

LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

FEBRUARY 2007

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

THE LAW EAST of STINK CREEK

**A Day in the
Life of a J.P.**

PLUS

The Skin We're In

Dark Chocolate

Hit the Road:

Victoria to Austwell

LINES DOWN— BUT NOT OUT

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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By Mary Lance

Photos by Wyatt McSpadden

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By Susan L. Ebert

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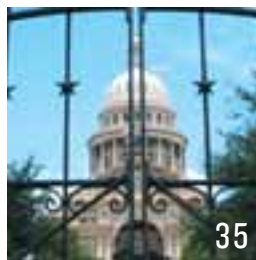
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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

Texas Co-op Power is published by your electric cooperative to enhance the quality of life of its member-customers in an educational and entertaining format.

TEXAS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES BOARD OF DIRECTORS: **John Herrera**, Chair, *Mercedes*; **Greg Jones**, Vice Chair, *Jacksonville*; **Ray Beavers**, Secretary-Treasurer, *Cleburne*; **James Calhoun**, *Franklin*; **Charles Castleberry**, *Tulia*; **Gary Nietzsche**, *La Grange*; **William "Buff" Whitten**, *Eldorado*

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letters



Editor's note: *Our December issue included an article on lowrider bicycles, and we mentioned Kyle McQuilkin, the fine arts doctoral student who was working to get the bicycles recognized as art. Above is the handlebar section of his skeleton-themed bicycle.*

WHY HUNT?

We are dog lovers and appreciated the December story by Andrew Sansom about the loss and reclamation of his Lab, Scout. But I must ask a volatile question—volatile certainly in Texas: How do people take joy in killing fowl or mammalian life?

No . . . no.

ELIZABETH ROTH
Central Texas
Electric Cooperative

COFFEEMATE

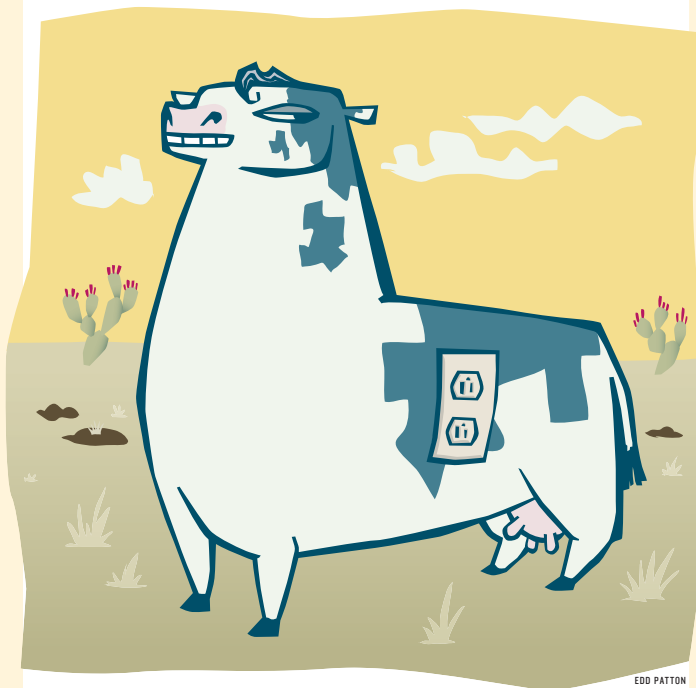
I want to compliment the staff of *Texas Co-op Power* on the quality magazine put out each month. I particularly enjoyed December's issue but always find something informative in each issue ... nice to enjoy with a relaxing cup of coffee.

JEANNE MUMAU
Pedernales Electric Cooperative

We receive many more letters than we can fit in the magazine. Visit www.texascooppower.com to read a sampling of those.

We want to hear from our readers. Send letters to: Editor, *Texas Co-op Power*, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, or e-mail us at letters@texas-ec.org. 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.

POWER TALK



GOT METHANE?

Cow chips, as every bona fide Texan knows, make great Frisbees®. They've even been packaged and marketed as clever souvenirs of the Lone Star State. Who would have imagined that one day the lowly cow chip would be enlisted in the national interest as a source of fuel for energy production?

Sure as shootin', that's just what's happening. The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), which provides power to many electric cooperatives and municipal utilities in Texas, recently announced it will buy natural gas produced from cow manure, called biogas, from a plant in North Texas. Microgy Inc. will open its methane-producing facility near Stephenville in April with plans to convert manure into pipeline-quality renewable natural gas.

Manure from 10,000 cows will produce 1 billion cubic feet of biogas annually, which will generate 650,000 million Btu. At this point, that represents about 2 percent of all the natural gas LCRA purchases and raises its renewables portfolio by 15 percent.

With a population of about 14 million cattle in Texas, it looks as if we might milk this methane thing till the proverbial cows come home.

SAFELIVING

Ten Tips for Using a Portable Heater

An electric heater can be a great convenience in cold weather, but if not used properly, it can be a potential hazard.

The Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers has developed a list of 10 simple tips to alert you to the dos and don'ts of using a portable air heater.

- Read the instructions and warning labels before using any portable heater.
- Keep flammable materials away from the heater.
- Unless the heater is designed for use outdoors or in bathrooms, do not use in those areas.
- Check for secure plug/outlet fit.
- Unplug the heater when it's not being used. Inspect the cord periodically. Do not use a heater with a damaged cord.
- Keep the heater at least 3 feet away from objects such as curtains, bedding, furniture, etc. Do not block the heater's air intake or exhaust.
- Place the heater on a level, flat surface. Do not place heaters on furniture.
- Heaters should be kept away from children and not be placed in a child's room without supervision.
- String out cords on top of rugs or floors. Placing anything on top of the cord may damage it.
- Do not use an extension cord unless absolutely necessary.

If you must use an extension cord, it must be marked "12-gauge" or "14-gauge" (the smaller the number, the larger the size of the wire).

Please be smart, be safe and enjoy your portable electric heater!

Photo courtesy
The Home Depot





ROBB KENDRICK

HAPPENINGS

Contemporary photographer Robb Kendrick captured **MODERN-DAY COWBOYS ON TINTYPES** for a heritage photography campaign commissioned by Frost Bank. The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin will be exhibiting 66 tintypes of those haunting images from February 17-April 15. The tintypes, says curator Margaret Blagg, are "literally one-of-a-kind creations. They are more like paintings or drawings than photographs." Subjects must hold a pose for several seconds as the image burns into the photographic plate. For more information, go to www.thestoryoftexas.com or call (512) 936-TSHM (8746).

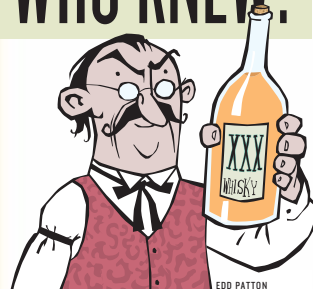
HOT STUFF

YO, TEXANS—TIME TO GET YOUR CALENDAR

For the die-hard Texan, there's no better gift than the Bona Fide Original Real Texas Calendar, which appropriately starts the year in March to honor Texas Independence Day (March 2). In addition to dates and cartoons, the calendar highlights significant Texas events throughout the year. For example, on March 24, 1880, Gen. Philip H. Sheridan apologized for saying, "If I owned Texas and hell, I'd rent out Texas and live in hell." To order the calendar for \$8.95, visit www.texascalendars.com or call (512) 263-6943.



WHO KNEW?



DIRECT TO DAMNATION?

Lamar County Electric Cooperative serves Direct, a town of 200 some 25 miles northwest of Paris in Lamar County. Actually, it's pronounced *Direct*. According to local tradition as relayed by the *Handbook of Texas*, "the town was named either for Indians who crossed the [Red] river 'direct' to obtain whiskey or to a revivalist who believed the local people were going 'direct' to hell. The local church was built with money donated by a converted saloon-keeper." Today, the easiest route to Direct is to take FM 79 north from Paris. First you hit East Direct, then Direct.

CO-OP PEOPLE

DOUG BAUM, CAMEL RANCHER

Riding camels isn't your everyday Texas experience, unless you're McLennan County Electric Co-op member Doug Baum or one of his guests. Celebrating the state's history of camel use during the Civil War, this Valley Mills camel rancher leads overnight treks complete with good cooking and conversation. Baum takes his guests to ranch land at Valley Mills, private land near Big Bend National Park and Monahans Sandhills State Park. For those seeking adventure outside of Texas, he recently added Egyptian camel treks to his itinerary.

Baum started working with camels at the Nashville Zoo, where he was employed in 1993. He admired their toughness and work ethic so much that he brought two of them back home to Texas. He's been working

with the animals ever since. In addition to arranging riding adventures, Baum provides camels for live nativity scenes during the holidays. Camels don't spit, Baum assures, and that's not water in their humps, but fat that helps them store food and water more efficiently. For more information on Baum's camel treks, visit www.texascamelcorps.com.



Doug Baum and friend in West Texas.

Texas Co-op Power (USPS 540-560) is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC). Periodical Postage Paid at Austin, TX and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 74 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power's* website is www.texascoopower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or e-mail nkorthcott@texas-ec.org.

Subscription price is \$3.84 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50. Individual copies and back issues are available for \$3 each.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Texas Co-op Power* (USPS 540-560), 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. Please enclose label from this copy of *Texas Co-op Power* showing old address and key numbers.

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THE LAW EAST OF STINK CREEK

QUAIL DOBBS

BY MARY LANCE • PHOTOS BY WYATT MCSPADEN

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A RODEO CLOWN AND A JUSTICE OF THE PEACE? • NOT MUCH, SAYS QUAIL DOBBS, WHO NOW SERVES AS A JUSTICE OF THE PEACE IN COAHOMA AFTER HIS RETIREMENT AS A RODEO CLOWN. WITH A TWINKLE IN HIS BLUE EYES, HE QUIPS, "YOU STILL GOTTA PUT UP WITH SO MUCH BULL."

My assignment was to spend the day on a slice-of-life piece on Dobbs, who for 35 years worked as a rodeo clown, then upon retirement in 1998, was elected to one of three J.P. posts in Howard County. His post is in Coahoma, his adopted hometown 10 miles from the county seat, Big Spring.

But when I asked him about his rodeo clown career, Dobbs corrected me. "It's rodeo bullfighting clown," he says. "We're the ones who slap the bull on the nose to distract him from the cowboy. And that makes the bull *reeeeal* mad."

Dobbs has scars from his rodeo days—including one very visible mark on his cheek. His explanation? "You don't have anywhere to hide in a barrel; there are no corners."

Seems the bull managed to get a hook inside the barrel and into Dobbs'

cheek, twirling the barrel with Dobbs inside like a Hula Hoop in the air. In 1973, a bull ran over him, breaking his leg. Other than that, he's fine today. So far, he's got no scars from being a judge.

We met in Big Spring, in the parking lot of what looked to me to be the world's biggest truck stop on the busy east-west Interstate Highway 20 trucking route. Dobbs does not fit the image of the tall, Texas lawman west of the Pecos: He is short with a cherubic face framed by blond hair and split by a near-perpetual smile. He is dressed in beige Wrangler jeans, a starched, white cowboy shirt, and practical SAS shoes.

I learned during the day that a monumental testament to Dobbs' fame is on the Coahoma water tank, just to the right off IH-20 before you enter the town (population 932). Dobbs' billboard-sized, white-and-red-painted clown face

grins down from the side of the water tank: "Welcome to Coahoma, home of Quail Dobbs." Town leaders thought this signage fitting because of Dobbs' cowboy honors. He was named the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association's Clown of the Year in 1978 and 1988, and is a member of the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame and the Texas Rodeo Hall of Fame.

While in Coahoma, I met Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. Jason Hester in Dobbs' Coahoma office—there to visit his mother-in-law, Connie Murley, Dobbs' clerk. The officer added his bit to the Dobbs lore.

"I always wanted to give someone a ticket by the water tower," he says. "Then when I tell them that their signature on the ticket is not an admission of guilt but does guarantee that they will either pay or show up in court, I



Above: Dobbs confers with Howard County Deputy Clerk Connie Murley. Below: Dobbs steps in to divert an angry bull.

would say ‘and that’s the judge you’ll see, right over there on the water tower.’” Unfortunately, he adds, it’s never happened.

Indeed, in spite of his short stature, like the tower image, Dobbs is larger than life. He is a beloved figure, as I

witnessed folks’ reactions to him, from the courthouse in Big Spring to his gleaming, white-painted office in Coahoma, and he was addressed as “Judge” or “Quail,” depending on the greeter—never the formal “Mr. Dobbs.” He ran unopposed in November, win-

ning his third four-year term.

“It’s not so much that I deserve it [being elected] or know the law, it’s that it’s an honor,” Dobbs said. But I learned not to believe his quip about the law—he knows it—as witnessed by detailed answers to my questions about J.P. law. Texas J.P.s attend 20 hours of schooling every year. “I’m always studying,” Dobbs says.

We drove to the 1950s-era courthouse in the middle of Big Spring where Dobbs delivered a marriage certificate to the county clerk. “Here, it makes ‘em legal to fight,” he quips.

At the sheriff’s office, Dobbs picks up a sheaf of yellow traffic tickets. “Lots of people don’t know a traffic ticket is a Class C misdemeanor,” he explains. He processes about 1,200 tickets a year. “There’s 12 miles of IH-20 in my precinct, and that’s lots of speeding tickets.”

DOBBS IS ONE TOUGH JUDGE ON speeders. “I used that story, and it didn’t work for me and it won’t work for you,” he says he tells speeders—admitting to me he was an inveterate leadfoot. One recent defendant was Dobbs’ son—who was ticketed



FROM THE COLLECTION OF JUDICIAL DOBBS

for not wearing a seat belt and received a fine. "I'm on the other side of the law, Son," Dobbs told him. "They [the town-folks] would have hung me if I hadn't."

Business finished at the courthouse, we drive to his office in Coahoma, past the famous water tank. A sign to the right of his door reads "The Law East of Stink Creek." The handmade, carved wooden sign was arranged by his former clerk—so named for an actual creek and a takeoff on Judge Roy Bean's "Law West of the Pecos."

Pink periwinkles bloom in a broken whiskey barrel on the porch—the barrel entirely wrapped in red tape—the same tape Dobbs used on his rodeo barrel. Inside the office, country music plays softly on a radio. Folks who have to come to this office will surely feel at home.

We lunch at Dairy Queen—chicken-fried steak, of course. More West Texas humor from the club of seven retirees sitting near us drinking serial cups of coffee: "So, Quail, did you have to pay that girl to sit with you," asks a retiree with gimme cap reading Coahoma Softball Champs.

"What do you know, Quail?" asks another blue-jeaned retiree. "Don't know 'come here' from 'sic 'em,'" he replies.

A J.P. IS AT THE ENTRY-LEVEL END of the judicial system but in rural areas has considerable powers, which include serving as county coroner, marrying couples, processing traffic tickets, serving eviction notices, issuing search warrants and performing all manner of magistrate duties, from driver's license suspensions to bail settings.

Coroner duty is Dobbs' least favorite. "You gotta be crazy to get up in the middle of the night and look at a dead person," he says. "It's not too difficult, the EMS is gone, and the reason they are gone is that the person is dead."

Dobbs explains that as coroner, he conducts an inquest. He interviews whomever is at the scene. Most deaths are from natural causes.

For marriage ceremonies, Dobbs erected a wrought-iron trellis in the corner of his office, entwined with green, fake ivy. He attached a real bull skull midway up the trellis—a gift from a rodeo in Montana before he retired. He consulted a steno pad of names and counted, one-by-one, the couples he's

married. It's about 25 a year.

Why become a J.P.? He was asked to run, he says, and he was relieved to have a career after retirement.

And how did he get to be a rodeo bullfighting clown? "Every young boy in West Texas wants to be a cowboy," Dobbs says. He started a career as a rodeo cowboy but within two years, thanks to an absent barrel clown in Wisconsin and his being offered the job, he was—pardon the pun—hooked.

In 1978, Dobbs founded the

Coahoma Kindergarten Rodeo. Each March, children build stick horses and stick bulls and perform in mock barrel races, bareback and bull riding, and even milk "wild" cows.

The teachers love the event because it combines mental and physical agility training. Dobbs cajoles his contacts from the Pro Rodeo Cowboy Association to donate to the rodeo.

Dobbs' sweet spot for youth emerged immediately on becoming a J.P. Just six weeks into the school year,

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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The J.P. marries Randy Jo Weaver and Cynthia Denise Householder.

he began receiving notices from the school district about truant students. He admits to being obsessed with keeping them in school.

DOBBS HAS THE POWER TO FINE or jail parents who don't show for a hearing or whose children continue being absent from school. Has he ever jailed or fined? "Naw, I call 'em first," says the judge who puts the youths to work cleaning up streets or painting fire hydrants. Or, he'll gently explain to a grandmother that three of her 17-year-old granddaughter's absence notes were forged. Or, by just talking with parents, he learned that too often they simply can't make the teen get out of bed on time to catch the bus. Dobbs just shakes his head.

"I can put 'em in jail, and I will if they don't do community service," Dobbs says. "I tell 'em, 'You'll drop out forever if you don't watch out.'"

"I took this job to make a difference," he says. "And if I can keep one kid going to school, that's making a difference."

Mary Lance wrote about lowrider bicycles for our December issue.





Electric Heaters

Space heaters are meant to provide supplemental heat, not to replace your home's heating system. In fact, if used incorrectly, space heaters can pose fire and burn risks.

Safety rules when using your portable electric heater:

- Read and follow the manufacturer's warnings and the use and care guidelines before using a space heater.
- Space heaters need space. Keep them at least 3 feet away from any combustible material such as bedding, clothing, draperies, furniture and rugs.
- Never use space heaters around unsupervised children and pets.
- Always turn the heater off and unplug it when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Plug space heaters directly into an outlet; do not use an extension cord.
- Electric space heaters use a lot of electricity. Plug your heater into a circuit with as little else on it as possible.
- Space heaters should be used only for supplemental heat. Don't use them to dry clothing, cook food, thaw pipes, or warm bedding.

BE COOL WITH ELECTRIC HEATERS



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THE SKIN WE'RE IN

Fifty percent of us will develop a form of skin cancer by age 65. I'm one of them.

by Susan L. Ebert



T

he actual biopsy didn't worry me too much.

After all, it was just a coffee bean-colored spot on the back of my upper left arm. It wasn't raised or lumpy, and was no larger than a pencil eraser, really. The only reason I even had it checked out, in April, was that my friend Jane and my mama adamantly insisted that I do so.

Jane first noticed it when we fished together in the summer, me bare-armed and bare-legged. She brought it up whenever we spoke. My mother noticed it the following Christmas, as we dressed together, saying "How long has that been on the backside of your arm?" I reply that I'm 50 years old, and I don't look at my rear view unless I have to.

"I'm not going to stop bugging you until you get it checked out," Mama says.

Jane's bugging me, too, I tell her. Mama is pleased.

They're calling and e-mailing every week. Okay, I'll go, I tell them. But since it's not like an ache or pain, I delay seeing a doctor until April, and even then, it's mostly to get my mama and Jane off my back.

OUT, OUT, DARNED SPOT

I visit Willis Cattel, a dermatopathologist trained in the Frederic Mohs method. Mohs developed a technique in the 1930s that trains doctors not only in surgery, but also in pathology and aesthetic repair. And Cattel's been practicing

it for 45 years or more.

"It's suspect," Cattel says without inflection. To my alarm, he immediately swooshes me into his operating room and excises a neat little quarter-sized plug around the offending spot.

I tell myself it's over.

He promises results in two days. Cattel, a robust, beaming gentleman, loves to fish, as do I, and we share our favorite angling adventures as he cauterizes and bandages the open wound where the spot sat moments before.

That's that; Jane and Mama can go on to worrying about other things. Cattel's office will send me a note in the mail saying that everything's fine.

But I get a phone call, not a letter. You need to be here at 9 a.m. tomorrow, the cheery, assertive voice tells me.

That's when I start getting scared.

Fear overcomes me the following morning in the waiting room. Seated around me are several others; one, a Lucchese-booted rancher with an ear missing, his wife stroking his hand and murmuring softly into his good ear. Nearby, a Dallas debutante, perfect in every detail except that half of her nose is gone, half-heartedly flips through a magazine.

I feel very alone.

When my name is called, Cattel emerges as soon as I am in the examining room.

IT'S CANCER

"It's positive," says Cottel, with just the right mix of professionalism and compassion. It takes a moment for his words to soak in, and he waits for my mind to catch up to what he has said.

"The good news," he continues, "is that it's Stage I melanoma, with a 95 percent cure rate with the Mohs method. I'll excise tissue until it shows no more cancer, then we'll do the reconstruction afterwards." As Mohs-trained surgeons do their own pathology in their own labs, everything happens fast. "Be here at 7 a.m. next Monday," he directs.

"Will it set me back to wait a week?"

"No, but why?"

"I'm going spring turkey hunting with some friends next Monday," I tell him. "I need this."

Cottel rubs his forehead and chuckles. "You're the one with cancer and the hole in your arm; another week won't matter."

IN THE WILD

Only my good friend Steve, among the other hunters and friends I meet in Paris, Texas, knows that I have a gaping hole, swathed in gauze, in my shooting arm. I have sworn him to silence.

Life breathes and pulses around me with each step; the flight of a red-tailed hawk, the mockingbird's chatter somehow more vivid. A gobble clatters through the woods. I hunt with total concentration but never touch my trigger. Cattle laze in the shaded meadows as we slink through vivid pastoral lands where Davy Crockett first entered Texas. I drink up the

Change Your Clothes, Not Your Life



COURTESY SUSAN L. EBERT

Opposite, author Susan Ebert regularly exposed herself to the sun before she learned how damaging it could be. Above, how she dresses now.

I confess: I was a Coppertone baby. In the 1960s, Jodie Foster, with her two-piece being tugged down her rump by the family dog, was my role model.

Don't wait, as I did, until you get skin cancer to protect yourself from Texas' brutal blaze.

You can still do all the activities you love; there's no need to stop ranching, fishing, riding, gardening or whatever outdoor pursuit is your passion or livelihood, Dr. Willis Cottel says. Instead, avoid midday sun whenever possible, wear a high SPF sunscreen, a hat with a shady brim, and long sleeves and pants.

SUNSCREEN

Apply it. There are many good sunscreens on the market. I like SmartShield, developed by Dallas-based Jim and Harl Asaff after she developed a precancerous spot in 1992. SmartShield, on the market for more than a decade, doesn't clog pores, harm live bait or fish you might catch and release, and is scent-neutral, unlike that coconut-scented goo peddled in supermarkets. Visit www.smartshield.com or call 1-800-343-1504 to learn more about this wonderful Texas-made sunscreen.

CLOTHING

Instead of the bare-headed ponytail, halter-top and shorts of yore, I'm found today on Texas' rivers, bays and mountains in a shady hat, long sleeves and long pants. Advances in both breathable microfiber technology and a nod to style make this a natural choice.

Check out these skin-saving clothing companies:

Coolibar Quality Sun Protection is recommended by the Skin Cancer Foundation. Their line blocks 98 percent of UV rays. Visit www.coolibar.com or call 1-800-926-6509 for a catalog.

Solartex Sun Gear checks in with a 50+ SPF rating and is available at www.solartex.com, or by calling 1-877-476-5789.

Alex & Me offers stylish outdoorswear in a range of 25-50 SPF ratings; see www.alexandme.com or call 1-877-873-4786.

ExOfficio is perhaps my favorite, offering men's, women's and children's apparel in their Buzz Off line, which also contains a naturally based, durable-through-washings organic insect repellent imbedded in the fibers of these stylish garments as well as a 30+ SPF rating. Visit www.exofficio.com or call 1-800-644-7303.

HEADGEAR

Put a stylish brim over your brow; who's to know you're safeguarding against cancer? Most of the big straw hat manufacturers now rate their brims for skin cancer protection.

EYE PROTECTION

Protect your eyes, and also the delicate skin surrounding them. Good, close-fitting eye protection is a must. Prices range from less than \$10 to more than 10 times that for good, UV-blocking sunglasses. Plus, you won't squint as much.

Vaccine

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Underway at Texas' own Baylor Research Institute, top scientific investigators are working on a novel vaccine for those, such as me, who have been diagnosed with melanoma. Scientists use harvested dendritic cells, powerful immune system warriors, and "load" them with melanoma cells from a patient's tumor to teach the patient's immune system to identify and destroy cancerous cells. Phase I and II clinical trials are giving researchers hope for a breakthrough vaccine for first-time melanoma survivors, without the toxic side effects of chemotherapy or radiation. Read about this research study at www.baylorhealth.com/health

information/baylorhealthmagazine/2006/may/BUMC/BUMC_skin_cancer.htm. To learn more, or to volunteer to participate in this clinical research study, call 1-800-4BAYLOR.

landscape and let it engulf me. My mind explodes with thoughts of my children, whom I feed and nurture, and my senses flood with the wild world that feeds and nurtures me.

The land restores my spirit; I am ready to face skin cancer surgery.

THE SURGERY

In the Mohs surgery, Cottel excises a large circle around the original offending spot that looks to me as large as a coaster. He immediately takes it into his own pathology lab.

I lie on the table, numbed with only local anesthesia, waiting. The smell from his cauterizing tool reminds me of branding cattle, but it's my own seared flesh I smell. Fear engulfs me.

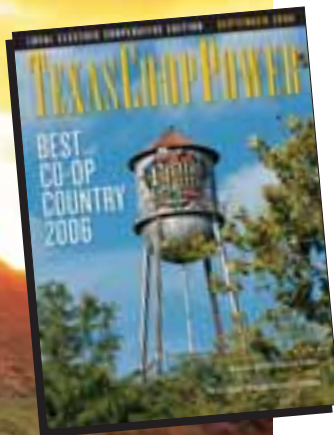
"We got it all," he says, smiling like a double-wide, when he re-enters from the lab.

The reconstruction of my upper arm goes well, especially considering the folks I had seen with parts of noses and ears gone. Cottel cuts a 7-inch crescent swath above and below the gaping circular excision and pulls the skin together. I watch as he slices my flesh away and drops it into a receptacle. With dozens of stitches, he sends me out the door, with instructions for immediate care. He says to return every six months for the rest of my days.

I will.

Susan L. Ebert is an outdoorswoman and associate publisher of Western & English Today.

TEXAS CO-OP POWER



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Texas Co-op Power is the Texas living magazine with a rural, suburban and small town focus. Each month you will read entertaining articles about Texas people, Texas history, Texas nature, Texas travel and Texas food.

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SEVERE WEATHER? TUNE IN!

NOAA Weather Radio

Do you have a battery-operated NOAA weather radio at your home or workplace?

If the NOAA broadcasts reach your area, the radios can be invaluable. Here's why:

- NOAA provides continuous broadcasts of the latest weather information directly from the National Weather Service offices. When severe weather threatens your area, the broadcast activates an alarm and turns on the radio so you can hear critical, potentially life-saving messages.
- NOAA weather radios can take advantage of an even greater tool: the "all hazards" radio network. These broadcasts provide warning and post-event information for a host of other threats including natural and technological hazards.
- NOAA weather radios can also receive broadcasted AMBER alerts for missing children.
- The NOAA weather radio network is expanding in coverage and capability, making it an invaluable tool. For as little as \$20, anyone can have access to potentially life-saving emergency messages.

We think your family's safety is worth the investment. Call your local electric cooperative or visit www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/index.html for more weather radio information.



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Home Insulation for Greater Energy Efficiency

DEAR JAMES: I probably need to make some energy-saving improvements to my home, but how can I be sure? Also, what are the most common areas to check for inefficiencies in the typical home and can I do it myself? *—Jerry V.*

DEAR JERRY: If your home is built using typical construction methods and is more than 20 years old, you can be pretty certain it is not as energy efficient as it should be. You cannot expect to make an older existing home as efficient as a brand new home, but investing in some energy improvements would be wise and probably provide a reasonable economic payback.



The dollar bill test is a quick and easy way to check the weatherstripping on doors.

There are several methods to determine how efficient your home is. First, talk with several of your neighbors and compare your utility bills with theirs on a month-by-month basis. Their bills will depend upon their specific family size, living habits and house size, but if you check with enough of them, they should average out.

It also helps to know where your home is losing heat so you know where to look for possible efficiency improvements. In general, ceilings account for 15 percent of losses (gains during summer); windows/doors, 26 percent; walls, 13 percent; basement/slab, 11 percent; and air infiltration (leakage), 35 percent.

Tightening up your home, meaning reducing air infiltration, is a good place to start. Check the weatherstripping on the doors by closing each door on a dollar bill. You should feel some resistance when you try to pull it out. Try this in several locations on each door because resistance will vary.

Check the air tightness of your window weatherstripping. Wait for a windy day and hold a lighted stick of incense near the weatherstripping. Watching the smoke trail will indicate any leaks. Do the same around any ceiling penetrations by ceiling fans or exhaust fans, recessed lights, etc.

Make sure your attic insulation thickness is up to current recommended levels for your area. Wear a breathing mask and gloves when handling insulation in the attic. If it is blown-in insulation, use a rake to level it out before measuring its depth. Air movement through the attic can create deep and shallow spots. Make sure the attic insulation is not blocking soffit air inlet vents.

Check to see whether your home has wall insulation and note the type of the insulation. Switch off the circuit breakers to wall outlets on outside walls. Double-check with a circuit tester to be sure the power is off. Remove the electrical faceplate. Using a nonconducting plastic knife, poke around the sides of conduit box to look for signs of insulation. Having a professional infrared scan of your house will also indicate whether you have adequate wall insulation.

Since heating and cooling equipment accounts for the majority of your utility bills, have them serviced regularly to be sure they are operating at their maximum efficiency. If they are old, have your contractor do a payback analysis for installing new higher efficiency models. This will save energy and generally improve your comfort level. © 2007 James Dulle

IS YOUR WIRING GOING SNAP, CRACKLE, POP?

Most of us don't think much about electricity unless we are forced to go without it. But just like light bulbs and appliances, the electrical system in your home deserves your attention.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International urges consumers to take an electrical tour throughout their homes to look for potential hazards.



Unlike this one, electric outlets should be securely mounted in the wall. If outlets in your home are loose, have them repaired.

Many potential hazards are easily identified and corrected.

- You can check to see that lamps and extension cords aren't cracked, frayed or covered by rugs or furniture.
- Check light bulbs to determine that the wattage is appropriate for lighting fixtures.
- Electrical appliances should be kept away from damp and hot surfaces and have appropriate air circulation.

Dim or flickering lights, arcs or sparks, sizzling or buzzing sounds from your electrical systems, odors, hot switch plates, loose plugs and damaged insulation, among other things, are signs of potential hazards and should be looked at by a qualified electrician.

Warning: Beware of Downed Power Lines

Winter weather and car accidents are a main cause of downed power lines. Your electric cooperative and the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) warn consumers to use extreme caution should they encounter a downed power line.

Downed power lines can carry an electric current strong enough to cause serious injury or possibly death. Assume that any downed line you see is an energized power line, and report it immediately to the police, fire department and your electric cooperative.

Here are some tips to help you stay safe around downed power lines:

- 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. This



will minimize the chance for a human path of electric current and minimize the hazards of electric shock. Electricity can move from a high-voltage zone to a low-voltage zone—and it could do that through your body.

- If you see someone who is in direct or indirect contact with the downed power line, do not touch the person. You could become the next victim. Call 911 instead.

- Do not attempt to move a downed

power line or anything in contact with the line by using another object such as a broom or stick. Even nonconductive materials like wood can conduct electricity and then electrocute you.

- Be careful not to put your feet near water where a downed power line is located.

- If you are in your car and it is in contact with the downed power line, stay in your car. Honk your horn or call 911 for help on your cell phone and tell others to stay away from your vehicle.

- If you must leave your car because it's on fire, jump out of the vehicle with both feet together to avoid contact with the live car and the ground at the same time. This way you reduce the risk of becoming part of the path of electricity from the car to the earth.

- Do not drive over downed power lines.

Source: ESFI www.electrical-safety.org

TIMING KEY TO LIGHTING EFFICIENCY

Looking for ways to increase the efficiency of your lighting? Timing could be the answer. With a little technology, you can make sure lights are on only when they need to be—even if you forget to turn them off.

PHOTOCELLS—These nifty devices turn lights on and off based on natural light levels, both indoors and out.

TIMERS—If you want to control what time lights go on and off, then timers are the answer. They allow you to set the on and off times. They are also great for security, letting you turn lights off and on when you're not home.

MOTION SENSORS—For outdoor lighting and security, these are a great choice. Whenever they sense movement, they turn on and then turn back off after a certain period of time.

VALENTINE'S TRADITIONS TO HELP SAVE ENERGY

This Valentine's Day, enjoy an energy-efficient celebration with the one you love.

Avoid the restaurant rush and the television rut and get back to a time-honored tradition that just happens to be energy efficient: the romantic candlelit dinner.

This year, leave your car in the driveway and turn your TV off. Instead, dim the lights and light lots of candles.

Cook your Valentine's feast-for-two in the microwave, which is a lower-energy way to prepare small meals. Or be adventurous and prepare cheese or chocolate in a fondue pot or salmon on an electric grill.

After dinner, bundle up and take a walk. Head home to warm up under your coziest blanket as you enjoy some microwaved hot chocolate.

(Give your water heater a hug, too. A water heater blanket insulates the heater and recoups its own cost in

about a year.)

Before you turn in for the night, lower your thermostat a few degrees and throw an extra blanket on the bed.

You'll love the feeling you get from doing your part to save electricity—and you'll love the savings that smart energy management produces.



A Feathered Friend

*I think Blackie's
mischievous
personality
blindsided
Grandmere.*

BY JOAN LAWRENCE

had lots of pets growing up—mostly dogs. Dad was known to take in stray animals. Someone was always giving him a dog or cat or rabbit they had found. Sometimes people would give him a pet they could no longer keep. Dad found homes for some of those pets; others we talked Mother into letting us keep. We had more than the usual run-of-the-mill pets while growing up. My Uncle Alfred gave my brother and me two lambs one summer. We named them Tom and Jerry. We had ducks and rabbits, and once we acquired three goslings. We called them Shirley, Goodness and Mercy, as they followed us all the days of the summer. But Blackie was the pet that endeared himself to my grandmother the summer she lived with us.

Grandmere was not much taken with pets. Oh, she would feed them if needed or shoo one off her lap, but she didn't play with them or take them for walks or seek them out when she was lonely. I was 11 that summer, and Bill, my brother, was 15. He had a summer job driving a tractor on a farm a few miles from Amarillo. He got up early each Monday and left with Jimmy, our next-door neighbor. He came home on Friday evenings, tired, dirty and always bearing a treasure for me. I could hardly wait for Friday evening to see what he would bring. Sometimes he had rattles from a snake he had killed. I had quite a collection of rattles that summer. He brought a lizard, a horned toad and several locusts, but most of those things I could catch myself. The best treasure was a baby crow that had fallen out of a nest and was rejected by the crow family. Bill had found worms and small bugs for it all week at the farm. He let me help him on Saturday and Sunday and then turned the feeding over to me when he had to go back on Monday. Grandmere named the chick Blackie, and we agreed it suited him.

I found lots of bugs and worms for Blackie. I shared them with Grandmere as she liked to put them in that wide-open mouth, too. It was amazing how fast Blackie grew. I didn't want to let him out of the garage as I was afraid he'd fly away. Grandmere said we shouldn't keep Blackie penned up. He would stay with us as long as he wanted, but he might have a better life somewhere else. Blackie would venture to nearby trees, but he always came to the front porch swing when Grandmere was there. He loved to sit with her. Often he sat on her shoulder, but sometimes he would perch on top of her head. Grandmere really loved that crow! It was quite a sight. I don't think she'd ever had a bird for a pet. He wasn't readily shooed away, either.

I think Blackie's mischievous personality blindsided Grandmere, and he won a

place in her heart before she even knew it. He liked sleeping in the box I had for him in the garage. One morning Blackie's leg got caught in the spring of the garage door. I was heartsick to see that broken leg. Grandmere told me how to take a matchstick and soft cloth and make a splint for Blackie's leg. We soon had him walking again. He stayed close to home while his leg healed.

Blackie was my constant companion those long days of summer. We would go for long walks or bike rides. He would sit on my shoulder or fly just overhead. When Grandmere came out to the porch, he would fly to her with a bright pebble or piece of glass that he had collected on our outing.

Like the rest of his species, Blackie was very intelligent and could even vocalize like a parrot. Grandmere called my brother Billy Earl. She would say, "Blackie, where is Billy Earl?" Or "There is Billy Earl." That crow would fly to meet my brother, squawking "Billerl, Billerl, Billerl." Sometimes Blackie would follow Bill when he rode his bike and would always squawk "Billerl" as he flew overhead.

One cool, windy day in the fall, Blackie soared high above the house. Grandmere and I watched as he flew from sight. I cried myself to sleep that night when Blackie did not return for his visit with Grandmere and me or to find his warm bed in the garage. Grandmere told me that Blackie needed to find a family of his own, and we should always remember the summer he was part of our family. She gave me a hug and said, "Part of growing up is learning to let go. There are always new adventures awaiting us if we keep ourselves open to the opportunity."

I wasn't ready to grow up if it meant losing Blackie, but she insisted, "We don't always get to choose our lessons or the time for them, but it is wise to collect them and learn from them."

Joan Lawrence lives in Georgetown and has a red dachshund named Pfennig. This is her first published article.



GORDON

A Tasty Treat That's Neat To Eat

Along with celebrated comfort foods such as barbecue and chicken-fried steak, fried pies are a part of the Texas way of life.

by Carlton Stowers



They are a sweet and nostalgic reminder of a more carefree time, a Deep South taste and aroma that lures one back to childhood days spent anxiously waiting in Grandma's kitchen. If there is a warmer and more welcomed midday treat than the old-fashioned fruit-filled fried pie, you are hereby challenged to name it.

With its crisp, sugarcoated crust, housing the likes of soft-cooked apple, peach, apricot or cherry, it is a delight that begs the consumer—young and old—to grab a glass of cold milk and briefly dismiss all worries about cholesterol and expanding waistlines.

Pies are popular the world over, but by golly, there's nowhere from sea to shining sea where the appreciation is greater than in Texas.

Just ask anyone who's stopped in at Hico's Koffee Kup Café southwest of Fort Worth for a slice of cream pie, with a 6-inch-high meringue topping, or travel north to the Natty Flat Smoke House in Lipan for a chocolate or blackberry fried pie. There's even a group of devoted and adventuresome Texans who regularly get together for weekend treks they call Pie Runs, visiting the likes of the Wimberley Pie Company southwest of Austin, the Farmhouse Café in Huntsville, Atwood's in Marble Falls, and Hawkins' Petty Café east of Dallas in search of new dining experiences.

In Marble Falls, Hardy Sivells, whose family has operated Atwood's for 35 years, sees to it that his restaurant's famed pies are disbursed fairly among his customers. At the order counter there is a sign warning customers, "A Maximum of Four Per Customer."

The restaurant opens at 6 a.m., Wednesday through Saturday, and by 7 a.m., says Sivells, "It's a gamble what flavors will be left." The pies, handmade by Sivells' mom, Virginia, aren't actually fried pies.

"People have called them that for as long as I can remember," the owner says, "but, in truth, they are a German-style turnover, baked, not fried, and have far fewer calories."

But the subject today is specifically the hand-held fried pie.

"This is going to sound strange," says Jo Clark, proprietor of Gainesville's popular Fried Pie Co. & Restaurant, of the treat "but, aside from the taste, I think what people like is the fact you can walk around while you're eating one. I have people who come in, get their order, then, rather than sit at a table, they'll go stand by the window and look across the street at the courthouse while they eat their pie."

Many view Clark, who has sold eight fruit- and cream-filled varieties of the pastry for almost a quarter century, as Texas' queen mother of fried pies. Monday through Friday, she and her staff fry no fewer than 300 pies daily—and on Saturday, 450—to fill the additional call-in orders from neighboring towns. Her most popular? "Apricot, 3 to 1," she says.

Where once she had the market virtually to herself, Clark now has a growing

list of competitors. Among the recent entries is Sarah Jackson, a 26-year-old single mother of two who is keeping the tradition alive and well in the rural West Texas whistlestop of Gordon, in Palo Pinto County. There, in a 1,500-square-foot building on the outskirts of the community of 473, she and her small staff at Backroads Bakery Inc. turn out between 4,000 and 5,000 fried pies weekly, providing them to an ever-expanding market that includes 140 convenience stores within a 150-mile radius.

As a girl growing up in Stephenville, she recalls, her repeated offers to help her mother with preparation of family meals were routinely met with the suggestion that she toss the salad and stay as far away from the stove as possible. She won't even venture a guess about the number of times when, as a young housewife, an emergency call went out for delivery pizza after she'd failed at whatever new recipe she'd tried. Pastries were her only successes.

"Some friends ran the hotel here in Gordon," she recalls, "and I occasionally made a whole pie and took it to them. They seemed to like them, and when they opened a small convenience store in town, they said they wanted a novelty food item to sell and asked what I thought about making a dozen or so fresh fried pies daily."

Seeing the opportunity to help out with the always-tight family budget, she began to experiment. "I'd never made fried pies before," she admits, "so I tried a number of recipes and finally came up with an apple-filled one that I was pleased with."

Soon she was waking at 3 a.m. each day to spend two hours in her small kitchen cooking three pies at a time in a deep fryer to fill her daily order from the nearby Longhorn Country Store.

Sellouts became common, and the orders increased to 200 pies per week. Soon, she expanded to other flavors, including the buttermilk fried pie, made from a recipe from her grandmother.

The business boomed, and her family came to the rescue. In April 2004, cousin Justin Scrivner, a Fort Worth fireman, and wife Mindy suggested a partnership.

"I knew she had something special," says Justin, "when I'd occasionally take a bunch of her pies to the fire station and watch them disappear immediately. The guys were comparing them to Krispy Kreme doughnuts."

With Justin serving as Backroads' president and chief promoter and Mindy working as bookkeeper, the business quickly expanded. His dad and his wife's grandparents began making twice-a-week deliveries. Having outgrown the backyard building where the pies were cooked, a spacious new building went up on a nearby lot that Scrivner owned. State-of-the-art equipment that streamlined the dough-making process was ordered from Chicago and Alabama; a delivery van was purchased; and a second cook went on the payroll.

Five days a week, from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m., Jackson and her staff prepare the pies and place them in a large walk-in freezer for later cooking. (Once delivered to the customer, the packaged pies have a 10-day shelf life.) Nearby, in a corner play area, 6-year-old Hunter and 5-year-old Sierra amuse themselves until Mom has a few minutes to join them.

Backroads Bakery, at least by Gordon measure, had gone big-time.

Customer comments posted on the company's website (www.backroadsbakery.com) are overwhelmingly positive, often opening with the gleeful admission that the writer "hasn't had a fried pie like this since my grandmother made them."

"Now," adds Scrivner, "we're all wondering where this is headed. We've talked with some big-city pastry shops who have asked about stocking the pies. I find myself wondering if one day some large food company isn't going to call, wanting to buy the business. What Jackson's started has grown into something none of us dreamed could happen."

He should have known. The market for a good fried pie is always going to be there. Along with celebrated comfort foods such as barbecue and chicken fried steak, it's part of the Texas way of life.

Carlton Stowers has written about the Lake Cisco Dam and the Odessa Meteor Crater for Texas Co-op Power.



The World's Best Chocolate

BY SHANNON OELRICH Scharffen Berger produces some of the finest chocolate in the world. If you want to find out how they turn the beans from a ripe cacao pod into the rich confection preferred by the world's best bakers, read the new book by the company's founders, John Scharffenberger and Robert Steinberg, called *The Essence of Chocolate* (Hyperion, 2006). As fascinating as that story is—Did you know the person roasting the cacao beans has to taste one every 30 seconds?—the real reason to read this cookbook is the recipes. There are over 100 mouth-watering recipes, with some old favorites like Chocolate Drop Cookies and some innovative desserts like Orange Chocolate Baklava.

Because Valentine's Day is an opportunity to do something a little special for our loved ones, I'm sharing two from-scratch chocolate recipes for which we usually take shortcuts: chocolate truffles and hot chocolate. Take the time to make one of these delicious desserts for your beloved, and you're sure to reap the benefits. If you're unable to find Scharffen Berger chocolate at your local store, you may order it online, as well as the book, from www.scharffenberger.com. (Note: You'll need a candy thermometer for the truffle recipe.)



ROBERT'S TRUFFLES

- 3 ounces 62% semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 3 ounces 70% bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream, preferably not ultrapasturized
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cocoa powder
- 5 ounces 70% bittersweet chocolate, melted

Place the chopped chocolates in the top of a double boiler set over gently simmering water. Let the chocolate melt three-quarters of the way, then remove from the heat and stir until smooth. Return the pan to the bottom of the double boiler, off the heat, to keep warm.

Meanwhile, heat the cream in a small saucepan to between 115 and 120 degrees F. The goal is to have the chocolate and cream at the same temperature.

Slowly drizzle the melted chocolate into the cream, stirring with a heatproof spatula to blend and emulsify (this emulsification is called a ganache). Stir gently, do not overmix.

Pour the ganache onto a baking sheet and spread into a layer about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Once it has reached room temperature, cover with plastic wrap and let it stand overnight at room temperature to solidify.

Scoop up a teaspoon of ganache on a spoon or with a melon baller and shape the chocolate gently into a ball. Place on a sheet of parchment paper. Do not roll the truffles in the palms of your hand at this point; it will compress them too much and make them hard. They don't need to be regular in size or shape. Scrape up any remaining bits of ganache with a pastry scraper and form into truffles.

Place the cocoa powder in a small bowl. Place about a teaspoon of the melted chocolate in the palm of one hand, and roll a truffle between your palms to coat it lightly with chocolate. (Rolling the truffles between your hands at this point will create a very thin layer of chocolate that will prevent the cocoa from soaking into the truffle.) Roll the coated truffles in cocoa powder.

The truffles can be kept in an airtight container at room temperature for 2 days or refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.



JOHN'S CLASSIC DRINKING CHOCOLATE



Allow the truffles to come to room temperature before serving. Makes about 3 dozen truffles.

JOHN'S CLASSIC DRINKING CHOCOLATE

- 2½ cups whole milk
- 4 ounces 99% unsweetened chocolate, coarsely chopped
- ⅓ cup granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional)
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)

Heat the milk in a medium saucepan over medium heat until it is hot to the touch. Whisk in the chocolate and sugar and continue whisking for 1 to 2 minutes until the sugar has dissolved. Whisk in the vanilla and the cinnamon and cayenne, if using. Reduce the heat to low. The chocolate may be made ahead; it will thicken as it sits.

Serve in demitasse cups or mugs depending on desired portion. Serves 6 to 8.

Note: For a lighter, airy consistency, remove the hot chocolate from the heat and mix with a hand blender on low speed just before serving. Or make ahead and use the frother of an espresso machine to reheat it. Individual servings can also be topped with frothed milk.

This can be made up to 3 days ahead and refrigerated, but if you use the spices, keep in mind their flavor intensifies over time.

DARK CHOCOLATE: IT'S GOOD FOR YOU!

The health benefits of dark chocolate accrue from the cacao bean, from which chocolate is made. Once the cacao bean is processed, it is called cocoa, cocoa mass, cocoa liquor or cocoa solids.

- Dark chocolate and cocoa may provide energy, endurance and a strong immune system.
- Healthful chocolate contains at least 65 percent chocolate, has no added fats after cocoa butter, and lists chocolate first on ingredient list.
- The fewer ingredients, the better. Good quality dark chocolate will have more fat grams per serving than sugar grams.
- Health benefits don't apply if chocolate contains hydrogenated fats and/or too much sugar.
- If you savor the chocolate and let it melt in your mouth, you will be satisfied with less.
- For celebratory occasions, there should be no culinary limitations. Celebratory chocolate desserts, however, are not meant to, nor will they, reduce one's cholesterol or weight.

—From *Eat Chocolate—Lose Weight: The Chocoholic's Survival Guide and Practical Handbook* by Anne Isham (Nortex Press, 2004)

Right: A cacao pod, which holds about 40 cacao seeds (or beans).




LOIS BOATWRIGHT *CoServ Electric*

Prize-winning recipe: Baked Fudge

This month's winning recipe for Baked Fudge is an old-fashioned dessert. It's like a chocolate brownie pie without the crust. The top gets that perfect brownie crackle, but inside it's rich and creamy. Serve it with a dollop of pure, unsweetened whipped cream for a taste straight from Grandma's kitchen.

Cook's Tip: If you want to lightly sweeten the whipped cream, add 1½ tablespoons of powdered sugar to the cream as you beat it. For a special treat, add a teaspoon of vanilla extract as well.

BAKED FUDGE

- 4 eggs
- 1¾ cups sugar
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup cocoa
- Pinch of salt
- 1 cup butter, melted
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- ⅓ cup dark chocolate chips
- 1 cup whipping cream

Place eggs in mixing bowl and beat well (about 3 minutes). Add sugar, flour, cocoa and salt, and beat well. Stir in melted butter, pecans and vanilla until thoroughly blended. Pour into 9x9-inch baking dish or pan. Sprinkle chocolate chips on top. Place in a larger pan and pour water into larger pan until water comes 1 inch up side of smaller pan. Bake at 325 degrees for 45 minutes or until set and crusty. Test by inserting a knife ½ inch from the edge to see if the knife is clean when removed. Do not overbake. Remove from hot water to wire rack. Cool, then refrigerate until cold. Cut into squares. Whip the cream and put a dollop onto each square before

serving. Makes about 20 squares.

Serving size: 1 square. Per serving: 271 calories, 3 g protein, 19 g fat, 24 g carbohydrates, 117 mg sodium, 79 mg cholesterol

LUSCIOUS DARK CHOCOLATE TRUFFLES

- 1 package (12 ounces) Hershey's Special Dark chocolate chips
- 1 tablespoon instant coffee granules
- 1 tablespoon rum extract
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 2⅔ cups powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- Cocoa powder, powdered sugar, toasted coconut or finely chopped nuts for garnish

Microwave chocolate chips in large microwave-safe bowl on High for 20-30 seconds at a time, stirring in between, until chocolate is melted.

Mix instant coffee granules and rum extract in small bowl and stir until coffee is dissolved. Set aside.

In large mixing bowl, mix cream cheese and sugar together, then add coffee/rum mixture. Add melted chocolate and vanilla. Mix well. Scrape down sides and cover bowl with plastic wrap. Chill for 20-30 minutes.

Shape a spoonful at a time into 1-inch balls by rolling in hands. Place on cookie sheet. Dust with or roll in your choice of garnish. Place each truffle in a small foil candy liner and keep refriger-

ated until ready to serve. Makes about 3 dozen truffles.

MARY BETH HALL
Pedernales Electric Cooperative

Serving size: 2 truffles. Per serving: 205 calories, 2 g protein, 10 g fat, 30 g carbohydrates, 39 mg sodium, 14 mg cholesterol

CHEESECAKE WITH DARK CHOCOLATE
CRUST

- 1 cup crushed nuts (macadamias or walnuts work best)
- 1 cup flour
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter, softened

Combine all ingredients and press into 9x9-inch baking dish. Bake at 325 degrees for 30 minutes.

FILLING

- 1 cup whipping cream
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

2-3 squares dark baking chocolate
With an electric mixer, whip whipping cream until it thickens. In separate bowl, mix cream cheese, sugar and vanilla. Fold whipped cream into cream cheese mixture. Grate 2-3 squares of dark chocolate (depending on taste), reserving some to top with, and fold into mixture.

Spoon mixture over crust, smooth with back of spoon, and top with reserved grated chocolate. Refrigerate for 1 hour before serving. Serves 16-18.

WILMA GRISCHKOWSKY
Pedernales Electric Cooperative

Serving size: 1 slice. Per serving: 266 calories, 3 g protein, 21 g fat, 23 g carbohydrates, 96 mg sodium, 46 mg cholesterol

RECIPE CONTEST


June's recipe contest topic is **CAJUN VS. CREOLE**. Do you have family recipes from either tradition, or just a favorite dish that fits the bill? If so, please send it to Home Cooking, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You may also fax them to (512) 486-6254 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org. Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric co-op. The deadline is February 15. The top winner will receive a tin filled with Pioneer products. Runners-up will also receive a prize.

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



**Texas Electric
Cooperatives**

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This public service message is brought to you by your local electric cooperative. For more information, visit your local co-op.

Fort Fraud: Ben Leaton's Grand Gamble

BY JEFFERSON MORGENTHALER

In 1848, shortly after Mexico surrendered its claim to Texas, an American trader and freighter traveled the brutal road through the Chihuahuan Desert to the Presidio del Norte, the most remote outpost of the Mexican empire. He was Benjamin Leaton, and he found himself in a tiny, struggling frontier pueblo, “a miserable, Indian-blighted place.”

Leaton crossed the Rio Grande to the Texas bank of the river. His freighting experience told him that commerce would soon flow between San Antonio, Texas, and Chihuahua, Mexico, fording the river at Presidio del Norte, not farther upstream at El Paso. He meant to establish a trading post that would profit from the steady stream of teamsters, traders and travelers that he saw coming.

Leaton selected a stretch of land 3 miles downstream. There, the Mexican army had built a small, fortified outpost—a *fortín*—from which they protected a few *campesino* farmers. Now, the army was gone, but the farmers remained.

Land titles were uncertain in the aftermath of the Texas Revolution, and none of the *campesinos* had ever completed the formalities necessary to prove their ownership. Recognizing an opportunity, Leaton bribed Esmerijildo Baiza, the *alcalde* (mayor) of the village at Presidio del Norte, and a former *alcalde*, Cesario Herrera. Before long, Leaton possessed a fine set of forged Mexican deeds to a tract along the river, measuring 5 miles long and over a mile wide.

As for the *campesinos*, Leaton ran them off at the point of a gun, with the support of Baiza. The farmers protested to the governor of Chihuahua that Leaton and the *alcalde* had stolen their land. But Leaton's lands were no longer in Chihuahua; they were in Texas, beyond the reach of Mexican law.

Leaton expanded the *fortín*, building an enclosed compound with stables, corrals, courtyards, work areas, living areas and a trading post. There were 40 rooms, enclosed by walls and parapets. Immense wooden doors swung wide to admit horses and wagons into the courtyard.

The bastion, soon dubbed “Fort Leaton,” was not for show. It was a necessity for survival in lands where Mescalero Apaches roamed and raided. Leaton meant to trade with the Mescaleros, a dangerous business. He knew that Mexican soldiers would not cross the border to protect him. The nearest Texas soldier, ranger or sheriff was hundreds of miles away. Leaton mounted a small cannon over the gate to his compound.



COURTESY TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

The first group of Texians pulled into Fort Leaton in October 1848, eight months after the border had been drawn. It was an expedition led by legendary Texas Ranger Jack Hays, accompanied by the equally legendary San Antonian Sam Maverick. The 70-man entourage was charged with opening a road from San Antonio to Chihuahua.

The explorers were lost and half-starved. They had resorted to eating mustang meat, panther, bear grass, prickly pear tunas, the occasional polecat and four of their pack mules. Water was so scarce that they had chewed strips of boot leather to keep their mouths moist.

Leaton afforded Hays' expedition the finest hospitality available. Hays' men rested and reprovisioned at Fort Leaton. After their grueling experience, they elected not to continue on to Chihuahua; instead, they turned back toward San Antonio, taking an easier route suggested by Leaton.

Despite the travails of Hays' expedition, the road from San Antonio soon became a busy trading route known as the Chihuahua Trail. Fort Leaton became a landmark in the region, and Ben Leaton became a heralded host and scoundrel who used the strategic position of his trading post to skillfully exploit Mexicans, Mescaleros and travelers of every stripe.

Today the restored Fort Leaton State Historic Site is just south of Presidio. There are two historical markers at the fort. They tell differing versions of its establishment, but neither mentions that Ben Leaton's tenure began with a bold and illegal land grab.

Jefferson Morgenthaler is the author of The River Has Never Divided Us from the University of Texas Press.



GATES AS FOCAL POINTS

Plenty of gates serve as barriers, so it was logical that some of our entries in this month's contest sported warnings shouting "Keep Out!" in no uncertain terms. But our judges favored these friendlier gates that delight the eye as they welcome guests. Come on in.

—CHERYL TUCKER

◀ CoServ Electric member **Caleb Bennett** snapped this photo while touring the State Capitol after work one day.

▼ **Bradley Matula** built this gate from the doors of a long-gone 1949 Chevrolet truck. Bradley and his wife, **Jennifer**, belong to Victoria Electric Cooperative.



▲ **Christopher Woods**, a member of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, calls this beautiful photo of a white picket fence covered in blooms and Old Glory—appropriately enough—"Morning Glories."



▲ Pedernales Electric Cooperative member **Kathy Comer** had sketched a gate design that incorporated both the sun and moon, only to discover that "the" gate had already been created by Rex Butterfield at Steel Horse Studios. "It was uncanny how similar our designs were," she said. "Of course, I had to get it."

Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Apr	Inspirational	Feb 10
May	Barbecues	Mar 10
June	Inventions	Apr 10
July	Brothers	May 10
August	Off to the Races	June 10
Sept	Birdhouses	July 10

INSPIRATIONAL is the topic for our **APRIL 2007** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to Inspirational, Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, before **February 10**. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline. Please note that we cannot provide individual critiques of submitted photos. If you use a digital camera, e-mail your highest-resolution images to focus@texas-ec.org. (If you have questions about your camera's capabilities and settings, please refer to the operating manual.)

▼ **Keith** and **Rose Land** enjoy exploring the back roads of Central Texas in their new little convertible. East of Salado, they came across this giant longhorn gate. "The gate warranted a U-turn so I could hop out and snap this shot of Keith and his new toy. I mean CAR!" The Lands have been Pedernales Electric Cooperative members for 20 years.



AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

FEBRUARY

- 01 SHINER** [1-25]
Heritage Quilt Show,
(361) 594-3044
- TEXARKANA** [1-28]
Black History Month,
(903) 793-4831,
www.texarkana-museums.org
- 02 BRYAN**
First Friday,
(979) 822-0496,
www.downtownbryan.com
- WINNSBORO** [2-3]
Benefit Garage Sale,
(903) 342-0686
- 03 HUNTSVILLE**
Rocky Raccoon
100 Mile Endurance Run,
(936) 295-8113,
www.hillcountrytrail-runners.com

- 03 MONTGOMERY**
Farmer's Market,
(936) 597-4566,
www.historicmontgomery-texas.com
- NAVASOTA**
Antique Roses Seminar,
(936) 870-4044
- ROCKPORT**
Bountiful Bowl Pottery
Fair, (361) 729-5352
- SAN ANGELO**
First Saturday,
(325) 653-4936
- 04 RICHARDSON**
Chinese New Year
Spectacular,
(972) 744-4650
- SCOTLAND**
German Sausage Meal,
(940) 541-2285
- 05 KINGSVILLE** [5-10]
South Texas Ranching
Heritage, (361) 593-2810,
www.kingsvilletexas.com

- 08 ABILENE**
ArtWalk, (325) 677-8389
- 09 BRYAN**
Braschler Music Show,
(979) 268-7727
- GALVESTON** [9-20]
Mardi Gras Celebration,
1-888-425-4753,
www.mardigrasgalveston.com
- GLEN ROSE** [9-10]
Winter Tractor Show &
Pull, 1-888-346-6282
- JEWETT** [9-11] Flea
Market, (903) 536-7689
- MIDWAY** [9-11]
Battle for El Camino Real
Reenactment,
(936) 348-6737
- 10 BOERNE** [10-11]
Market Days,
(830) 249-5530,
www.mainstreetboerne.com
- CYCLONE**
Mardi Gras Celebration,
(254) 985-2393

- 10 LIBERTY**
Trail Ride,
(281) 432-0052
- LUBBOCK**
Chorale Valentine's
Concert, (806) 792-
9220, www.lubbock-chorale.org
- NEW BRAUNFELS**
Daddy/Daughter Dance,
(830) 221-4350,
www.nbpard.org
- NEW BRAUNFELS**
Hill Country Doll Show &
Sale, (830) 606-5868
- ROUND TOP**
International Guitar
Festival, (979) 249-3129
- STEPHENVILLE**
[10-11, 24-25] Chicken
House Flea Market,
(254) 968-0888
- 14 MERCEDES** [14-18]
Rio Grande Valley Music
Festival, (956) 373-0130,
www.rgvmf.com



TEXAS CO-OP POWER

**EACH MONTH, WE BRING YOU THE
VERY BEST TEXAS HAS TO OFFER!**

Texas Co-op Power is the Texas living magazine with a rural, suburban and small town focus. Each month you will read entertaining articles about Texas people, Texas history, Texas nature, Texas travel and Texas food.

And, in every issue we feature a personal look at chosen towns in "Texas, USA" along with "Around Texas," featuring selected events around the state.

AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

15 BROWNSVILLE [15-18]
International Birding Festival, 1-800-626-2639, www.brownsville.org/2006birdfest

PORT ARTHUR [15-18]
Mardi Gras Weekend, (409) 721-8717, www.portarthur.com/mardigras

16 BOERNE [16-18]
St. Valentine's Day Massacre Motorcycle Rally, (210) 865-7188, www.massacrerally.com

DECATUR [16-17]
Winter Dayze Motorcycle Show & Expo, (940) 399-9679

JEFFERSON [16-18]
Mardi Gras Upriver, (903) 665-3733, www.mardigrasupriver.com

17 LIVINGSTON [16-18]
Trade Days, (936) 327-3656, www.cityoflivingston-tx.com/tradedays

ANDICE [17-18]
Crafter's Fair, (254) 793-9438

ROUND TOP [17-18]
Historical Society Community Garage Sale, (979) 249-3042

18 BROWNSVILLE [18-25]
Charro Days Fiesta, (956) 542-4245, www.charrodaysfiesta.com

20 PORT ARTHUR
Fat Tuesday Mardi Gras Party, (409) 962-9860, www.portarthurtexas.com

22 BRENHAM [22-25]
Library Benefit Used Book Sale, (979) 337-7201

23 PORT ARANSAS [23-25]
Celebration of Whooping Cranes & Other Birds, 1-800-452-6278

24 ATHENS
Home & Garden Show, (903) 675-7961

CARTHAGE
Jim Reeves Jamboree, (281) 852-8308, www.JohnRexReeves.com

GAINESVILLE
Farm Toy Show, (940) 759-2876

MIDWAY
VFD Steak Dinner & Dance, (936) 348-8270

26 ODESSA
Shrimpfest, (432) 550-9696

MARCH

03 ATHENS
Fly Fish Texas, (903) 676-2277

03 LONGVIEW
Train Show, (903) 753-9512

10 JEFFERSON
Paranormal Conference, (903) 987-9157

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. Please submit events for April by Feb 10. **Events are listed according to space available; see the full listing at www.texascooppower.com.** We appreciate photos with credits but regret that they cannot be returned.

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Make checks payable to Texas Electric Cooperatives.
Send \$29.95 (\$24.95 plus \$5 tax, shipping and handling) for each cookbook to Cookbook, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. Also available in many co-op lobbies throughout the state or online at www.texascooppower.com. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.

Down around Matagorda Bay and environs, you find unexpected stores of art, shiploads of history, hundreds of bird species for the watching and wary folks keeping an eye out for the next hurricane. In a mini-region along the Coastal Bend, about halfway between Galveston and Corpus Christi, you can spend a whole weekend soaking up the heritage and natural history of an area brimming with some of the greatest, little-known finds in the state. Winter is prime visiting time, too, so pack the binoculars and head on out.

You'll start in surprisingly rich Victoria, Victoria Electric Cooperative headquarters, then head 25 miles southeast toward the Gulf on U.S. Highway 87, stopping when you reach Port Lavaca, perched on Matagorda Bay. From there, you'll follow Texas Highway 35 southwest, then Texas Highway 239 southeast, on a 26-mile drive to Austwell, skirting the shores of San Antonio Bay, the gateway to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

VICTORIA

The seat of Victoria County, which lies about 120 miles southeast of San Antonio, was founded by Spanish settlers in 1824 and grew as more families arrived from Germany and Ireland. The town survived a burning following the massacre of Republic forces at nearby Goliad in 1836 and an 1846 cholera epidemic. To appreciate its survival is to explore its glories in such sites as **MEMORIAL SQUARE**, with its handsome courthouse and charming bandstand, pioneer graves and a wooden, wind-driven gristmill. At the **NAVE MUSEUM**, inside a grand, Greco-Roman building, find the work of Royston Nave, a Texas painter whose work won raves in New York in the 1920s. Fortify yourself with lasagna and homemade pie at **FOSSATI'S** on South Main Street, a friendly café with comfortably creaky floors, said to be the

VICTORIA to AUSTWELL

Whoop it up in Victoria and catch a glimpse of 5-foot-tall cranes at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

BY JUNE NAYLOR

your life list—some 400 species have been noted in this county alone—is at **PORT LAVACA'S LIGHTHOUSE BEACH AND BIRD SANCTUARY**, with its Formosa Wetland Walkway and Alcoa Bird Tower, the latter crafted entirely from recycled plastic.

Port Lavaca/Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce, 2300 Texas Hwy. 35, Port Lavaca, (361) 552-2959, www.portlavaca.org or www.portlavacainfo.com

AUSTWELL

Here's your jumping-off point to visit the 70,504-acre **ARANSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**, renowned for its winter colony of exquisite whooping cranes. One of just two crane species on the continent, this endangered crane draws attention for its looks—it's snowy white with black wing tips and a bright-red crown, and at 4–5 feet in height, it's the tallest bird in North America. It's also known for its noisy call that can be heard for miles. The whooping crane comes with a good story, too, as preservation efforts have brought it back from near-extinction numbers of just 15 birds in 1937 to roughly 200 in the vicinity today. You can see them between November and March by taking the 16-mile driving tour through the refuge. Among the 390-odd

other species you'll also see here are roseate spoonbills, ibises, herons and egrets. Do stop at the 40-foot-tall observation tower, furnished with two high-power spotting scopes.

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, FM 2040, Austwell; (361) 286-3559; www.fws.gov/southwest/REFUGES/texas/aransas/. Admission \$3-\$5. For a **Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail** map, contact Texas Parks & Wildlife, (800) 792-1112 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_trails/coastal/

The seventh edition of June Naylor's book, Texas: Off the Beaten Path, is now in stores.



oldest deli in Texas.

Victoria Convention and Visitors Bureau, 700 Main Ctr., Ste. 102, Victoria; (361) 582-4285, 1-800-926-5774, www.victoriatexasinfo.com

PORT LAVACA

The **CALHOUN COUNTY SEAT** overlooks Lavaca Bay from a bluff-top setting, where you watch kayakers paddling along to get a better glimpse of the feathered friends populating these waters. This area sits midway along the magnificent **GREAT TEXAS COASTAL BIRDING TRAIL**, with roughly 20 mapped viewing sites in this particular vicinity. Maybe the best place to add birds to