

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

Holiday Lights
Around Texas

PLUS:

Mountain Lions
Holiday Cookies
Texas by Satellite

Ice Storms

Although much of the state is unaccustomed to snow and ice, temperatures can fall below freezing even in South Texas. Wet snow and ice snap tree branches and cause electric lines to sag.

To make our families safe and comfortable during a winter power outage:

- Report any outages.
- Turn off electrical appliances that were operating at the time the power went off, including your heating system. Leave one light on so you'll know when service has been restored.
- Keep warm by closing off rooms you don't need and use only safe sources of heat, like a wood stove. Do not burn charcoal indoors—it releases carbon monoxide, which is deadly. If you operate lanterns or fuel-fired cook stoves or heaters, make sure that you have adequate ventilation to keep harmful fumes from accumulating.
- Don't drive unless absolutely necessary until road conditions improve. If you must drive, go slowly and pump your brakes to stop.
- Be extra careful not to slip on treacherous ice.

Ice storms are more than a nuisance—they can be deadly!

ICE ISN'T ALWAYS NICE



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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

A MAGAZINE ABOUT TEXAS LIVING

The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

Who doesn't love driving around at night during the holidays, enjoying all the magically illuminated homes? Fort Worth photographer Christina Patoski published a book depicting some of her favorite finds. This month we are reprinting a select few for your enjoyment.

You'll see more holiday lights in Jim Gramon's festival column about a water parade near Galveston. Where I grew up on the coast, we had a similar nighttime boat parade. From a distance, all you could see were the slowly moving lights on the inter-coastal waterway—not even the outlines of the boats were discernable in the blackness of night. My favorites were the sailboats with their simply lit, repeating triangular patterns.

The satellite view of Texas featured in Texas, USA would make a great holiday card. Of course, many areas served by cooperatives don't register on the map at all because of their sparse population. That's why neighbors got together to create rural electric cooperatives in the first place—to bring illumination to areas without large concentrations of people. Today, it's mainly in co-op areas where you can still enjoy a splendid starry night sky.

This month we also feature mountain lions, who flourish far away from bright lights and big cities.

Our recipes section features holiday baking, a beloved family tradition. And Focus on Texas looks at another tradition—the school play.

Happy holidays!

Peg

Peg Champion
Vice President, Communications/
Publisher

Can humans and
mountain lions coexist?



PHOTO COURTESY TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE © 2004

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Photos by Christina Patoski

Photographer Christina Patoski started snapping holiday yard displays more than three decades ago. Here are some of our favorites from across Texas.

Living With Mountain Lions 10

By Elaine Robbins

These secretive and solitary cats live under the radar screen of most Texans, but they still roam vast reaches of the state.

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The best holiday cookies. Christmas Boat Lane Parade in the Clear Lake Channel.

Focus on Texas 37

It's hard to tell who has the most fun at school plays—the cast or the audience.

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By J. Ronald Eyton
Nighttime Texas.



Sierra Fox is a happy spring flower for her preschool production. Her grandmother, Iris Campbell, is a member of Pedernales EC. For more photos from school plays, turn to page 37.

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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LETTERS

Now Try Chicken-Fried Turkey

I enjoyed reading those articles in the September issue that rhapsodized over chicken-fried steak, its various methods of preparation and history. Don't get me wrong, I really like a good chicken-fried steak, but don't even dream of ordering one unless you are seated in a café that has a reputation for that dish, or else you are sure to be disappointed.

However, I'll give you one better. For many years now, I have served chicken-fried turkey to my family and friends, to their delight. The very best part is to bone a thigh or two, slice them crosswise a little thicker than 1/2 inch, douse in egg beaten with a little water (if you don't have butter-milk), dredge in seasoned flour, and fry in 1/2 inch of canola oil until nice and tan. Everybody has their own cream gravy, which is necessary to enhance this really great offering.

WARREN HOLMGREEN, Central Texas EC

Pulled His Trigger

Well, you finally "pulled my trigger." I have started to write so many times when a particular item hit me, but the story on the glider pilots in WWII did it ["Flying 'Coffins' During WWII," October 2004].

The Clark and Aline Atteberry family arrived in Mercedes, Texas, in 1922 with three of us kids—I was the oldest; my younger brother, Eugene (Gene) Taylor; and the newborn baby sister, Danneta Aline.

Before we were through, there were five of us who graduated from Mercedes High School. [My brother] Lt. Gene Atteberry was one of those glider pilots who died. He died in March 1945, just a few short days before the end of the war with Germany. Most of the boys from Gene's class in school were casualties.

I am just a few short days from my 86th birthday, and I have been an avid reader since I was first introduced to the Weekly Reader.

I enjoyed the windmill stories. All the stories about the East Texas area always get to me since I spent about 20 years all around Lufkin.

PHILIP C. ATTEBERRY, Magic Valley EC



The Mum Phenomenon

I want to thank you so much for your article in the October 2004 issue on homecoming mums ["Mum-a-Mia!"]. I have been doing custom mums for 11 years and trying to explain this phenomenon to people who have never seen homecoming mums can sometimes be quite a challenge. All I can tell them is the bottom line: "Only in Texas!" Thank you also for correcting me. I had understood that mums were only a North Texas thing, but your article proved me wrong. It's all over Texas! You're right—Texas girls really do make a statement.

TRISH PIRANEO, CoServ Electric

Elegant Essay

Just a note to thank you and Tom Dodge for the tribute to J.X. Miller ["Hanging Out With J.X.," September 2004]. I thought this was an elegant piece, a fine essay about an "ordinary" person. Loved the photo and the clothespin diagram, too. The clothespin bag at our house had a different shape, kind of a little doll dress, but I remember it well—at least now I do.

JULIE ARDERY, Austin

Another Route to Garner

We enjoyed Cheryl Tucker's article on Garner State Park in your September 2004 issue ["Best of Co-op Country"], but she forgot to mention that

you can get to it through our wonderful town of Sabinal. At Sabinal (60 miles west of San Antonio), turn north at the one-and-only light on Highway 90, at Highway 127. Go through (or stop and visit our friendly little town) past the city park, turn left at the intersection, and go on to Concan. This is a much better way to get to Garner State Park!

PATRICIA MCFARLAND, Medina EC

More Windmills Needed

Sooner than later, this country must come to the firm realization that alternative sources of energy are the answer. Already, if you can believe the oil companies and your federal government, we are in a crisis. Oil is selling at \$50 a barrel and has been used as a reason to open up Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to exploitation. I'd like to see more windmills dotted across our Texas landscape. Yes, even on Padre Island. Also from Fort Stockton to the Louisiana border and beyond!

CARL BAILEY, Comanche EC

Co-ops and Cell Phones

The rules to follow when power goes out, given in the October 2004 issue, are good; however, during an outage, we discovered something else that we believe should be included. We called the local co-op on a cell phone and the co-op didn't recognize the number as one of its customers. Eventually, we remembered an old rotary dial phone that we have and used it to call the co-op. At that time, we learned that we should also give the co-op our cell phone number so they will accept the call as being from a customer. We receive very good service from our local co-op, Trinity Valley EC.

FRANK H. JOHNS, Trinity Valley 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.

THE MOST TASTEFUL OF GIFTS!

With 128 pages of mouthwatering recipes, Texas Co-op Power cookbooks make great gifts for friends and family.



RECIPE FOR A HAPPY YEAR

Fill your holidays—and your year—with lots of tasty treats from your favorite magazine in the *Texas Co-op Power Cookbook*. It's a great gift for a friend or neighbor, so they can also start their new year with taste!

Order Form

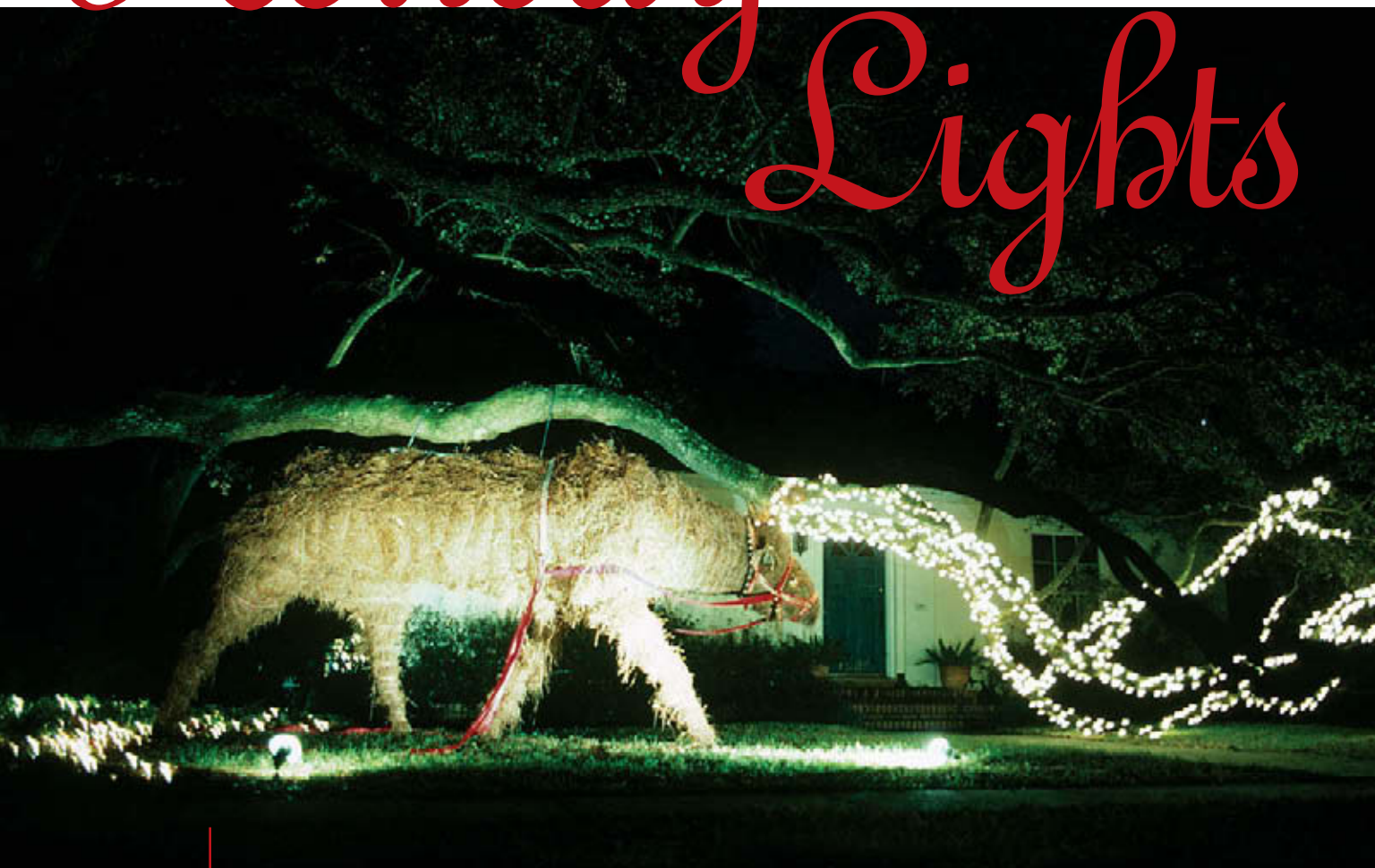
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*P*hotographer Christina Patoski believes that holiday lights are unique American folk art. She began documenting both humble and grand yard displays in her hometown of Fort Worth more than 30 years ago, then traversed the country looking for more proof of what she describes as “man’s innate desire to create, to celebrate and to share.” Texas Co-op Power is sharing some of the photographer’s Texas discoveries with our readers to commemorate Christmas 2004.

The photographs were taken with a 35mm Nikon camera using extended time exposure and available light. More of Patoski’s photos can be found in *Merry Christmas America: A Front Yard View of the Holidays* (Thompson-Grant Inc., 1994).

Holiday Lights



Live Oak/Reindeer, Houston

It takes artist Kathy Hall three full days to craft a huge reindeer using branches from her live oak to represent the deer’s antlers. Her neighbors on Nottingham Street and art students provide trimmings of ribbon, pinecones and bells.



Gazebo, North Richland Hills

The Allen family just couldn't stop themselves, extending their holiday decorating all the way to the gazebo by their backyard pool. Adding to the drama of the brilliant night sky is a full moon obscured by dramatic clouds.



Rustic Wagon, Odessa

Latrice Neves, husband Bill, her five kids and six grandkids carry on a family tradition of Christmas decorating that started in 1960 with Latrice's father in Levelland. This old wooden wagon was found at a garage sale.



Panty Hose Rack, Nocona

Bill Richardson's unique creations were enormous and legendary—you could see their glow on the horizon for miles. Bill, who passed away in 1996, used discarded drugstore and jewelry displays, like the panty hose rack pictured here, for his flights of fancy.



Windmill, Lubbock

Nothing says High Plains Christmas better than a decorated windmill.



Toy Parade, Odessa

Bill Neves cleverly created a miniature ski run by covering an existing rock wall with old bed sheets. His daughter's old dolls think it's better than Aspen.



Cadillac, Dallas

Jack Ward and Brian Rumpel decided on a lark to decorate their car in 1996. Even though the original decoration took only five hours to create, they had to do nightly touchups, especially straightening out drooping strings of lights. It was too much trouble for a repeat performance, so they sold the car.



Luminous Angel, Fort Worth

A lifelike white angel in ascension brings a mysterious glow to a suburban Fort Worth porch.



Electric Meter, Austin

If there's a Christmas decorating genius, it's Jamie Lipman, the mastermind behind Austin's annual 37th Street decoration extravaganza. He's been at it for almost two decades, inspiring his neighbors to join in the holiday fracas.



Triangle, Dallas

"The only person who can out-gaudy me is Tammy Faye Baker," says June Arnold, who created a Christmas tree out of used chicken potpie tins.



PHOTO COURTESY TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE © 2004

LIVING WITH MOUNTAIN LIONS

A solitary cat struggles to survive against the odds.

BY ELAINE ROBBINS



© W. PERRY CONWAY/CORBIS

As the sun started its slow descent, wildlife researcher Bill Adams and a friend watched a cottontail rabbit hop down the road toward his truck. They had been tracking locations of a radio-collared female mountain lion for a research study. Suddenly, about 20 yards in front of the truck, a mountain lion kitten dashed out and chased the rabbit into the brush.

Surprised and delighted, they waited a few minutes. Then they searched along the brush line for signs of a kill. "We saw [the kitten] sitting right in the brush watching us," recalls Adams. "Soon he felt comfortable and nonchalantly walked across the road and sat under a mesquite tree. There he found a Texas tortoise. He actually played with it like a housecat might play with a toy." The lion cub began chewing on the tortoise.

"Out of 6.2 billion people on the planet," Adams remembers thinking, "my friend and I are probably the only ones watching a mountain lion eat dinner."

Indeed, it was a rare opportunity to see a mountain lion in the wild. Secretive and solitary, these cats (also known as cougars or pumas) live under most of our radar screens. In fact, many people are surprised to learn they still exist in Texas.

"Mountain lions live on the fringes of municipalities and in rural America and most people never know it," says Dede Armentrout, director of the Mountain Lion Foundation of Texas. "It's amazing to me that they've survived—and thrived—on the edges of human civilization."

In Texas, mountain lions continue to roam the desert mountain ranges of the Trans-Pecos

(especially Big Bend) and the dense brushlands of South Texas. Although there are no confirmed populations elsewhere in the state, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department mammologist John Young regularly receives calls reporting sightings in other areas, like East Texas and Fort Worth.

"Recently we've had a lot of sighting reports in the Bastrop-Lockhart area—at least a couple of them that were fairly detailed and appeared reliable," he says. But people mistake everything from bobcats to deer to housecats for the lions. Such sightings are so notoriously inaccurate that wildlife biologist Harley Shaw once dismissed them as "UFOs—unidentified furry objects."

Mountain lions have endured amazingly well in the American West, despite human efforts to wipe them out. They have survived hunting, poisoning and trapping. A few decades ago, when scientists predicted that human encroachment on their habitat would finally send the lions over the brink, they rebounded instead. Today between 10,000 and 50,000

mountain lions live in the western states, from Colorado to California. Although lions were eradicated in eastern North America more than a hundred years ago, a remnant population of Florida lions hangs on in the Everglades. That subspecies, one of the most seriously endangered animals on the planet, recently got an infusion of new genes from Texas mountain lions that were released there for breeding.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

How has the mountain lion survived? A natural athleticism certainly helps. With a body 3 to 4 feet long and weighing up to 200 pounds, "a lion can jump flat-footed 18 feet and land on the roof of a two-story house," says Armentrout. By comparison, the Olympic record for a human high jump is a wimpy 7.8 feet.

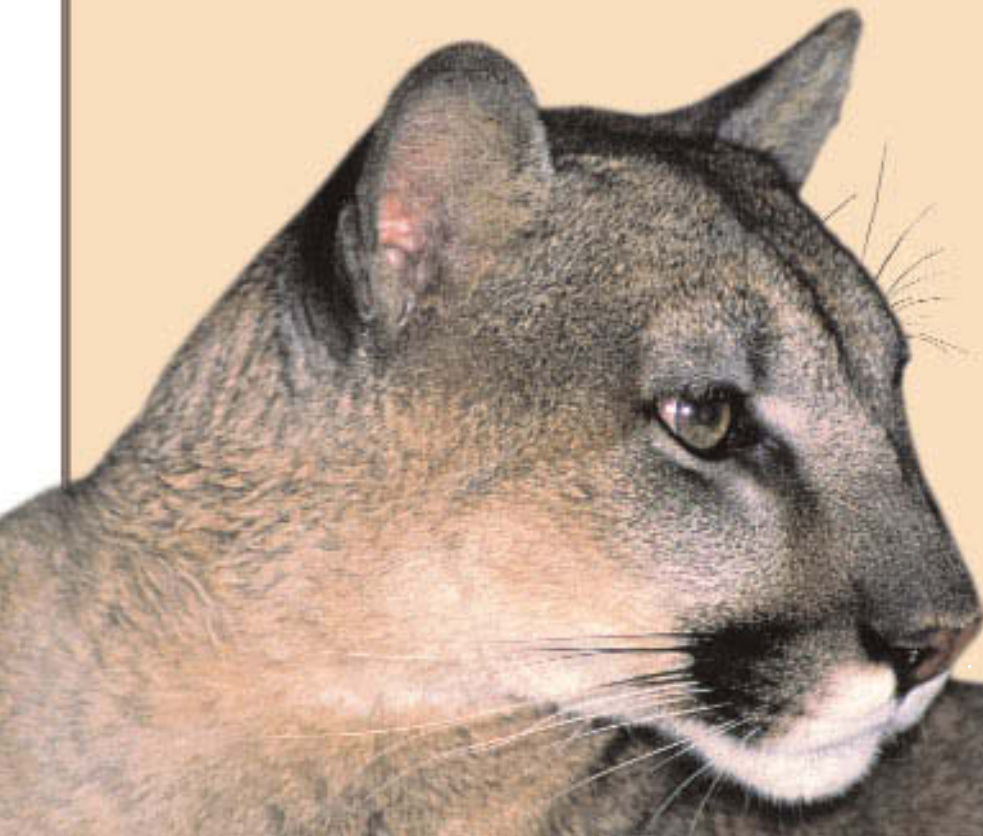
The mountain lion is also a consummate hunter. It can drop a 600-pound elk—that's three times its size. It can kill a deer or a bighorn sheep with barely a fight. Perhaps most

impressive, the mountain lion is what biologists call a "porcupine specialist." How do you eat a porcupine without self-administering acupuncture? "Carefully," replies one mountain lion expert.

Hunt training starts early, when a mother leaves her kittens at a kill while she looks for their next meal. In his book, *Soul Among Lions*, Harley Shaw describes the distinctive look of a kill site that has been worked over by kittens as "a minor tornado. Grass and ground litter may be disturbed for 50 feet surrounding such a carcass. Much rough-and-tumble romping occurs. Leg bones, ribs and even the skull are chewed into small pieces. Chunks of hair, hide, ears and tail are torn and scattered, suggesting that such fragments are used as toys."

Although athleticism is an undeniable factor in the lion's survival, attitude seems to play a part as well. The lion's game plan for dealing with humans combines three parts avoidance with one part contempt. Writer Rick Bass observed this attitude during an unexpected face-off with a mountain lion on a deserted logging road near his home. After glancing back and forth between Bass and his dog, the cat stared at him with "the purest distillation of scorn I have ever encountered." In the end, writes Bass, "it was all just a little too weird for the lion. After more scowling, he turned and walked off."

This feisty attitude develops early. Kittens, adorably furry with black



spots and bright blue eyes, hiss and bare their teeth in their best imitation of fierceness. "Sure, they're cute," admits Adams, who once tracked down a den to fit a kitten with an expandable radio collar. "But they can be pretty nasty. We were definitely wearing leather gloves, and we didn't get bit. But it wasn't for lack of effort on their part."

At about one-and-a-half years old, young lions strike out on their own to establish their own territories. According to Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) studies, a male's territory covers 130 square miles in West Texas and 80 square miles in South Texas, where deer are more plentiful. Female territories are slightly smaller and can overlap. Except for brief mating interludes and females' time with their kittens, mountain lions spend the rest of their lives alone, hunting and defending their territory from intruders.

This loner subsists primarily on mule deer in West Texas and white-tailed deer in South Texas and supplements its diet with wild hogs, javelina, raccoon, skunk, rabbit and other small game. Although a mountain lion has been known to make quick work of a herd of sheep or

goats—a fact that doesn't endear it to ranchers—its impact on cattle is minimal, only occasionally killing a single calf.

The loneliness of the long-distance hunter ends every two years, when a male and female come together to mate. During this period, they are the picture of domestic bliss, hunting and dining together and mating as often as 60 or 70 times a day. But after a week or two, the male leaves as suddenly as he arrived. Single parenting is the rule for mountain lions. The female nurses, raises and trains her young completely unassisted.

CAN HUMANS AND MOUNTAIN LIONS COEXIST?

Although this creature has shown remarkable resilience, its fate in Texas is a cause for concern. Texas is the only state in the nation with mountain lions where these cats have no legal protection. In the 1970s and again in the 1990s, the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club petitioned for protection, but their efforts were defeated.

Texas Parks and Wildlife argues that the mountain lion population is

stable and therefore doesn't need protection, but no credible data exists to back this position. Mortality rates are alarmingly high. During a recent TPWD study at Big Bend Ranch State Park, 15 of 21 cats collared for study were killed by a private predator control specialist on a private ranch adjacent to the park. Ten of 19 cats radio-collared for a South Texas TPWD study were killed during the study—this time by hunters. Last year Wildlife Services, a predator-control division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, killed a record 86 mountain lions in Texas. Says one former TPWD wildlife biologist, "There is a real concern, especially in South Texas, as to whether lions can sustain a kill rate of this magnitude."

Texas landowners have always fiercely defended their right to control predators on their land. Ironically, some ranchers don't worry about their livestock, but fear the mountain lions will kill their deer. With a big buck worth as much as \$10,000 to a rancher, a deer-eating lion poses a substantial financial threat. But that threat may be more perceived than real. Adams recently studied deer predation by lions in



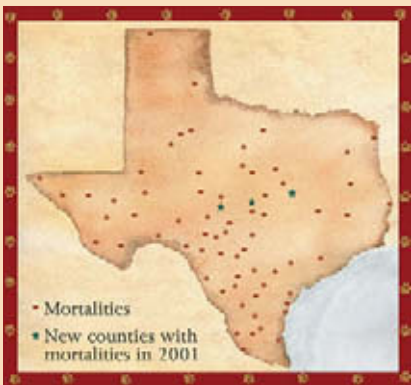
WHAT TO DO IF YOU ENCOUNTER A MOUNTAIN LION

In the past five years, there has been only one confirmed mountain lion attack on a human in Texas. However, a mountain lion encounter is always a possibility, especially in Big Bend. Here are some tips if you encounter a mountain lion:

- ✿ **Stand tall. Mountain lions are intimidated by height.**
- ✿ **Put children up on your shoulders.**
- ✿ **Don't run, bend over, or turn your back.**
- ✿ **Yell, throw things, fight back.**

Because mountain lions are solitary hunters, injuries can threaten their ability to survive. As a result, they may back off from a fight. Many people who have put up a good resistance have successfully fought off a lion attack.

TEXAS MOUNTAIN LION MORTALITY RATES 1983-2001



South Texas. His conclusion? Mountain lions actually consume less than 1 percent of the overabundant white-tailed deer population of South Texas.

For decades, the debate over mountain lion protection has been hampered by a lack of reliable population figures. Now a new study will provide the first real numbers. Using cutting-edge genetics testing, researchers—Jan Janecka and Michael Tewes of the Cesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute in Kingsville—will determine current population figures. They will also determine whether Texas populations still have enough genetic diversity to remain stable, as well as which travel corridors need to remain open to allow dispersal of young and access to mates. The study (see www.tpwd.state.tx.us) should give TPWD the information it needs to determine whether to put a management plan in place. One approach would be mandatory licensing for professional trappers and required reporting of any lion kills.

Is there enough room in Texas for both mountain lions and people? It's a question that says as much about our tolerance for wildness as it does about geography. "We're demonstrating right now that humans are compatible with mountain lions, and we've been compatible for a long, long time," says Armentrout. "They don't like to eat us very much, and we rarely see them, and that can continue for the foreseeable future."

As Adams watched the kitten dining on Texas tortoise, he thought with admiration about its mother. "Several mountain lions had been killed on that ranch, but she hadn't," he says. "She was pretty wily and educated." Finally, after about 10 minutes, he noticed the kitten look up from its kill and over its shoulder in the direction of the radio-collared female.

"We got the impression that maybe she was communicating that

he needed to move on from where he was," Adams recalls. It would be a crucial lesson in the young cat's life. Reluctantly leaving the tortoise behind, the kitten, all spots and spunk, ambled away and disappeared into the thick brush.

Elaine Robbins wrote "Drive Yourself Wild" in the April 2004 issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. She covers nature and travel from her base in Austin.

Emergency Kit

PACK YOUR EMERGENCY KIT NOW!

Have you taken steps to prepare for severe storms before they strike? Why not put together an emergency supply kit now?

Here's what your kit should include:

- First-aid kit
- Cash (banks and ATMs may be unavailable in a power outage)
- Battery-operated radio
- Flashlight (and extra batteries)
- Important documents and records, photo IDs, proof of residence
- Three-day supply of nonperishable food
- Three gallons of bottled water per person
- Coolers for food and ice storage
- Fire extinguisher
- Blankets, sleeping bags and extra clothing
- Prescription medications, written copies of prescriptions, hearing aids and other special medical items
- Eyeglasses and sunglasses
- Extra keys
- Toilet paper, clean-up supplies, duct tape, tarp, rope
- Can opener, knife, tools



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BEST OF CO-OP COUNTRY CONTEST 2005

We invite you to participate in our third Best of Co-op Country contest. Print your choices, along with the location and phone number where applicable, in whatever categories you wish. Provide your name, address, telephone number and co-op. Mail this page or a copy to "Best of Co-op Country," 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, or download the webpage from the September issue at texascooppower.com or e-mail to coopcountry@texas-ec.org.

Entries will be judged on the number and persuasiveness of nominations received. You don't have to explain your nomination, but comments might help us choose a winner. Photographs are also useful.

Because the volume of "Best" nominations has increased, we are changing the rules. Petitions are not allowed. Each nomination must be sent separately by mail or e-mail—except in the new student contest described below.

BEST OF CO-OP COUNTRY GENERAL CONTEST CATEGORIES	
1. Place to Take the Kids	5. Hamburger
2. Romantic Getaway	6. Scenic Bridge
3. Historic Site	7. Golf Course
4. Summer Camp	8. Dining Worth the Drive

BEST OF CO-OP COUNTRY STUDENT CONTEST	
Class or School Project: students from middle and high school may nominate one of the following:	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 30px;">Best Town To Live In</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 30px;">Best Texas Writer</div>
<p><i>Students must explain in writing why their choice is best. Quantity and quality of nominations will be judged. Teachers and parents are not allowed to write or edit the submissions. The winning school will receive a prize of \$1,000.</i></p>	

Your Name _____	Co-op _____
Address _____	City/Zip _____
Telephone Number _____	

The deadline for submitting nominations is March 15, 2005.
The results will be published in the September 2005 issue of Texas Co-op Power.

Downed Lines


Weather and car accidents are the main causes of downed power lines. Always stay away and warn others to stay clear of power lines. Even if they don't hum, spark or "dance," downed lines can be dangerous—they can carry an electric current strong enough to cause serious injury or even death.

Follow these rules:

- If you see a downed power line, move away from the line and anything touching it.
- The proper way to move away from the line is to shuffle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times to minimize the chance for a human path of electric current.
- If someone is in direct or indirect contact with the downed line, do not touch the person. Call 911 instead.
- Don't try to move a downed power line or anything in contact with the line by using another object such as a broom or stick.
- Don't drive over downed power lines.
- If you are in your car and it is in contact with a downed line, stay in your car. Honk your horn for help but tell others to stay away from your vehicle. Call 911 if you have a cell phone or ask passersby to do it.



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LINES DOWN — BUT NOT OUT

GIVE HOLIDAY GIFTS THAT SAVE ENERGY



Holiday gift giving may warm hearts, but it generates a million tons of waste between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve.

To offset some of it, why not stuff those stockings with energy-efficient small appliances like kitchen aids and grooming devices? Look for the Energy Star label—it guarantees that the appliance you're buying is energy-efficient—on TVs, DVD players, cordless phones and computers.

The newest compact fluorescent light bulbs are small enough to slip into a holiday stocking. The bulbs outperform fluorescent lamps of the past, and they save tons of energy over their long lifetime.

If you're buying a battery-powered

present, include rechargeable batteries. If the gift requires standard batteries, let the recipient know where to recycle them.

Give your time instead of a department store item. Offer to baby-sit, work in the yard or cook dinner. Loved ones will be touched by your consideration, and the gift could save you money and energy.

Wrap your gifts in reusable bags or yesterday's newspaper. Glam them up a bit with hand-drawn greetings. The paper can later be used as packing material.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPS STRETCH HOLIDAY DOLLARS

Stretch your holiday budget by saving a few bucks on energy this season.

Your outdoor holiday lights may make your home sparkle at night, but turn them off when you go to bed. Not only will you save on your electric bill, but you also will reduce the risk that the lights will start a fire.

Further reduce the cost of your holiday festivities by switching to LED—or light-emitting diode—holiday lights. LED strings last longer and use less than 1 percent of the energy of incandescent lighting.

Trade your incandescent porch lights for compact fluorescent bulbs. Fluorescent bulbs last up to 10,000 hours, use about 75 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs and screw right into most standard light sockets.

Finally, microwave or slow-cook as much food as possible. Save your oven

and stove top for big jobs like roasting the turkey. Microwave ovens use up to 75 percent less energy than conventional ovens, and a slow cooker can heat an entire meal for less than 10 cents' worth of electricity.



EXERCISE CAUTION WHEN USING EXTRA ELECTRICITY

When you're wrapping presents, fixing dinner, decorating the house and singing carols, don't neglect the dangers that can come with using extra electricity.

- Stringing holiday lights means using lots of extension cords. Don't overload outlets. Use no more than three sets of lights per extension cord.

- Check decorative lights for damaged cords, plugs and sockets. Replace anything that's frayed, cracked or broken. Buy cords that are certified by Underwriters Laboratories; look for the UL symbol on the package.

- Don't run cords under rugs, carpets or baseboards. This creates a fire hazard.

- When you put up outdoor decorations, avoid stringing lights in trees near power lines. Fasten outdoor lights securely with insulated staples, never nails or tacks.

- Keep electric lights away from decorative metal trees. Keep all light strings out of the reach of small children and pets. Both like to chew the wires!

TEND TO FREEZER, EVEN WHEN IT'S FREEZING OUTSIDE

Even when it's freezing outside, keep tabs on the extra freezer in your garage or basement.

Ice cream season is long gone, so your freezer may be nearly empty. Yet a full freezer uses less energy because the already-frozen food keeps the unit's temperature low.

If you have a freezer that isn't quite full, pack it with water-filled plastic milk cartons or two-liter bottles. This will keep your freezer running efficiently.

The water-filled containers—filled to four inches from the top—will ease the strain on the freezer's motor and keep food cold longer during a power outage. You can drink the water in an emergency.

Also:

- Keep the freezer's temperature higher than zero. Colder temperatures waste energy without extend-

ing the shelf life of your frozen food.

- Chest-style freezers are cheaper to run than uprights because cold air stays in the unit when you open the top. When you open an upright

freezer, all the cold air flows out.

- Defrost a freezer if frost builds up to one-quarter of an inch. That happens only in units that aren't self-defrosting or frost-free.

WHAT TO GET SOMEONE WHO HAS IT ALL

What do you give to the people on your gift list who already seem to have everything? How about something to help your family and friends prepare for the unexpected? Some suggestions:

- A smoke detector with extra batteries.
- Five-pound fire extinguishers for the kitchen and bedrooms.
- A heavy-duty flashlight with extra batteries.
- A first-aid kit.
- A weather radio with a battery backup and tone-alert feature to receive weather alerts.
- A winter car kit, including flares, shovel, windshield scraper and a battery-powered radio.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS
from your
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

OUR OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24,
IN OBSERVANCE OF CHRISTMAS.

Celebrating Christmas With a Bang

BY LONN TAYLOR

These days we celebrate Christmas with Christmas trees, carols and nativity scenes, but throughout most of the 19th century, Christmas in Texas was celebrated not with candlelight and carols but with a liberal use of alcohol and a generous expenditure of gunpowder.

It was a holiday fraught with danger. In rural areas groups of men and boys rode from farm to farm on Christmas Day, announcing their presence at each farmstead by firing off pistols and shotguns. They would be invited in and served a “collation,” usually eggnog or whiskey punch. Then they would proceed to the next farm, joined by the men of the household they had just visited.

In some communities it was customary to shoot anvils on Christmas Day. This involved putting two blacksmith’s anvils in a wagon and hauling them around the countryside. At selected spots, usually a cross-roads store or some other community gathering place, the anvil shooters would stop the wagon, unhitch the team, and place one of the anvils upside down on the ground. A handful of gunpowder would be tamped into the depression that now faced up. Then the other anvil would be placed on top of it. Once the top anvil was in place, they lit the fuse that led to the gunpowder. The resulting explosion could be heard for 10 or 15 miles. With the top anvil spinning through the air, falling back to earth near the shooters, plus the fact that the participants were usually pretty well insulated with whiskey, anvil shooting was a rather hazardous form of recreation.

Nineteenth-century anvils were often made of chunks of forge-welded cast iron that tended to fly apart when subjected to the pressure of an explosion. When that happened, it usually ended the day’s fun, unless a fresh

anvil could be found.

Gunpowder was an integral part of Christmas, and all anvil-shooters carried a little glass bottle of it around with them. One of my father’s earliest Christmas memories involved one of those bottles. A local joker walked into my grandfather’s store in Ganado, where a group of men were sitting around the stove on a cold morning a few

the morning and stay all day—visiting, talking and sampling eggnog. One Christmas in the late 1950s or early ’60s, the talk turned to an oil well that had just been drilled on the Kingston Ranch, near the Reeves-Jeff Davis county line. The well had been capped as a dry hole, but the drilling had caused gas to bubble up in a nearby water well. Several of the eggnog

drinkers got to arguing about

whether the water in that well would burn if somebody lit a match to it. The result was that 30 or 40 people climbed into their cars and pickups and trundled out to the Kingston Ranch to find out.

As the crowd gathered around the well, Duncan Kingston leaned in and flicked his cigarette lighter. According to Wid, there was a whoosh and a column of flame shot out of the well. Kingston’s hands were badly burned and he lost his eyebrows. The pasture caught fire, people scrambled for their vehicles, and eventually one of Red Adair’s companies in Midland had to be called to come and put the fire out.

Wid says it was the most

exciting Christmas he can remember.

Hamilton, headquarters town for Hamilton County Electric Cooperative, celebrates Veterans Day by shooting anvils—a tradition since 1918. The early-morning event takes place behind the American Legion Post. “We wake up the town to tell them it’s a holiday,” said Wesley and Norma Jones of Hamilton. The anvil shooting is open to the public and is followed by a breakfast.

Writer Lonnn Taylor retired to Fort Davis two years ago after serving as a historian at the Smithsonian Institution and as director of The University of Texas Winedale Historical Center.



GIL ADAMS

days before the holiday. He looked around and said, “Boys, I’ve decided to end it all,” tossing a bottle filled with what appeared to be gunpowder into the stove. Dad said he never saw grown men move so fast. Fortunately the bottle was full of charcoal.

One other element of those old celebrations has survived in the Big Bend area within living memory. When Wid McCutcheon of Fort Davis was growing up, his family’s Seven Springs Ranch was the site of an annual Christmas Day eggnog party attended by ranch families from all over the northern end of Jeff Davis County. People would start arriving early in

There They Go Again

Marvin and D-Wayne have found yet another way to get into trouble with electricity.

Your grandparents' or great-grandparents' treasured ornaments—the one that looks like a snowflake or the jolly old glass Santa—may have a special place on your Christmas tree. Strings of their old colored lights should not.

If you dig in attic trunks, you might find dusty wired lights. Or you might see them at garage sales. Well, leave them alone. The old lights use more electricity than the ones your parents buy today.

They can overload an electric circuit, which routes electricity to several electric outlets in the same room. This could make the TV set and lamps go off. Then an adult has to get a flashlight and reset or replace the circuit.

Those old Christmas lights can cause even worse problems if their wires are frayed or cracked or the bulbs are broken. Light cords that are covered (or “insulated”) improperly can shock you, even if they don't look worn. Sparks from the wires and bulbs can start fires. A fire could burn down your Christmas tree, your presents and even your house!

Here are some rules to follow, using up-to-date Christmas lights:

- Don't overload a single outlet.
- Keep extension cords out of high traffic areas.
- If a light strand looks damaged, don't take any chances.
- Never leave your decorations lighted while you're away from home or after you've gone to bed.
- Unplug light strings before replacing bulbs or fuses.
- Don't string together more than three strands of lights with push-in bulbs. If you're using strands with screw-in bulbs, the attached strands should not total more than 50 bulbs.

Have a safe and merry Christmas!

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



THE SHIRLEY TEMPLE CHRISTMAS

BY WILLIAM JACK SIBLEY

“Hard times. It was all just hard times.” • That was the standard reply I’d usually get when I asked my grandparents about what it was like for them during the Great Depression. That statement was then followed by a lump-in-your-throat tale of deprivation, stoicism, good-hearted friends and relatives, and the unswerving belief that indeed, things would get better soon enough. • “After all,” my grandmother would nod, “we were all in the same boat. You just had to have faith.”

When I’d ask my mother, their daughter, about those times, it was a slightly different remembrance. She’d recall being an isolated child in small-town Texas and making do with imaginary playmates and scarce toys, incorporating a vivid fantasy life. Mother held countless pretend backyard banquets (consisting of half an apple butter sandwich and a jar of well water) and treasure hunted after every rain shower for “red velvet” bugs that magically surfaced like rubies in that section of Atascosa County. The privy served as a castle, the mesquite trees were dragons, and the garments on the clothesline became her loyal subjects.

Except for the occasional drives out to the ranch to help her dad feed scrawny steers and a few side trips up to San Antonio, there weren’t a whole lot of surprises. Except at Christmas time. Then it was as if the veil of sameness lifted and another world miraculously revealed itself. Suddenly there were bags of ripe oranges and store-

bought candy and beautiful wrapping paper, and—one year in particular—there was the Shirley Temple doll.

As my grandmother liked to tell it, they were right in the middle of President Roosevelt’s New Deal experiment and Christmas was fast approaching. Although they never went hungry and were never without the everyday necessities, there wasn’t exactly a lot of bounty to go around. Grandmother Martin realized Santa would be needing a little assistance that year, so she got busy. She read in the paper that if a person managed to sell four subscriptions to the *San Antonio Express*, they could come downtown and pick out a brand-new Shirley Temple doll. There it was, her answer. The fact that she didn’t know anybody in need of a subscription—and spare change was rarer than a pig in a pew—was immaterial. Divine Providence would handle the particulars.

At the time, Shirley Temple was the reigning 6-year-old queen of the movies. Virtually every little girl in America suffered through bad perms

and tap dance lessons to be just like her. Mother was no exception. The highlight of her year was to drive up to San Antonio, gawk at the dazzling department store windows on Houston Street, share a chicken salad sandwich at the Manhattan Café, and then slip into an air-conditioned matinee at the Majestic Theater for an afternoon sail on “The Good Ship Lollipop.” The entire day’s outing for two could be achieved easily for under five dollars (with change to spare). And even if a little girl couldn’t dance on a grand staircase with the world’s greatest tap dancer, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, a pretty good second choice would be having your very own Shirley Temple doll. No question.

Grandmother somehow managed to scavenge up the money to purchase a subscription to the paper herself, and then she sold another two to her sisters-in-law. Naturally, the most difficult part was selling that last one. Try as she might, she couldn’t convince anyone else in their small community to part with the not insignificant sum of

\$8.50. The whole world delivered to your mailbox every day for under nine bucks a year, and there were simply no more takers. She wouldn't give up, however. It was going to be a Shirley Temple Christmas, or nothing.

By December 23, things were starting to look dire. It was just too discouraging to even think about going through another holiday season with more homemade knickknacks, no matter how much love she sewed and baked into them. Sometimes a body just needed a brand-spanking-new something with a price tag and the smell of retail about it. Leaving church after Sunday services with my grandfather, she casually mentioned to the minister that she was "this close" to getting a Shirley Temple doll for her little girl. Unfortunately, she couldn't find another soul anywhere who could afford the price of the paper. The minister thought for a moment then inquired, "How much?" Surprised, my grandmother told him and he informed her that yes, he thought he might could use a subscription for himself. The minister? Surely, he got the paper already? Unless, of course ... Interesting how frequently people rise to the occasion when simply offered an opportunity to participate.

The next morning she and my grandfather made it up to San Antonio just before the offices of the *Express* shut down for the holidays. My grandmother handed over her subscriptions and money and then was ushered upstairs into a very large room. I can still see her face as she described the next part. "It was like Fairyland! Boxes and boxes, rows and rows of the most beautiful dolls wearing the most beautiful clothes you'd ever seen. The whole room was filled with Shirley Temple dolls! All so perfectly gorgeous, it just took your breath away. I'll never forget it as long as I live." They selected "their" Shirley and made it back to my great-grandmother's home in Jourdan-ton just in time for Christmas Eve.

I can see my mother's face lighting up as she recalls what happened next. "Grandmother in Jourdan-ton always managed to have a real tree each year. They wouldn't let me see it, though, until Christmas Eve. I could hear them behind those big drawn doors of the parlor getting things ready. It would be

just about all I could bear not to be let in. Finally, they'd open the doors and I'd stand there completely awestruck. You can't imagine how beautiful that tree was: the angel hair, the ornaments, row after row of colored strands and candles—it just took your breath away. And there, underneath it all, was the most beautiful doll I'd ever seen. My very own Shirley Temple! It was the only present I got from Santa that year but I'll never, ever forget it."

Simpler times, adversity, limited choices—from such "hardship" comes the treasure of priceless family memo-

ries. If by some chance Shirley Temple Black should ever read this, I hope she will accept my heartfelt appreciation for giving us all her amazing gifts of joy and happiness. And in particular, for making one little girl and one grateful Texas family very, very happy many Christmases ago.

William Jack Sibley is a novelist, screenwriter and playwright from Atascosa County. Among his 2004 contributions to Texas Co-op Power were "Ode to a Mexican Café" and "Died and Gone to Lichtenstein's." Sibley's new novel, *Faded Love*, will be published in 2005.

"You can't imagine how beautiful that tree was: the angel hair, the ornaments, row after row of colored strands and candles—it just took your breath away. And there, underneath it all, was the most beautiful doll I'd ever seen. My very own Shirley Temple!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM COLLECTION. ORIGINALLY FROM THE COLLECTION OF ELIZABETH M. KING, GIFT OF MRS. H. LOUIS AUTEN, OAK PARK, IL.

Christmas Cookies

Everyone in the family has favorite holiday sweets—the ones that are only made around Christmastime and carry with them the holiday memories of entire generations. As early as November, my family begins to look forward to sand tarts covered with powdered sugar, peanut butter and chocolate “buckeye” candies, and the classic gingerbread man cookies. Whatever your particular favorite, Christmas cookies are a time-honored tradition as well as a great way to say “happy holidays.”

This is a terrific gingerbread cookie recipe. You can make classic gingerbread men with it—or use it to bake materials for a special holiday gingerbread house, perfect for “building” with kids or grandkids.

Gingerbread People

1 cup butter, softened
1 1/2 cups white sugar
2 tablespoons light corn syrup
1 egg
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon ground allspice

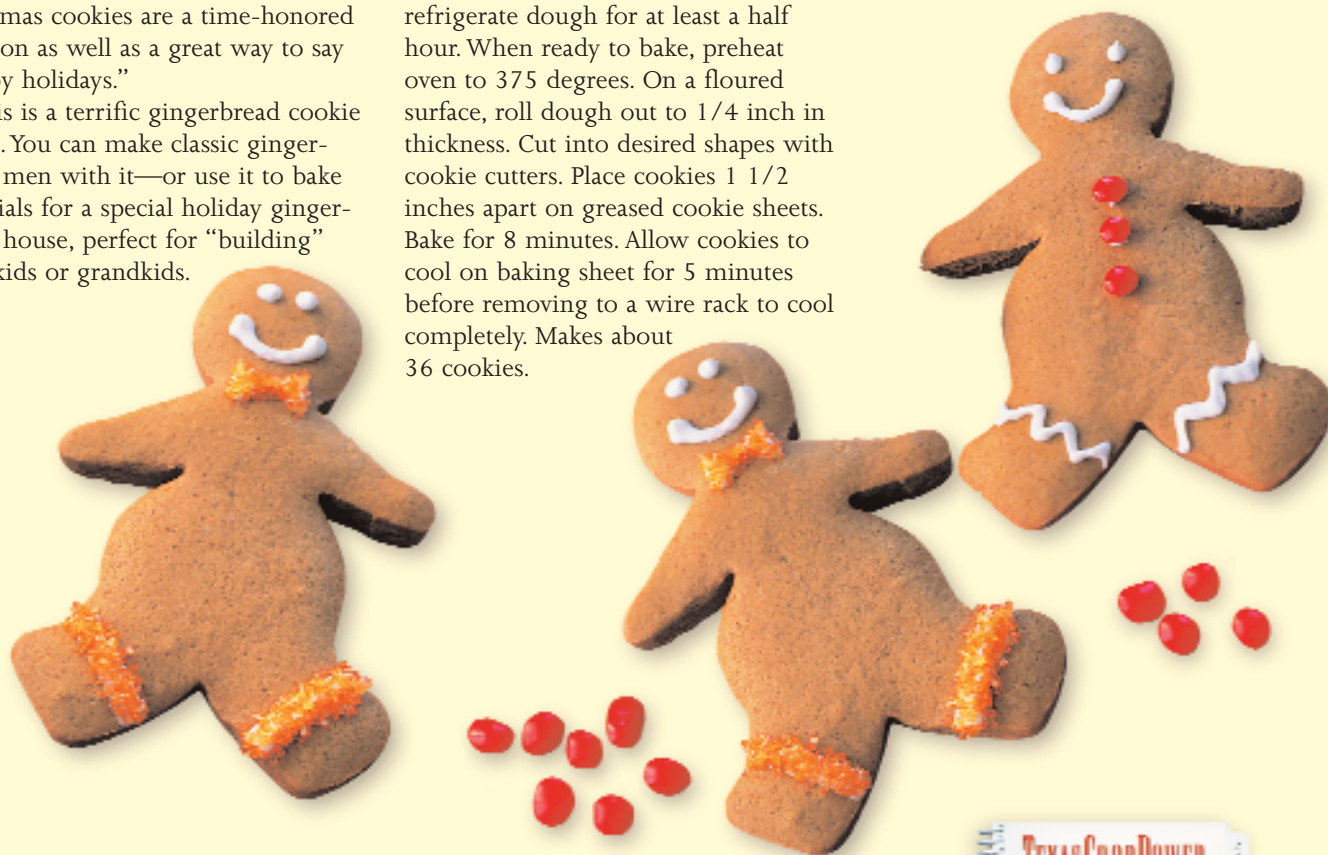
Cream together butter, sugar and corn syrup until smooth. Beat in egg. Combine flour, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, cloves and allspice; stir into creamed mixture. Cover and refrigerate dough for at least a half hour. When ready to bake, preheat oven to 375 degrees. On a floured surface, roll dough out to 1/4 inch in thickness. Cut into desired shapes with cookie cutters. Place cookies 1 1/2 inches apart on greased cookie sheets. Bake for 8 minutes. Allow cookies to cool on baking sheet for 5 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely. Makes about 36 cookies.

Cookie Icing

2 egg whites
1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
2 cups confectioners' sugar

Whip egg whites and cream of tartar until foamy. Gradually add sugar and continue to beat until icing is stiff. Add food coloring if desired and pipe onto cooled cookies. The icing can also be used as a glue to affix candy decorations.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 142 calories, 1 gram protein, 5 grams fat, 23 grams carbohydrates, 128 milligrams sodium, 19 milligrams cholesterol



Texas Co-op Power Cookbook: THE PERFECT GIFT FOR ANY SEASON!

The cookbook features 250 recipes from Texas co-op members and makes an affordable gift. Order one today for your favorite cook. The cookbook is available at most local cooperatives. Or, send name, address and phone number, along with a check or money order for \$18.75 (\$15 plus tax/S&H), to: Texas Co-op Power Cookbook, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.



Kids in the Kitchen is the recipe contest subject for March. Remember the fun you had as a child learning to create your own special favorites in the kitchen? Share those special recipes—and memories—with us before December 10. The top winner will receive a copy of the *Texas Co-op Power Cookbook* and a gift pack from Adams Extract. Others whose recipes are published will also receive a gift pack from Adams Extract. 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.

What fun we had with our recipe testing for Holiday Cookies! This month's winning recipe comes from **LAURIE SANTOS** of Yancey and D'Hanis. According to her family, Laurie's cookies have become a much-anticipated tradition over the years. She bakes and decorates these delicious cookies for every holiday, but they never last long! Laurie, a Medina EC member, will receive a copy of the *Texas Co-op Power Cookbook*. She will also receive a gift pack compliments of Adams Extract, as will the other winners whose recipes are published below.

Christmas Cookies

2 2/3 cups sifted flour
2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
2/3 cup butter
1 1/2 cups sugar
2 eggs, unbeaten
1 teaspoon vanilla
4 teaspoons milk

Sift flour twice, add dry ingredients (except sugar) and sift again. Cream butter, add sugar, then one egg at a time, and beat well. Add vanilla to butter mixture. Alternate adding milk and flour mixture into butter mixture. Chill or add flour to reduce stickiness.

Roll out dough and cut into

desired shapes. Bake 9 minutes at 400 degrees (more or less depending on thickness). Cool completely, then frost and decorate. Store in tightly sealed container. Makes about 36 cookies.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 98 calories, 1 gram protein, 4 grams fat, 15 grams carbohydrates, 102 milligrams sodium, 20 milligrams cholesterol

Honey Cookies

2/3 cup butter
1/2 cup sugar
1 cup honey
2 eggs
1 tablespoon lemon juice
3 cups flour
3 teaspoons baking powder

Cream butter. Add sugar and remaining ingredients in order. Mix well. Drop by teaspoonful on well-greased cookie sheet. Bake at 300 degrees for 10-15 minutes. Makes about 36 cookies.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 111 calories, 1 gram protein, 4 grams fat, 19 grams carbohydrates, 79 milligrams sodium, 20 milligrams cholesterol

BEATSY NOLAN, Pedernales EC

Ginger Snaps

1 cup packed brown sugar
3/4 cup vegetable shortening
1 egg
1/4 cup molasses
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup quick oats
2 teaspoons baking soda
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon salt
Sugar for rolling dough

Combine brown sugar and shortening; beat until creamy. Stir in egg and molasses. Combine flour, oats, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon and salt. Add to creamed mixture; mix well. Chill 1 hour. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Roll dough into 1-inch balls; roll in sugar. Place on greased cookie sheet 2 inches apart. Bake 8-10 minutes or until lightly browned. Let stand 5 minutes before removing



to racks to cool. Makes about four dozen cookies.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 74 calories, 1 gram protein, 3 grams fat, 10 grams carbohydrates, 67 milligrams sodium, 4 milligrams cholesterol

BARBIE PRUITT, FEC Electric

Texas Drop Cookies

2 cups butter
2 pounds brown sugar
4 eggs
6 cups sifted flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
2 teaspoons baking powder
2 teaspoons nutmeg
4 cups raisins, nuts, etc.

Mix all ingredients and drop by tablespoonful on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350-375 degrees for 8-10 minutes. Makes about 4 dozen cookies.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 126 calories, 2 grams protein, 6 grams fat, 18 grams carbohydrates, 82 milligrams sodium, 18 milligrams cholesterol

MELISSA GRAHAM DOUGLASS, Bandera EC

AROUND TEXAS

December

1. Tree Lighting Ceremony, **Kyle**, (512) 268-5341
1. Christmas Tree Lighting, **Orange**, (409) 883-3468
2. Holiday Tree Lighting, **Beaumont**, (409) 833-5100
2. Christmas Parade, **Jasper**, (409) 384-2762
2. Country Christmas, **Liberty-Dayton**, (936) 336-5736
2. Christmas Stroll and Lighted Parade, **Graham**, (940) 549-3355
- 2-3. Holiday Stroll Event, **Seguin**, (830) 401-2448
- 2-4. Sight & Sounds of Christmas, **San Marcos**, (512) 393-8430
3. Country Christmas, **De Leon**, (254) 893-2083

3. Christmas Parade, **Orange**, (409) 886-4505
3. Council of Garden Tours, **Beaumont**, (409) 842-3135
3. Knights of Columbus Fish Fry, **Dripping Springs**, (512) 894-4470
- 3-4. Norwegian Christmas festivities, home tour, parade, lutefisk dinner, **Clifton/Cranfills Gap**, 1-800-344-3720, www.cliftontexas.org
- 3-4. Market Days, Christmas Express, Christmas Ball, **Rockdale**, (512) 446-2030
- 3-4. Christmas in **Goliad**, (361) 645-8767
- 3-4. Christmas Festival and Chili Cook-Off, **Brookshire**, (281) 375-5050 or www.cityofbrookshire.com
- 3-4. Stars in the Village, 1800s Christmas village, **Gonzales**, (830) 672-2157
- 3-4. Christmas in Tyler County, **Woodville**, (409) 283-2632

- 3-4, 10-11, 17-18. Caroling in the Caverns, **Natural Bridge Caverns**, (210) 651-6101
- 3-5. Weihnachten, Christmas festival/market, **Fredericksburg**, 1-888-997-3600 or www.fredericksburg-texas.com
- 3-5. Old Mill Trade Days, **Post**, (806) 495-3529 or www.oldmilltradedays.com
4. Christmas Ball, **Rockdale**, (512) 446-2030
4. Ole Time Music, **Pearl**, (254) 865-6013
4. Christmas Memories Parade, **Paris**, (903) 785-7971 or www.rrvfair.org
4. Cove Country Opry, **Copperas Cove**, (254) 547-5966 or www.covecountryopry.com
4. Trail of Lights, **Huntsville**, 1-800-289-0389
4. Christmas Open House, **West Columbia**, (979) 345-4656

FESTIVAL OF THE MONTH BY JIM GRAMON

Texas' 43rd Annual Christmas Boat Lane Parade: December 11, Clear Lake Area

I was born on February 22 a century or two ago. I always felt sorry for the kids who didn't get a parade for their birthdays. It was only later that I learned that some guy named George Washington shared my birthday, but by then I was already hooked on parades.

Most parades are held on land, but some take place in the air, and some are even held on the water. For the past 42 years, the Clear Lake area has presented a very special water parade, the Annual Christmas Boat Lane Parade.

Halfway between Houston and

Galveston off Interstate 45 or Highway 146 (just east of NASA), Texas' 43rd Annual Christmas Boat Lane Parade crosses Clear Creek channel on Saturday evening, December 11.

More than 100,000 people traditionally enjoy this event from both land and from hundreds of boats

anchored throughout the lake. The parade, sponsored by the City of Seabrook, features approximately 150 brightly decorated powerboats and sailboats. The festivities begin at 6 p.m. with a fireworks display and the illumination of the lighthouse in League City. This colorful procession travels the Clear Creek channel from the South Shore Harbor Marina and the Nassau Bay Lagoon to Galveston Bay and back.

Boat decorations range from traditional to unique, as the beautiful vessels provide a symphony of colors and music. Santas, elves, angels and other passengers dance and sing sea-



COURTESY CLEAR LAKE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Annual Christmas Boat Lane Parade is marking its 43rd year.

4. Winter Wonderland, **Beaumont**, (409) 838-6581
4. Market Day, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-2201
4. Corsicana Opry, **Corsicana**, (903) 872-8226
4. Christmas Parade & Bazaar, **Avery**, (903) 684-3562 or (903) 684-3825
4. A Pioneer Christmas, **Independence**, 1-888-BRENNHAM
4. Xmas Cruise for Kids Open Car Show, **Kerrville**, (830) 634-2698
4. Old Fashion Christmas, **Castroville**, 1-800-778-6775 or www.castroville.com
4. Holiday Coin Show, **Tuleta**, (361) 375-2558
4. Christmas Ball, Western swing, **Rockdale**, (512) 446-2030
4. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Buna**, (409) 994-5586

son's greetings across the water.

Founded 43 years ago with just five boats, the parade is now one of the largest in the nation. As the parade has grown, so has the variety of boats from power to sail to even one- or two-man-powered vessels. Sizes vary from the 16-foot 1934 Ford Coupe (aquatically equipped) to the 120-foot paddle wheeler "Spirit of Texas." The largest sail entry is typically 60 feet long.

Held the second Saturday in December, parade night is usually cool and clear. The show goes on regardless of weather, so bring your umbrella. Lodging and restaurants along the shores of Clear Lake and the Clear Creek channel do a booming business, and many reservations are made months in advance of the parade.

Prime viewing areas are Nassau Bay, Seabrook and Kemah along the channel from Clear Lake to Galveston Bay.

For more information, call the Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, (281) 488-7676, ext. 27; fax (281) 488-8981; or www.ClearLakeArea.com.

Jim Gramon is the author of *FUN Texas Festivals and Events*. Jim@JimGramon.com, www.JimGramon.com.

4. Country Christmas, booksignings, home tour, train, carriage, **Fayetteville**, (979) 378-2222
4. Children's Christmas Parade, **Conroe**, (936) 756-4673
4. Christmas Open House, **West Columbia**, (979) 345-4656 or www.tpwd.state.tx.us
4. Christmas in the Big Thicket, **Silsbee**, (409) 385-5562
4. Nine Flags Festival, **Nacogdoches**, 1-888-OLDEST-TOWN or www.nineflagsfestival.com
4. Market Days, **Dripping Springs**, (512) 858-9912
4. Cowboy Holiday Ball, **Luckenbach**, 1-888-311-8990 or www.luckenbachtexas.com
4. Christmas Tour of Homes and Historic Places, **Round Top**, (979) 249-3042
4. Holiday Extravaganza, **Columbus**, (979) 732-2797
4. Lighted Christmas Parade, **Victoria**, (361) 572-2767
4. Christmas on the Square, **Alba**, (903) 765-3278
4. 125th Birthday and Christmas Tree Lighting, **Ingram**, (830) 367-4322
4. Wild Game Dinner, **Graham**, (940) 549-3355
4. Arts & Crafts Show, **Kyle**, (512) 396-2054
4. Market Day, **Rockdale**, (512) 446-2030
- 4-5. Holiday Wonderland of Lights/Tour of Homes, **Mineola**, (903) 569-2087 or www.chamber.mineola.com
- 4-5. Budafest, 25th anniversary, **Buda**, (512) 694-3413
- 4-5. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Hamilton**, (254) 386-3529
- 4-5. Historic Homes Tour, **Gonzales**, 1-888-672-1095
- 4-5. Dog Show, **Conroe**, (936) 597-6980
- 4-5. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Calvert**, (979) 364-2559 or www.calverttx.com
- 4-5. Candlelight Tour of Homes and Enchanted Villas, **Granbury**, (817) 573-5299
- 4-5, 11-12. Holiday Wine Trail, 16 wineries, **Hill Country**, www.texaswinetrail.com
- 4-5, 11-12. Candlelight Christmas Home Tour, **Waxahachie**, (972) 938-9617
- 4-6. Holiday Heritage Celebration, **Columbus**, (979) 732-8385 or www.columbustexas.org
- 4-6. Christmas Festivities, fun run, home tour, **Livingston**, (936) 327-5242
- 4, 11, 18. Cowboy Christmas at Enchanted Springs, **Boerne**, (830) 249-8222 or www.enchantedspringsranch.com
5. Christmas Tour of Homes, **Jacksboro**, (940) 567-2636
5. Advent Music Festival, **Mason**, (325) 347-5758 or www.masonxccc.com
5. Polka Fest, **Ellinger**, (979) 378-2311
5. Texas German Christmas Party, **New Ulm**, (979) 968-3382
7. Brush Country Music Jamboree, **Three Rivers**, (361) 786-3334
8. Lighting of the Menorah, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-6969 or www.emilyann.org
9. Jaycees Christmas Parade, **Jacksonville**, (903) 526-3691
- 9-11, 16-18. North Pole Village, **Canyon Lake**, (830) 964-3003 or www.crofcanyonlake.org
- 10-11, 17-18. Campfire Christmas, **Richmond**, (281) 343-0218 or www.georgeranch.org
- 10-11, 17-18. Christmas Walk, **Briggs**, (512) 489-2300
- 10-12. Christmas in Historic **Montgomery**, (936) 449-4400 or www.lakeconroetx.org
11. Prairie Chapel Christmas Tour of Homes, **Crawford**, (254) 722-7332
11. Market Days, **Georgetown**, (512) 868-8675 or www.discovergeorgetowntx.com
11. Old-Fashioned Christmas for Kids, **Paris**, (903) 785-5716
11. Christmas in the Hills Tour of Homes, **Dripping Springs**, (512) 858-7825
11. Crystaland Christmas Parade & Party on the beach, **Bolivar Peninsula**, (409) 684-5940
11. Sunmart Endurance Run, **Huntsville**, (936) 295-5644
11. Christmas Home Tour, **Fredericksburg**, 1-888-997-3600 or www.fredericksburg-texas.com
11. Hometown Christmas Lighted Parade, **Livingston**, (936) 327-5242
- 11-12. Live Nativity and Streets of Old Bethlehem, **Conroe**, (936) 756-6335 or www.stmarkconroe.org
- 11-12. Preservation Weekend, **Fredericksburg**, (830) 997-2835 or www.pioneermuseum.com
- 11-12. Holiday Tour of Heritage Homes, **Seguin**, (830) 372-1001
- 11-12. Kiwanis Trade Day, **Bonham**, (903) 640-1972
- 11-12. Christmas Homes Tour, **Victoria**, (361) 573-5345
12. The Journey to Bethlehem, drive-through Christmas luminary, **Mason**, (325) 347-5582 or www.masonxccc.com
12. Candlelight Tour of Homes, **Nacogdoches**, 1-888-OLDEST-TOWN or www.nineflagsfestival.com
12. Tour of Homes, **Jacksonville**, (903) 586-2217 or 1-800-376-2217
12. Holiday Home Tour, **Beeville**, (361) 358-4480
- 12-January 2. Winter Odyssey, multi-cultural festival, **Port Arthur**, 1-866-585-2787
14. Lighted Christmas Parade, **Nederland**, (409) 722-0279
17. Country Opry, **Victoria**, (361) 552-9347
- 17-19. Trade Days, **Fredericksburg**, (830) 990-4900 or www.fbgtradedays.com
- 17-19. Trade Days, **McKinney**, (972) 562-5466 or www.tmttd.com
- 17-19. Trade Days on the Avenue, **Port Neches**, (409) 722-4023
- 17-19. Trade Days, **Livingston**, (936) 327-3656 or www.cityoflivingston-tx.com/tradedays
18. Market Days, **Victoria**, (361) 572-2767
18. Pineywoods Pickin' Parlor Concert, **Mineola**, (903) 569-8037
- 18-19. Living Nativity, **Rockett**, (972) 576-8954
19. Las Posadas, **Seguin**, (830) 401-2448
19. Las Posadas, **Wimberley**, (512) 847-6969 or www.emilyann.org
19. La Gran Posada in Market Square, **San Antonio**, (210) 227-4262
27. Centennial Birthday Party, **Conroe**, (936) 760-4654 or www.cityofconroe.org

Lights ... Cameras ... Action!

Doesn't everyone take a camera to their child's, or grandchild's, school plays? You remember those wonderful programs—the makeshift scenery and props, the funny costumes, the ad-libbing, the forgotten lines. It's the opportunity to be center stage, only to become numb with stage fright, that most of us vividly remember. Here are some scenes from school plays across the state.

The topic for February—and quite appropriate for Valentine's Day month—is "Romance, Texas Style." Send your best romance photos, along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to Romance, Texas Style, Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, before December 10. For digital photo requirements and e-mail instructions, go to www.texas-ec.org/tcp/faq.html. We can no longer return photos unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included with your entry. Please allow 4-6 weeks for your photos to be returned.



Jasper-Newton EC member Donna Terrell shared this photo of the cast of Lamar University's production of *Snow White*. Her son, James, played Sleepy. "All seven dwarves performed dance routines on their knees," she said, and noted that the area's elementary school students loved it.



Director Jon Skupin applies Dustin Wortham's makeup for "Mother Courage," S&S High School's UIL one-act play. Also shown is Courtney Croft, who played Mother Courage. Cooke County EC member Toni Seaver sent in the photo and said, "Mr. Skupin has taken his casts to the state meet three times in the past six years."



Guess which red-nosed reindeer 6-year-old Blake Kasparian is playing? Blake's parents, Charlie and Kerry Kasparian, are members of McLennan County EC. His great-grandparents and grandparents, Deron and Fran Kasparian and Allen and Yvonne Kasparian, belong to Rio Grande EC.



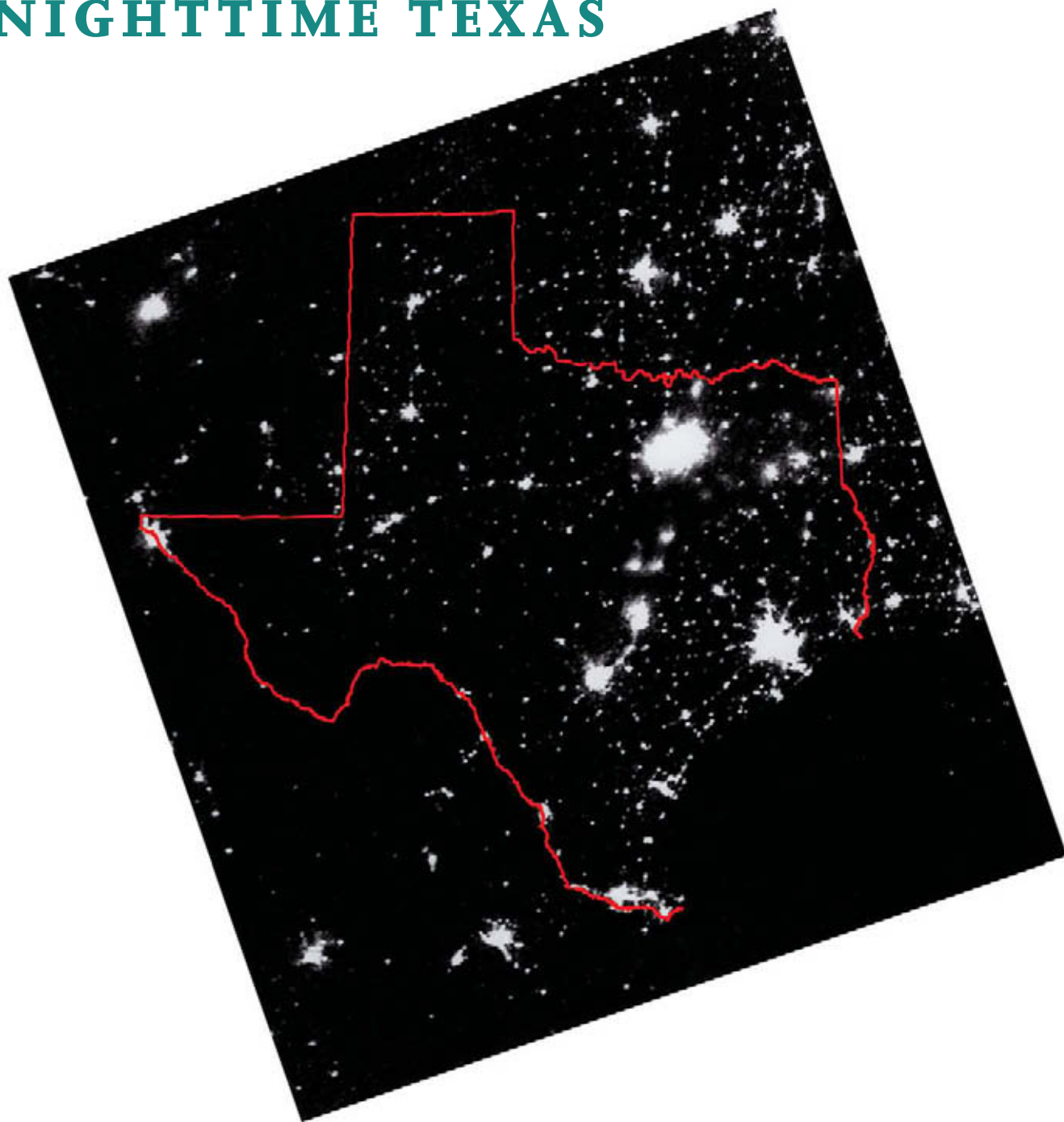
Bowie-Cass EC member Lola McMellon submitted this photo taken during the 1950-51 school year at Texarkana High School's production of "Columbus." "My husband, Larry McMellon, first from the left, the cute one—and I still think so after 51 years of marriage—performed," she said. "All of his grandchildren think he is cute, too."

UPCOMING in Focus on Texas

Issue	Subject	Deadline
February	Romance, Texas Style	December 10
March	Insects & Bugs	January 10
April	Gardens/Gardening	February 10
May	Caught Napping	March 10
June	Picnics	April 10
July	Water Gardens & Ponds	May 10



NIGHTTIME TEXAS



The lights of Texas cities and towns, fires (including oil flares and burning vegetation), lightning, and even moonlit clouds are visible in nighttime images acquired from the United States Air Force Defense Meteorological Satellite Program (DMSP). Two satellites orbit the earth in a near-polar, sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of about 516 miles as part of the DMSP program.

This satellite view of Texas, outlined in red, is on a north-south alignment.

The “like-it-or-not” melding of the Fort Worth-Dallas area is evident, as is the IH-35 corridor connecting Austin, San Marcos, New Braunfels and San Antonio.

Houston’s visibility is reinforced by the radiating spokes of towns along the principal roadways that lead to the hub of the city.

Other major routes such as IH-27, connecting Amarillo and Lubbock, and IH-20, linking Fort Worth, Abilene, Midland, Odessa, Monahans and Pecos, are also easy to trace.

It just goes to show that the stars at night aren’t the only things big and bright in Texas—at least from a satellite’s perspective.

J. Ronald Eyton is a professor in the Department of Geography at Texas State University in San Marcos.