65 of the 80 Spaniards who remained on the island succumbed to various unpleasant deaths.

The Indians, already put off by the cannibalism, grew more suspicious of the white men when several of their tribe died of illnesses brought by the Spaniards. Some wanted to murder the remaining Spaniards to prevent any more of what they considered to be deadly black magic. But Cabeza de Vaca's host dissuaded them, saying if the Spaniards were magic they wouldn't have allowed so many of their own to perish.



Jim Anderson

Next the Indians pressed the Spaniards to assume the role of doctors, so the castaways adopted a faith-healing ritual that involved making the sign of the cross over the sick while breathing on them and praying over them. "All of those for whom we prayed, as soon as we crossed them, told the others that they were cured," Cabeza de Vaca recounted with relief and a little puzzlement.

The healings worked well enough until Cabeza de Vaca himself fell ill, at which point the Indians lost faith in his alleged powers. By now, he was living on the mainland where, once he regained his health, he became a trader. He traveled from the coast inland, exchanging shells and cockles for animal hides, flint, glue and red ochre. Having assimilated, he conducted these duties in his birthday

suit. However, being naked was not particularly practical in the freezing winters or broiling summers.

Of the original 300 explorers who landed in Florida, only four survived the voyage. These four, including Cabeza de Vaca, were eventually enslaved by Indians and forced to work in tuna (prickly pear) fields southeast of what is now San Antonio. Besides having to deal with the plants' razor-sharp spines, the Spanish slaves also had to contend with swarms of mosquitoes and the smoke and heat of smudge fires lit to fend off the bugs.

With Cabeza de Vaca as their leader, they escaped in September 1534 and traveled by foot for a year and a half until they encountered other Christians on the West Coast of Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca eventually made his way back to Spain to write about his adventures.

According to his accounts, the four escaped slaves became the first white men to see buffalo. They also revived their faith-healing routine, which lent them celebrity status with each new tribe they encountered. According to Ashford, "In one case Cabeza de Vaca administered his spiritual treatment to a man who was supposed to be already dead, and later it was reported the man had returned to life."

Based on what they could piece together from Cabeza de Vaca's account, historians believe the party did reach the Guadalupe Mountains. Two members (though not Cabeza de Vaca) also took a side trip to what was probably the Rio Grande River. At some point they encountered a group of villages, which some later inhabitants of Northern Mexico insisted were the mythical Seven Cities of Gold. Given all the other amazing adventures Cabeza de Vaca's small group experienced in Texas, this doesn't seem like much of a stretch.

Spike Gillespie's second book of essays, *Surrender (But Don't Give Yourself Away)*, was published in the fall by the University of Texas Press.

Lightning Can Cause Power Surges

This month, our heroes are trying to use their lightning lasers to fend off giant vampire chickens, but something is going horribly wrong. The darn chickens are soaking up the power and growing bigger!

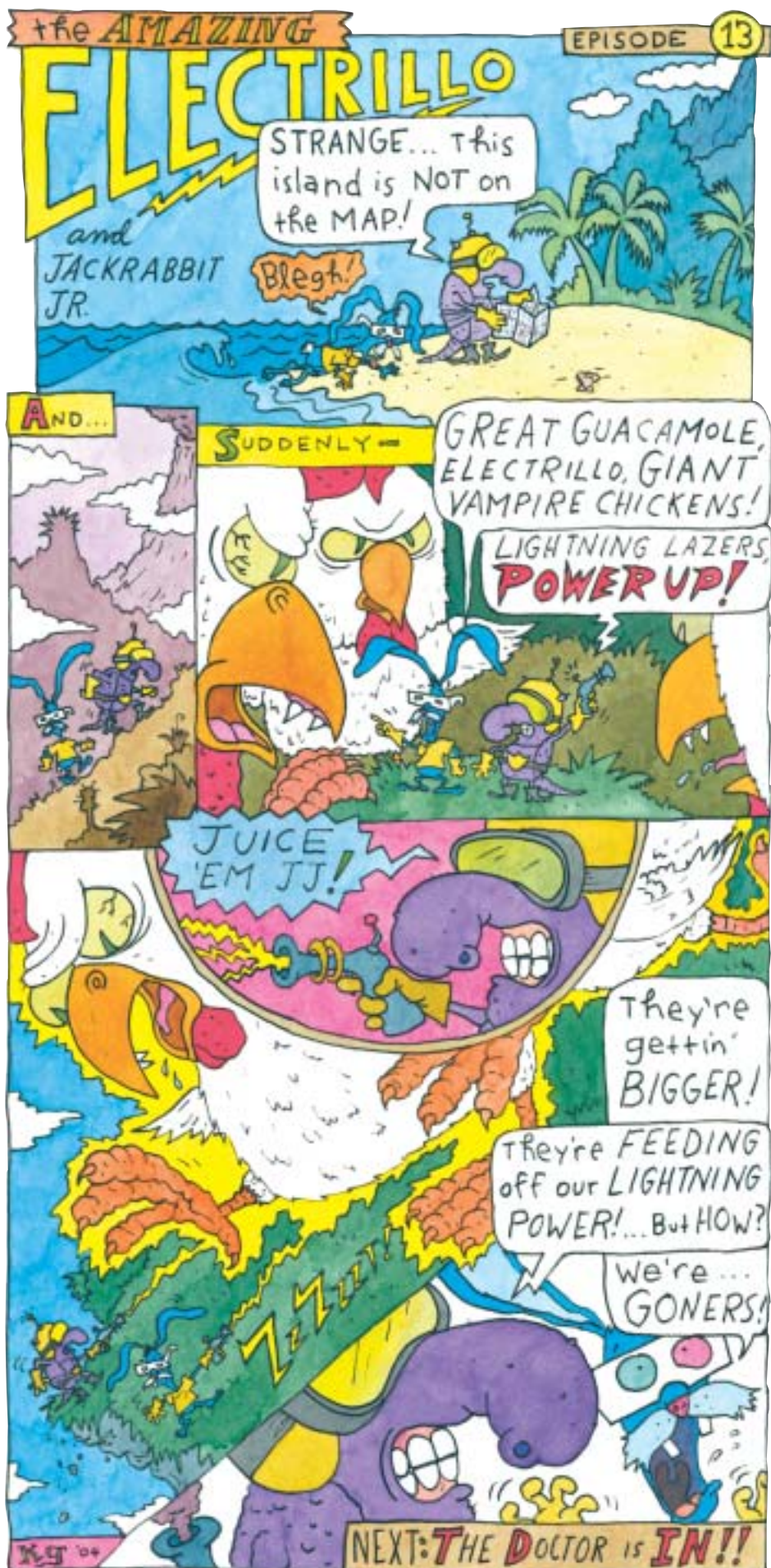
Even in real life, we have to be concerned about the effect of power surges. A lightning strike is the strongest kind of power surge, but it's not the only cause of sudden surges of electricity. About half of all power surges come from inside your home when household appliance motors cycle on and off, like in a refrigerator or an air conditioner. Over time, these small surges can ruin many of the appliances and other electronic equipment you use every day. That's because appliances like washing machines, stereos, desktop computers, VCRs and DVD players are very sensitive to any change in electric current.

Besides lightning, there are other power surges that can come into your home from the outside. These surges can travel through telephone, cable or electric lines. And just like a surge zapped Electrillo's electro-copter last month, large power surges can instantly ruin electronics.

Power surges can be prevented from damaging electrical appliances if you have a defense system called a "surge suppressor." There are many different kinds of surge suppressors. Some protect the whole house from outside power surges; these should be installed by an electrician. Other surge suppressors protect individual appliances from power surges inside the house and must be installed at each electric appliance. If one appliance is not protected, it can send a power surge to other appliances!

Have a grownup call your electric co-op to learn more about protecting your home and your electric appliances from lightning and other power surges. It might be too late for the electro-copter, but it's not too late to protect your prized possessions!

Cartoonist Keith Graves is a popular artist and author of children's books.

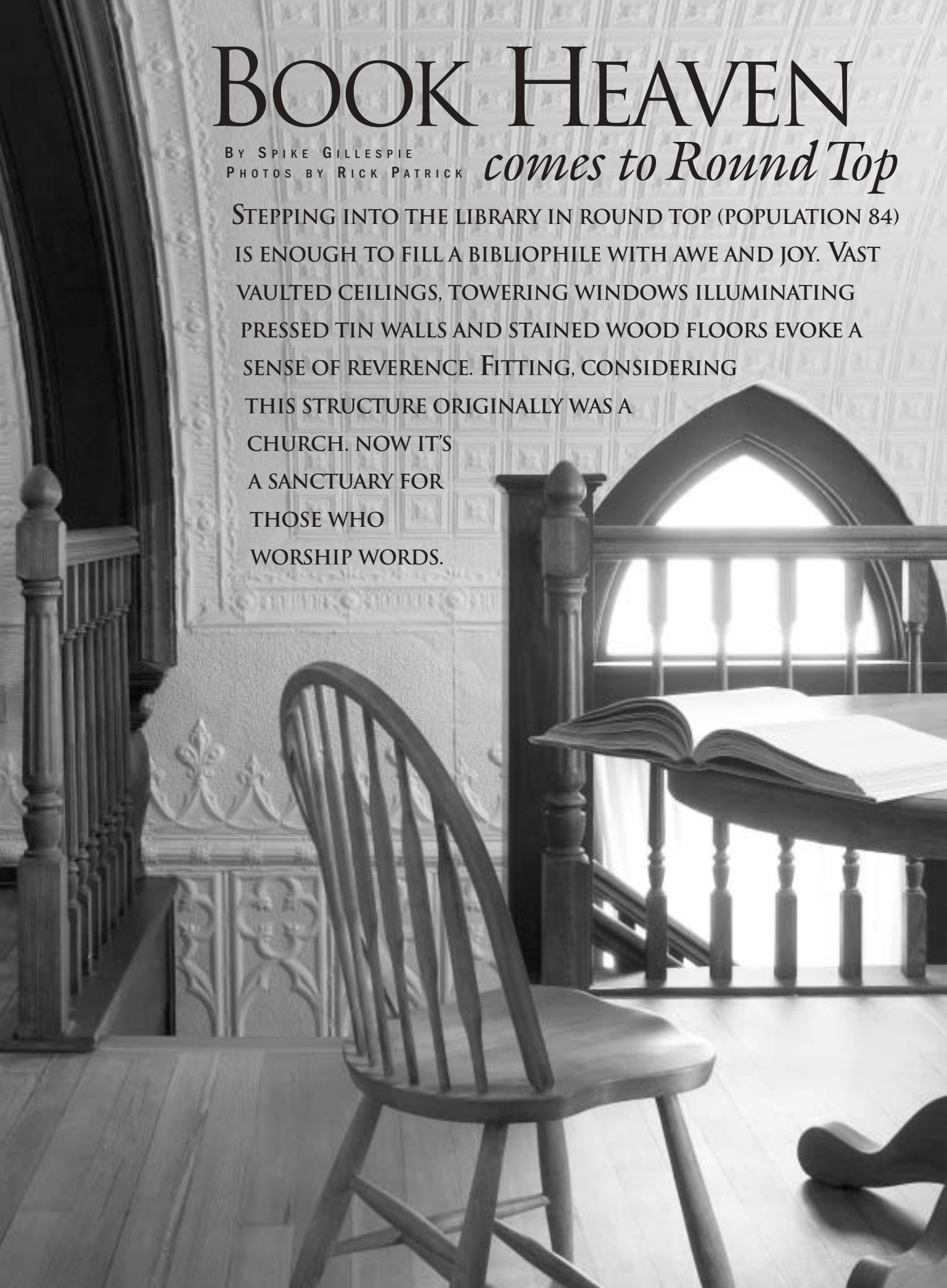


BOOK HEAVEN

BY SPIKE GILLESPIE
PHOTOS BY RICK PATRICK

comes to Round Top

STEPPING INTO THE LIBRARY IN ROUND TOP (POPULATION 84) IS ENOUGH TO FILL A BIBLIOPHILE WITH AWE AND JOY. VAST VAULTED CEILINGS, TOWERING WINDOWS ILLUMINATING PRESSED TIN WALLS AND STAINED WOOD FLOORS EVOKE A SENSE OF REVERENCE. FITTING, CONSIDERING THIS STRUCTURE ORIGINALLY WAS A CHURCH. NOW IT'S A SANCTUARY FOR THOSE WHO WORSHIP WORDS.



Until five years ago, Round Top residents had to drive 20 miles to La Grange to check out a book. Technically, the new library is this Central Texas town's second in just three years. The first opened in 1999, when the town leased the Rummel House from the Bybee Foundation.

Two years later, Houstonites Sterling and Marianne McCall paid \$700,000 to purchase and move a church from the town of Buckholts to the Rummel House site, and to renovate it to serve as a bigger library. Round Top, which draws upwards of 50,000 people for antique and craft sales some weekends, and the adjacent arts community of Winedale seem to attract benevolent patrons.

Formerly the Hope Lutheran Church of Buckholts, the building was constructed in the 1920s for less than \$20,000 and served its congregation



for nearly half a century. Time and termites took their toll, however, and in 1975 the church was sold to a farmer named Svetlik, who moved it to a pasture and used it to store hay.

While some might question using such a beautiful old building as a hay barn, it actually proved to be a blessing since the hay preserved the floors. Architect Chris Travis, who has an interest in preservation and owns homes in Round Top and New Mexico, convinced Svetlik to sell the church.

As illustrated on a large flat-screen TV near the pulpit, moving the building was quite a chore. Under Travis' direction, it was dismantled into seven pieces, then trucked in to Round Top over the course of a week. Bobby Schwarz, now 10, was 7 years old when he saw the procession. "We thought it was the Astrodome, it was so big," he says.



It took another year to reassemble and renovate the building. Though a sign identifies the building as a "children's" library, Kathy Madere, the original librarian and current programs manager, says the library actually contains more adult books.

"To be a member of the Central Texas Library system, you need to have a phone, be open 20 hours a week, and

have at least 7,000 books," says Madere. In the beginning, the library fell short of that figure by 6,850 books. But the collection has grown with the facility, and now boasts over 12,000 books.

There are so many books, in fact, that the overflow is now stored in the Rummel House out back. This is also where children's art classes are held, the children's choir rehearses, and adults take pottery classes. Rather than functioning solely as a book lender, the Round Top Library serves as a community center as well. Nearly any day of the month, there are activities for all ages, from book clubs to teen drawing classes, adult yoga and computer lessons. (The

library has eight computers.)

"It's a fun place to hang out," Bobby Schwarz says, pausing to look up from a book to offer his opinion. Bobby's 12-year-old brother, Emile, engrossed with a nearby computer, concurs. "It's very cool," he says. "They do all sorts of new things. They do programs. They let you play on the computers. They have new things every day."

The place is exceedingly kid friendly, right down to the "Little People's" restroom with its scaled-down sink and toilet. The tops of the library shelves are adorned with ceramic figurines depicting fictional characters, including Flopsy, Mopsy and Peter Rabbit; Little Red Riding Hood; and an as-yet-to-be-identified story

involving a mother wolf with a plate of chicken, a father wolf eating a chicken leg, and three baby wolves begging for food. This collection was donated by Karin Ramsey of Houston, whose father was a ceramist in Germany.

A great opportunity to see the entire library requires a trip up to the former choir loft, now the reference section. Looking down provides a feeling of having ascended to Book Heaven.

Outside, the path leading folks to (and reluctantly away from) the splendid library includes a number of bricks engraved with the names of donors and their favorite book quotes. Among them,

Children who love to read

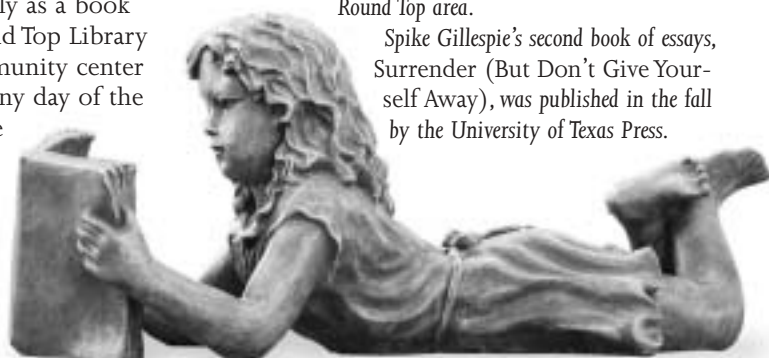
Hold a special kind of magic ...

The power to enrich their entire lives.

Enter now, child. Magic awaits.

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative serves the Round Top area.

Spike Gillespie's second book of essays, *Surrender (But Don't Give Yourself Away)*, was published in the fall by the University of Texas Press.

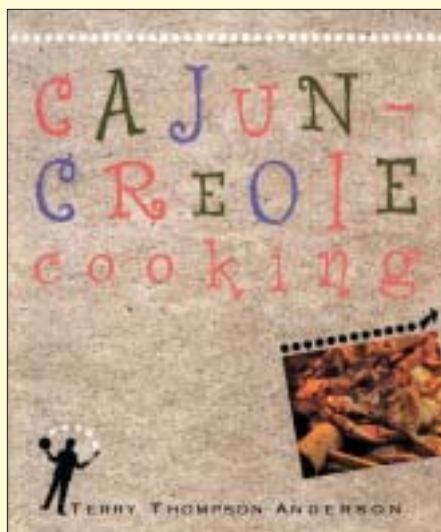


Shrimply Delicious

For Christmas each year, my family picks a theme for the food we're making. This past Christmas, we decided on a Cajun theme, so I turned to Terry Thompson-Anderson's classic book, *Cajun-Creole Cooking* (Shearer Publishing, 1-800-458-3808) for recipes. We had a wonderful repast of Blue Crab-Stuffed Mushrooms, Cajun Cornbread Dressing, Mixed Greens With Turnips and Tasso, and Orange-Glazed Pork Roast. The book, now in its third edition, is a wealth of information and recipes. It covers the nuts and bolts of great Louisiana cooking, from detailed directions for making a traditional roux and seafood stock to time-tested recipes for all of your Cajun favorites. Below are two tasty shrimp recipes from the book—you'll have to buy the book to try our Christmas menu!



© FoodPix



Shrimp Creole

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 3 medium garlic cloves, minced
- 1 large green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 large red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped, including leafy tops
- 1 tablespoon minced flat-leaf parsley
- 2 cans (16 ounces each) stewed tomatoes, diced, liquid reserved
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

- 1/2 teaspoon red (cayenne) pepper
- Salt to taste
- 3 fresh bay leaves, minced, or 2 dried bay leaves, crumbled
- 1/2 teaspoon celery seed
- 2 pounds raw peeled and deveined small shrimp
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 4 green onions, chopped, including green tops
- Cooked white rice

Heat olive oil in a heavy 12-inch Dutch oven over medium heat. Add flour all at once and stir to blend. Cook, stirring constantly, to form a rich, peanut-butter-colored roux. Add onions, garlic, bell pepper, celery and parsley. Cook until onions are wilted and transparent, about 8 minutes. Stir occasionally. Add tomatoes and their liquid, lemon juice, and all seasonings except Worcestershire sauce. Stir to blend well. Bring to a full boil to thicken. Reduce heat to low and cover pan. Simmer 30 minutes.

Stir in shrimp and Worcestershire sauce. Replace cover and cook an additional 30 minutes. Remove cover and stir in green onions; cook 5 minutes. Remove from heat and serve over rice.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Creole Barbecue Shrimp

- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 1 cup canola oil
- 1 can (12 ounces) bock beer
- 1 cup seafood stock or bottled clam broth
- 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 1/2 teaspoons red (cayenne) pepper
- 1 tablespoon finely ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh basil
- 1 teaspoon dried leaf oregano
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 2 teaspoons filé powder
- 6 green onions, chopped, including green tops
- 6 pounds raw unpeeled medium-to-large shrimp

Combine all ingredients except shrimp in a heavy 6-quart pot over medium heat. Stir well to blend. Bring to a simmer and cook for 20 minutes to form a flavorful courtbouillon.

Stir the shrimp into the sauce, coating well. Cook, stirring often, until shrimp turn a rich coral-pink color, about 25 minutes. To serve, spoon shrimp into soup plates and top each serving with a portion of the spicy sauce.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

August's recipe contest subject is Ice Box Pies. I make a lemon ice box pie twice a year without fail for my father: one for Father's Day and one for his birthday. Do you have a recipe for an ice box pie that is a family favorite? Send it in by May 10. The winner will receive a copy of the Texas Co-op Power Cookbook. Be sure to include your name, address and phone number, as well as your co-op affiliation. Send recipes to Home Cooking, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You can also fax recipes to (512) 486-6254 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org

Who knew shrimp was so versatile? We received many—and varied—shrimp recipes, which were hard to narrow down. We tested a number of them, and our top three are below. The winner is Cathy Miller, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative, for her fantastic Spicy Shrimp Wraps, perfect for the hot summer months ahead. Cathy says, "This seems like a lot of steps, but each step is easy, and the finished product is worth the effort!" We agree. She will receive a copy of the Texas Co-op Power Cookbook.

Spicy Shrimp Wraps

4 large tortillas (thin whole wheat or other flavored tortillas designed for wraps)

Spicy Peanut Sauce:

- 1/4 cup chunky peanut butter (at room temperature)
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar or white wine vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (or more to taste)
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes (or more to taste)
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil (can be reduced)
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil (optional)

Whisk together peanut butter, soy sauce, vinegar and seasonings. Continue to whisk while streaming in oil.

Salad Filling:

- 1/2 seedless cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced on an angle
- 2 cups fresh sprouts
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 3 scallions, sliced on an angle

- 12 leaves fresh basil, chopped or torn
- 3 tablespoons chopped, fresh mint leaves (about 4 sprigs)
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar or white wine vinegar
- Salt

Combine first 7 ingredients. Mix together sugar and vinegar and toss with vegetable mixture. Season with salt to taste.

Shrimp Filling:

- 24 medium fresh shrimp, shelled and deveined
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1-2 teaspoons grill seasoning blend (recommend Montreal seasoning) or salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Toss shrimp with soy sauce and seasoning blend (or salt/pepper). Heat oil in skillet; when hot, add garlic and red pepper flakes. Sauté for 30 seconds. Add shrimp and sauté for 2-3 minutes (don't overcook).

For each wrap, blister a tortilla on each side in a hot skillet, then fill with shrimp and salad mixtures, and top with spicy peanut sauce. Wrap

like a burrito. To make eating less messy, roll final product in wax paper. For presentation, slice each wrap in half on the diagonal. Makes around four large wraps, depending on the size of tortilla used.

Serving size: 1 wrap. Per serving: 477 calories, 18 grams protein, 22 grams fat, 54 grams carbohydrates, 3,043 milligrams sodium, 55 milligrams cholesterol

Shrimp Dip

- 1 1/2 cups sour cream
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup chili sauce
- 2 teaspoons yellow prepared mustard
- Few drops Tabasco
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire
- 1 tablespoon horseradish
- 1 tablespoon cut chives
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons dry sherry or lemon juice
- 1 pound boiled shrimp, finely chopped

Combine first 10 ingredients. Blend well and chill. Add chopped, boiled shrimp that have been chilled. Makes about 10 servings. Serve with corn chips.

Serving size: 1/2 cup of dip. Per serving: 209 calories, 11 grams protein, 17 grams fat, 3 grams carbohydrates, 230 milligrams sodium, 108 milligrams cholesterol

Emma Hamil, Mid-South Synergy

SAFE LIVING

'Temporary' Means 'Temporary'

Not enough cord for your lamp or radio to reach the nearest outlet? Stop plowing through the junk drawer for an extension cord. This may not be a good idea. The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) suggests you follow these tips:

- **Do not substitute extension cords for permanent wiring.**
- **Do not run cord through walls, doorways, ceilings or floors.**
- **Do not use an extension cord for more than one appliance.**

If an extension cord is needed for a longer period, temporary power taps (multiple plug outlets) can be used when insufficient electrical receptacles are available. These devices may have three to six electrical receptacles, a circuit breaker, a 6- to 15-foot cord and a surge protector, and should bear the mark of a certified testing organization.

- **Multiple plug outlets must be plugged directly into mounted electrical receptacles. They should not be connected together.**
- **Make sure the extension cord or temporary power strip you use is rated for the products to be plugged in and is marked for either indoor or outdoor use.**
- **Never use a cord that feels hot or is damaged in any way.**



AROUND TEXAS

May

- April 30-May 2. General Sam Houston Folk Festival, **Huntsville**, (936) 295-8113 or www.SamHouston.Memorial.Museum
- April 30-May 2. Birdfest, **Chappell Hill**, www.chappellhillbirdfest.com
- April 30-May 3. Texas Songbird Festival, **Lago Vista**, 1-888-328-5246
1. Ice Cream Festival, **Brenham**, 1-888-BREHAM or www.BrenhamTexas.com
1. German Sausage Dinner, **Pattison**, (281) 934-8218
1. Ole Time Music, **Pearl**, (254) 865-6013
1. Market Day, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-2201
1. Puttin' on the Ritz, Blanco County Courthouse Gala, **Johnson City**, (830) 833-2211
1. Nativescapes Garden Tour, **Fredericksburg**, (830) 685-3811
1. Tall Pines Airing of the Quilts Show & Sale, **Huntsville**, (936) 295-8322
1. Kite Fest, **Kyle**, www.cityofkyle.com/parks
1. Garage/Bake Sale, **Uhland**, (512) 396-2355
1. 40 Head Bull Riding and Dance, **Harper**, (830) 864-4912
1. Karnes County 150th Anniversary parade and festival, **Karnes City/Kenedy**, (830) 583-0128 or www.thecountywide.com
1. Old-Fashioned Flea Market and Pancake Breakfast, **Mount Vernon**, (903) 379-2185
1. Trades Day and Swap Meet, west of **Conroe**, (936) 447-1922
1. Cinco de Mayo Festival and Dance, **Weimar**, 1-888-3WEIMAR
1. VFD and Rescue Department Fundraiser,

- Willow City**, (830) 685-3225
1. Cinco de Mayo Festival, **Athens**, (903) 676-2277
1. Senior Quilt Show, **Bastrop**, (512) 321-7907
1. Indian Springs VFD Barbecue/Auction, **Livingston**, (936) 563-2615
1. Arts and Crafts Day, **Kyle**, (512) 396-2054
1. Mesquite Tree Festival, **Coolidge**, (254) 786-4814
1. Homecoming, **Henly**, (512) 858-4214
1. Extreme Edge Kayak Fishing Tournament, **Rockport**, www.extremeedgefishing.com
1. Airing of the Quilts, **Huntsville**, (936) 295-2150
1. Cove Country Opry, **Copperas Cove**, (254) 547-5966 or www.covecountryopry.com
- 1-2. St. Joseph's Bazaar, **Livingston**, (936) 967-8385
- 1-2. Central Texas Airshow, **Temple**, (254) 298-5770 or www.centraltexasairshow.com
- 1-2. George Paul Memorial Bullriding, **Del Rio**, (830) 775-9595
- 1-2. Gullo Kidzfest, **Conroe**, (936) 788-KIDS
- 1-2. Vintage Auto Club Spring Fever Tour, **Graham**, (940) 549-2783
- 1-2. 50th Annual Village Fair and Texas Music Festival, **League City**, (281) 332-4651
- 1-2. Mayfest, **Calvert**, (979) 364-3884 or www.discovercalvert.com
2. St. Stanislaus Festival, **Bandera**, (830) 460-4712
- 3-8. Mayhaw Festival, **Daisetta**, (936) 536-6695
4. Flower Show & Plant Sale, **Brenham**, (979) 421-9212
4. Brush Country Music Jamboree,

- George West**, (361) 786-3334
5. Cinco de Mayo Celebration, **Huntsville**, (936) 295-0223
- 5-8. Lions Club Rodeo, **Jasper**, (409) 384-2555
- 7-8. Maifest, **Brenham**, (979) 836-3695 or www.BrenhamTexas.com
- 7-9. Bluegrass Festival, **Flomot**, (806) 469-5278
- 7-9. Greek Festival, **Clear Lake**, (281) 326-1740
- 7-9. Texas Crab Festival, **Bolivar Peninsula**, (409) 684-3345
- 7-9, 21-23. Chicken House Flea Market, **Stephenville**, (254) 968-0888
8. Market Days, **Georgetown**, (512) 868-8675 or www.discovergeorgetowntx.com
8. Blackjack Grove Day Festival, **Cumby**, (903) 994-2892
8. Market Days, **Burnet**, (512) 756-4297 or www.burnetchamber.org
8. Garden Tour, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-2201
8. Johnson County Lawn and Garden Show, **Cleburne**, (817) 556-6370 or www.jcmga.org
12. Kolache-Klobase Festival, **East Bernard**, (979) 335-7907
- 12-16. Texas State HOG Rally, **Conroe**, (936) 441-3375
- 13-14. Community Garage Sale, **Kirbyville**, (409) 423-5827
- 14-15. World Championship Bison Cook-Off, **Santa Anna**, (325) 348-3826
- 14-15. Quilt Show, **Bluegrove**, (940) 895-3731
- 14-15. Mini Grand Prix Race, **Waxahachie**, (972) 938-9617
- 14-15. Treasure Trails, 30 miles of treasures, **Cass County**, (903) 639-2351
- 14-16. Trade Days, **Livingston**, (936) 327-3656 or www.cityoflivingston-tx.com/tradedays

FESTIVAL OF THE MONTH BY JIM GRAMON

31st Annual Pasadena Strawberry Festival: May 14-16

I was neither the fastest nor the most productive berry picker in my family. But I always loved walking barefoot in that sandy East Texas soil to round up some berries, carefully dodging big red ants and goathead stickers. Knowing that, it will come as no surprise that strawberry festivals are among my favorite events.

Pasadena (just east of Houston) will host its 31st Annual Strawberry Festival May 14-16.

All the events are held at the spacious Pasadena Fairgrounds at the intersection of Fairmont Parkway and Red Bluff. They'll have all the fixin's for a whole lot of fun:

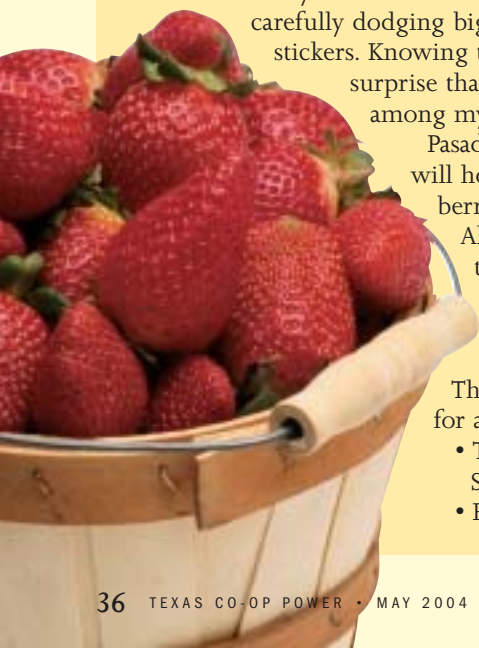
- The World's Largest Strawberry Shortcake
- Four Entertainment Stages

- Outstanding Carnival
- Children's Pavilion
- Texas State Mud Volleyball Championship (who knew?)
- Lots of Clowns
- Teen Battle of the Bands
- Barbecue Cook-Off
- Truckloads of Fresh Strawberries

What could make this whole thing even better? Well, all the proceeds go to the San Jacinto Day Foundation, which provides scholarships for students and books for college libraries, and preserves and promotes Texas history.

For more information, contact the San Jacinto Day Foundation/Pasadena Strawberry Festival; phone: (281) 991-9500; e-mail: bert@strawberryfest.org; website: www.strawberryfest.org.

Jim Gramon is the author of several books on Texas festivals and storytellers. Jim@JimGramon.com, www.JimGramon.com.



- 14-16. Trade Days, **Fredericksburg**, (830) 990-4900 or www.fbgtradedays.com
15. Legends of Texas Swing Music Festival, "Alamo" movie set, **Dripping Springs**, (512) 826-4707 or www.legendsoftexaswing.com
15. Zingha-Wee-Thay Powwow, **Springtown**, (972) 285-3847
15. Art Splash on the Square, **Graham**, 1-800-256-4844
15. Spring Festival and Car Show, **Gun Barrel City**, (903) 887-3152 or www.cclake.net
15. Blanco Bonanza Bulls and Barrels, **Blanco**, (830) 833-4418
15. Annual Freeze-Off, **Clarksville**, (903) 427-2645 or www.red-river.net
15. Pioneer Round-Up, **Plainview**, (806) 293-8283
15. Bubble Day, **Beaumont**, (409) 833-5100
- 15-16. Highland Lake Barbecue Cook-Off, **Burnet**, (512) 756-8080 or www.burnetchamber.org
- 15-16. Live Oak Antiques Show, **Columbus**, (979) 865-5618
- 15-16. Fine Art and Wine Trail, **Spicewood**, (830) 798-2020 or www.texasfineartandwine.org
- 15-16. Farming and Ranching Heritage Festival, **Richmond**, (281) 343-0218 or www.georgeranch.org
18. Farm and Ranch Tour, **Athens**, (903) 675-5181
19. Gazebo Music Fest, **Kyle**, www.cityofkyle.com/parks
21. Victoria Country Opry, **Victoria**, (361) 552-9347
- 21-23. Big Thicket Wildflower Exposition, **Kountze**, 1-866-BIG THIC
22. Power of the Past Tractor Show, **Paris**, (903) 784-7182
22. Texas Steak Cook-Off, Beef Symposium and Tourist Trap, **Hico**, 1-800-361-HICO or www.texassteakcookoff.com
22. John Wesley Hardin Days, **Comanche**, (325) 356-9558
22. Texas Natural and Western Swing Festival, **San Marcos**, 1-888-200-5620 or www.sanmarcoscharms.com
22. Trade Day, **Coldspring**, (936) 653-2009
22. Hunter Road Market Days, **New Braunfels**, (830) 708-8878
- 22-26. U.S. Open Windsurfing Regatta, **Corpus Christi**, 1-800-766-2302 or www.corpuschristi-tx-cvb.org
23. Lions Club Fish Fry, **Llano**, (325) 247-1470
24. Country Music Show, **Lockhart**, (512) 281-3854
28. Old Fiddler Reunion and Contest, **Athens**, (903) 675-2325
- 28-30. National Polka Festival and 5K Run, **Ennis**, 1-888-366-4748 or www.nationalpolkafestival.com
- 28-30. Memorial Weekend Rodeo, **Bandera**, (830) 796-7207 or www.banderarodeo.com
- 28-31. Roadrider's Hill Country Tour and Trade Show, **Burnet**, (512) 756-4297 or

- www.burnetchamber.org
29. Cowboy Breakfast, **Leakey**, (830) 232-5199
29. Tour d'Temple Bike Tour, **Temple**, (254) 791-2747 or www.visittemple.com
29. Founders Day, **Richards**, (936) 851-2444
29. Hay Day Community Festival and Parade, **Gordonville**, (903) 523-5982 or www.hay-day.us
- 29-30. Lone Star Championship Chuck Wagon Races, **DeKalb**, (903) 278-6151 or

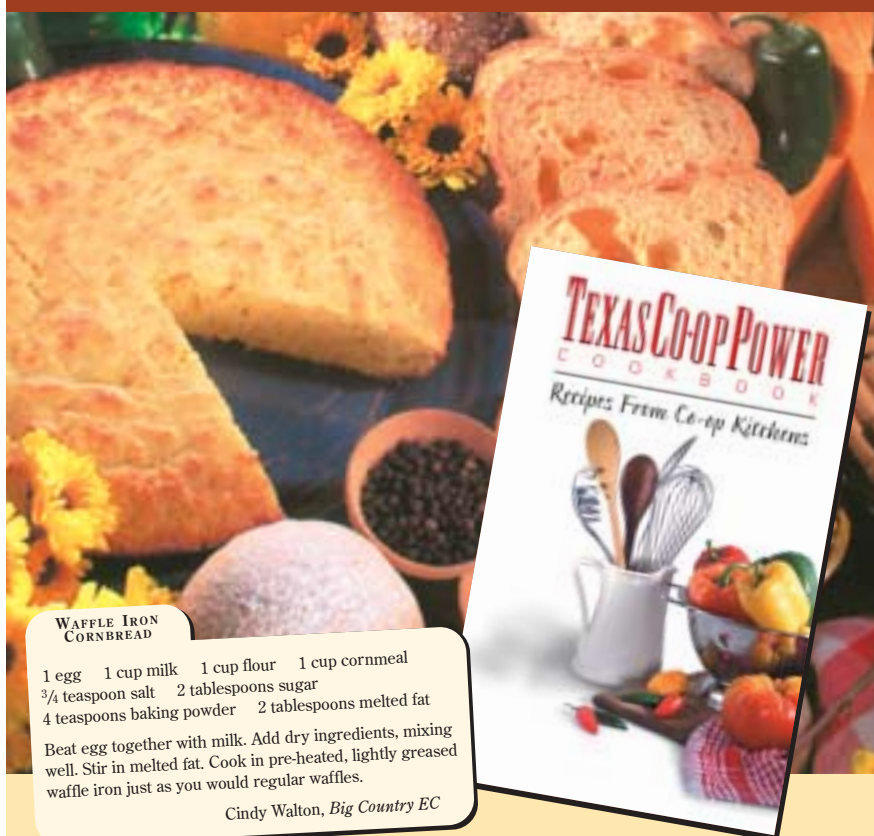
- www.threesidesfarm.com
- 29-30. May Festival, **Ellinger**, (979) 378-2311

Event information can be mailed to Around Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, faxed to (512) 486-6254, or e-mailed to aroundtx@texas-ec.org. It must be submitted by the 10th of the month two months prior to publication. E.g., July submissions must be received prior to May 10. Events are listed according to space available.

FOUR STAR FARE for the LONE STAR STATE

★★★★

Mouthwatering recipes from the heart of Texas



WAFFLE IRON CORNBREAD

1 egg 1 cup milk 1 cup flour 1 cup cornmeal
 3/4 teaspoon salt 2 tablespoons sugar
 4 teaspoons baking powder 2 tablespoons melted fat

Beat egg together with milk. Add dry ingredients, mixing well. Stir in melted fat. Cook in pre-heated, lightly greased waffle iron just as you would regular waffles.

Cindy Walton, *Big Country EC*

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No Friend Like a Best Friend

After looking through a couple hundred "best friends" photos, we decided that Texas is aptly named—the Indian word *tejas* means "friend." In fact, there were enough entries to split the photos into two categories: humans and animals (with humans and/or other animals). We decided that "animal friends" could be a separate topic for our September 2004 issue, so you still have time to submit friendly animal photos if you wish! Meanwhile, enjoy these Texas-friendly shots of human pals from our readers.

The topic for July is "Family Fun." Send your photos with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description to Family Fun, Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704 before May 10. For digital photo requirements and e-mail instructions, go to www.texas-ec.org/tcp/digital.html. We regret that we can no longer return photos that are not accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.



Clay Johnson gives his best friend and dad, Eric, plenty of help. Clay's grandparents, Jamie and Debbie Baumgart, are Trinity Valley EC members.

Five-year-old Laythen Adams always walks his brother, Taylor Thompson, off the field after a game. The best friends are sons of South Plains EC members Heath and Mitzi Adams and grandsons of Gene and Sandra Taylor.



Houston County EC member Melba J. McGhee snapped this shot of her son, Jonny MacNaughton, and her granddaughter, Jessica, when she noticed that Jessica had a piece of hay in her mouth, just like her dad!



Cousins and best friends Jared Kimminau and Emily Bromley explore the nature trail at Grandpa's farm. South Plains EC member Jane Bromley submitted the photo.



Then and now: Jane Aly Waldrop and Charlotte Dykes Pigg have been best friends since 1949. Jane is a member of Bryan Texas Utilities.

UPCOMING in Focus on Texas

Subject	Issue	Deadline
Family Fun	July	May 10
Fish Story	August	June 10
Animal Friends	September	July 10
Chow Time	October	August 10
On the Farm	November	September 10
School Plays	December	October 10



Bandera—Nature Is My Sustenance

The imaginary Alpine lakes appear before me again, nestled serenely between these hills that I wistfully call mountains. The phenomenon only occurs in early morning when the dew point meets ambient temperature. Briefly, my spirit is elevated 10,000 feet, and I am the lone visitor to a mystic place. I must force myself to refocus on Highway 16 and my commute to San Antonio. The lakes return to vapor masses that will soon disappear as the temperature rises.

Not all morning scenes carry me far away. There are days when the atmosphere is so clear that the undulating folds of the hillside reveal their most intimate details. I can make out the game trails of white-tailed and axis deer, and the sage color of the juniper is easily distinguished from the sharper greens of the oak and mesquite.

The Hill Country feeds my soul. I discovered Bandera two years ago when I was searching for a home for me and Skitzo, the old family dog. We moved into a limestone house behind the 1891 courthouse. It is a peaceful place where I can feel the words that Enos Mills, father of Rocky Mountain National Park, wrote a hundred years ago: "Nature takes mind and body and puts them at their best. Here one comes to know himself and to be the self he would like to be."

I receive frequent visits from the natural world that surrounds the old house. In the backyard before daylight, a baby possum cautiously crawls up the skeletal remains of an old live oak tree covered by the dense vines of the trumpet creeper. I feel privileged to witness this recluse, who shows no haste to retreat.

In the front of the house, hummingbirds fly in the open door and nearly transparent lizards with large dark eyes scoot over the sill. Skitzo is a complicit conspirator in these acts as he relaxes without stirring. Our unintentional practice of inviting the outdoors in is,



Wynan Meinzer

A Hill Country highway shrouded in mist.

instead of an inconvenience or intrusion, a welcome sharing of habitats.

Local natural areas host an even richer variety of flora and fauna, and, in turn, they enrich me. Once, when a light rain fell and all else was hushed, a pair of muskrats glided almost imperceptibly through the tributary that drains into the Sabinal River. One hotter, dryer day, the endangered golden-cheeked warbler appeared more interested in its bath in a trickling seep than it was in my presence. I am grateful that these creatures allow me to observe their private world.

Nature extends an invitation, a promise that every visit has potential for adventure. As dark settled in one summer evening, I watched and waited at the mouth of one of the Hill Country's natural sinks, a rocky-lined hole in the surface of the ground. Cave crickets emerged en masse, like a wave of soldiers suddenly appearing across a distant horizon. Hundreds became thousands, and I could hear a light rustling as they reached the dry ground litter. Turning on my headlamp, I saw that the walls

of the cave appeared to be in motion as harvestmen, or daddy longlegs, marched beside the crickets. A blacktail rattlesnake moved silently toward the cave in search of frogs and mice as Mars rose in the southeastern sky. I hiked out, recalling a night last winter when I hugged the cavity's opening for warmth as a light snow fell.

Skitzo doesn't visit the natural areas with me anymore. Instead, as I step onto the porch, he welcomes me home and tells me about his day sharing his water dish with the sparrows or his evening watching deer graze on our neighbor's favorite plants. Together we go inside as the lizards evade our footsteps.

Like a cup of morning coffee, these daily experiences awaken me and let me know I am alive. Like the breakfast that follows, they nourish me. Here, in the Hill Country, I am the self I want to be.

More of Gail Denkhaus' essays are scheduled to appear in *How I Got To Bandera 2*, to be published this summer by Pallafox-Calli Publishing Company.