

# TEXAS GOOD POWER

## STEAK

A Texas Love Affair

PLUS

Highway Havens

Selecting Steak

Hit the Road:

Amarillo to Turkey

# ON BOARD WITH BOATING SAFETY

## Boating

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


### Safety Rules for Boating:

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

Have fun on the water.  
Boat safely!



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By Jeff Siegel

Photos by Will Van Overbeek

*Buy a good cut of meat, slap it on the grill and keep the cooking simple. Mmmm. Doesn't that steak smell good?*

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By Camille Wheeler

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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.

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# letters

## MINNIE LOU IS MY HERO

Minnie Lou Bradley [May 2007]—what a wonderful life. My life dream is to raise cattle, but my life events have led to running a \$150M company.

Although my life is a success, I will always yearn to walk in Minnie Lou's shoes. She is a true pioneer in an all-too-modern world. I know not many women share my dream, but Minnie knows the contentment from a lifetime of hard work and dedication to the land. It has rewarded her richly. Thank you for your story.

**CRISTI CANNON**  
*CoServ Electric*

## ALL IT NEEDS IS WINGS

We enjoyed reading the article on the hummingbirds ["Hummingbirds: Those Magnificent Flying Machines," March 2007] and count ourselves lucky to have several varieties humming around us, enough to keep 10 feeders active. But we bet you've never seen a hummingbird like ours!



Other than feeding at night, there's not too much different about him. And we wondered why our feeder was dry every morning.

**NANCY AND GREG STUART**  
*Pedernales Electric Cooperative*

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](mailto: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. Read additional letters at [www.texascoopower.com](http://www.texascoopower.com).

# POWER TALK

## PEC LAUNCHES GREEN WORKS

Environmental responsibility has become the watchword for companies around the globe. At Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC), that philosophy forms the basis of an ongoing effort



## GREEN WORKS

launched this past Earth Day called Green Works that encourages the use of renewable electricity and promotion of conservation.

Through that initiative, the nation's largest electric cooperative offers its more than 200,000 members the monthly option of buying power that

is generated by renewable resources. Renewable electricity is not a new concept for PEC, whose chief supplier, the Lower Colorado River Authority, has produced hydroelectric power for decades. And unlike programs offered by other utilities—which can cost substantially more than conventionally generated electricity—the cost for green Pedernales power is only half a cent more per kilowatt-hour than the base energy charge.

The cooperative purchased 145,690,000 kilowatts of renewable energy between June 2006 and March 2007 and wants more members to participate in the program.

To promote improved energy management, the cooperative offers its members resources such as the PEC Home Energy Center, an online energy audit designed to help members save on monthly bills and reduce carbon emissions. It takes members on a step-by-step tour of their dwelling, determining energy usage, offering ways to increase efficiency and even measuring their "carbon footprint." PEC also offers links through its website, [www.pec.coop](http://www.pec.coop), to information on renewable electricity, environmentally friendly business practices, and conservation and green building.

## Bring the Breeze to You

One of the keys to home energy efficiency is directing heating or cooling exactly where you want it. At bedtime, you can save electricity by using standard fans or ceiling fans. Ceiling fans should rotate counter-clockwise in the summer (to generate a downward breeze to cool you off) and clockwise in the winter (to cycle the warm air that rises to your ceiling.) By judicious use of a ceiling fan, you can cut up to 40 percent from your cooling bill in the summer.

Or you can use the Bedfan®, designed and sold by Bryan Texas Utilities member Kurt Tompkins of Snook. The Bedfan blower goes between the bottom sheet and top sheet, circulating air directly on you. The bottom of the blower stands at the foot of the bed, pulling air from under the bed. (So this is a good incentive for people to clean under their beds.) For more information on the fan, go to [www.bedfan.com](http://www.bedfan.com).

## Solar Screens Reduce Cooling Costs

Solar screens provide an inexpensive way to save energy and help cut cooling bills. The screens reduce heat absorption in windows by up to 90 percent, resulting in up to a

30 percent reduction in summer bills. Using solar screens to shade exposed windows can reduce room temperatures

by as much as 20 degrees.

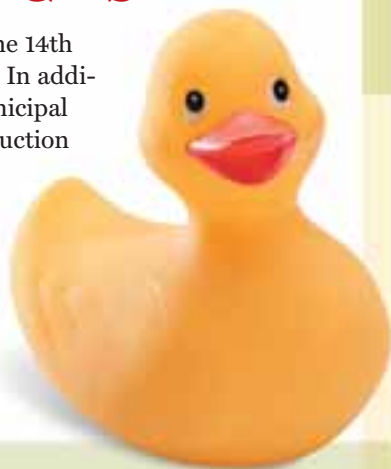
The screens are virtually invisible from the inside while providing privacy from the outside and cost about \$1-2 per square foot. If kept in place during winter, solar screens reduce wind chill and heat loss.



# H A P P E N I N G S

They'll be going quackers in Northeast Texas on July 4 at the 14th annual **JEFFERSON SALUTES AMERICA** celebration. In addition to a traditional fireworks bonanza, the Shreveport Municipal Concert Band will belt out patriotic music, a cake and pie auction will raise money for children's books at the local Carnegie Library, a bike and tricycle parade will roll through Otstott Park, and hundreds of little plastic ducks will be set loose for a race down Big Cypress Bayou.

The sponsor of the winning duck will win \$500 cash, and other front-runners also can claim prizes. Proceeds from the \$5-per-duck fee benefit the city's youth sports. The fun starts at 5 p.m.



## WHO KNEW?

### TASTY TOWNS

Some enterprising anonymous e-mailer has assembled Texas town names under various categories. Our favorite category is culinary. To wit:

**NOODLE**  
(Jones County)

**OATMEAL**  
(Burnet County)

**TURKEY**  
(Hall County)

**SUGAR LAND**  
(Fort Bend County)

**SALTY**  
(Milam County)

**RICE**  
(Navarro County)

And top it off with:

**SWEETWATER**  
(Nolan County)

The list we received contained two other town names we couldn't verify—Bacon and Trout. If anybody out there knows if these towns exist, please drop us a line.

## HARRISON COUNTY COURTHOUSE STANDS TALL FOR JUSTICE

Site of the first pro-Civil Rights sit-ins in Texas in the 1960s, the old Harrison County Courthouse in Marshall serves as a shining example of designer J. Riley Gordon's Renaissance Revival architectural style. Built in 1900, the courthouse features a dramatic



cast-iron central staircase and a false belfry on which stands a uniquely winged 6-foot-tall Lady Justice statue. The courthouse formerly served as home to the Harrison County Historical Museum but is currently undergoing renovation. Marshall is also headquarters of Panola-Harrison Electric Cooperative.

—From *The Courthouses of Texas*, Texas A&M University Press, second edition, 2007

## CO-OP PLACES

### TRY TO LAND AT THE HANGAR HOTEL

Editors and writers from numerous Texas cooperatives convened at a central location in Fredericksburg in April to exchange ideas. We stayed at the Hangar Hotel/Conference Center, which is on Central Texas Electric Cooperative lines. A modern hotel shaped like a hangar located at an actual private airport, it evokes the 1940s, from the vintage luggage in the foyer to the room phones that resemble old dialups. How cool is that?

Across the tarmac in a separate hangar are meeting rooms, a room big enough for dances and a vintage-looking diner. Fly (or drive) in for a great burger and a good bed; (830) 997-9990, [www.hangarhotel.com](http://www.hangarhotel.com).



DINER: STEVE HORRELL. SIGN: LOUELLEN COKER

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BY JEFF SIEGEL

PHOTOS BY WILL VAN OVERBEEK

**The smell is the first thing everyone notices. It's unmistakable—a combination of wood burning down to coals, sizzling fat and cooking beef. It brings back a thousand memories, all at once and yet still distinct, memories of families and backyards and Boy Scout cookouts and neighborhood barbecues with little kids running all over the place.**



"THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE IT, IS there?" asks Ronnie McIntosh, standing next to a grill in City Park in Hico in Hamilton County, checking the fire every so often. It's early afternoon on a sweltering July day in 2006—the warmest summer in almost a decade, but McIntosh, who has been at City Park since before 10 a.m., doesn't seem particularly bothered by the heat. He is there to grill a steak, and that's important business.

McIntosh, Richard Spradlin, and Andy and Kyle Cook make up one of a dozen or so teams—theirs is called Cook 'n' Company—competing in the third annual Texas Steak Cookoff. The goal? To grill the perfect steak. "And the only way to do that," says McIntosh with a laugh, "is to practice, and then practice some more. And then practice even more."

In this, Goldthwaite's Cook 'n' Company, Leggo My Angus of Dallas and

all of the cooking contest regulars have something in common with every man and woman who has ever turned on a grill or lit a match under a pile of charcoal. In fact, though grilling steak has a special place in Texas cuisine and in Texas history, what with longhorns and cattle drives, it's an all-American pastime that dates to the first British colonists (who, it turns out, weren't averse to having the neighbors over to dine on char-broiled beef). And, no doubt, they faced the same dilemma everyone faces today: How rare is too rare, and can anyone actually eat it well done?

### **ON THE TRAIL**

The story is part of American lore, and as lore goes, it's mostly true. In 1867, an Illinois cattle dealer named Joseph G. McCoy bought steers in Abilene, Kansas, penned them, and then shipped them to the Union Stockyards in

Chicago. Over the next 20 years or so, cowboys and trail hands drove 5 million to 10 million cattle out of Texas along the Chisholm Trail and its tributaries, headed for railheads such as Abilene and Dodge City.

And why not? The state had plenty of cattle (by one estimate, there were eight bovines for every person in Texas around the end of the Civil War, most of the cattle wild), and it made lots of economic sense. In 1865, for example, a steer that cost \$3 or \$4 in Texas might fetch 10 times that amount on the East Coast. Given that return, what was a journey over 700 miles of rough country populated by hostiles, varmints and the like? And, to make the trip even more profitable, the Texas longhorn, for all of its faults as a carrier of the dreaded Texas fever, gained weight during the drive.

Ironically, says Johnny D. Boggs, a writer who specializes in the frontier

West, cowboys didn't eat much beef on the trail. For one thing, the cattle were too expensive, especially for dollar-a-day cowhands. Chuck wagon fare was bacon, biscuits and beans, and maybe something polite society called son-of-a-gun stew, which was made with sweetbreads. Says Boggs: "Even when cowhands reached trail towns like Abilene and Wichita, most preferred fancier dishes than a good steak. Oysters were a favorite."

On the other hand, the rest of the country loved its beef—and had, for more than 150 years, says James E. McWilliams, who teaches at Texas State University in San Marcos and is the author of *Revolution in Eating: The Quest for the Food that Shaped America* (Columbia University Press, 2005). Starting with the earliest colonists, eating steak was a sign of prosperity. Poor people ate pork, he says, not only because it was less expensive, but because it was easier to raise. A farmer could turn a pig loose in a swamp and not have to worry about feeding it (and a poacher didn't even have to worry about who owned the pig). A cow, on the other hand, needed a field to graze, and a field meant land, usually fenced, and that arrangement required a prosperous farmer who could pay for it all.

## HEAD FOR PENNSYLVANIA

In the middle to late 18th century, the center of the U.S. beef industry was in western Pennsylvania. It had a nationwide reputation, and its beef was exported up and down the Atlantic Coast, from Maine to the West Indies. The meat was salted, smoked or pickled in those pre-refrigeration days, and consumers would cook it over an open flame, usually in a hearth fire. In an 1808 cookbook, *The New-England Cookery*, author Lucy Emerson says "A roast Potatoo is brought on with roast Beef, a Stake, a Chop, or Fricassee."

Sounds pretty much like a steak dinner today, doesn't it?

In fact, says Thomas Schneller, who teaches meat cutting at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, and is a third-generation butcher, not much has changed about steak since then. Our beef is more tender, but the results are pretty much the same if done correctly. Talk to experts such as



Participants in the third annual Texas Steak Cookoff in Hico were responsible for feeding a huge, hungry crowd.



The team at top calls itself Leggo My Angus. Below them on the left are Tracy Travis and her husband, Bill, owners of the Texas Trails restaurant in Hico. To the right is judge Charlie Price.

Schneller and the Hico contestants, and these rules of thumb become clear:

**Choose a cut you like**, whether it's ribeye or T-bone, for there aren't any right or wrong answers. Bone-in steaks can be more difficult to cook but make for a more impressive presentation.

**Marbling**—the lines of fat in the beef—matters. That's because it will melt during cooking, adding flavor and helping keep the meat moist, especially if it's well done. Look for marbling that's evenly distributed, and look for dots as opposed to streaks.

**High heat is best.** The goal is a crusty outside, but a tender and warm inside. A crust, thanks to the miracle of caramelization, adds yet more

flavor. It's even possible to accomplish this feat for steak that's well done by finishing the meat in a low oven. That way, the outside doesn't burn, and the inside turns the appropriate shade of brown.

**Cooking time** depends on the thickness of the cut and how well done it needs to be. The answer here is trial and error; once you figure out how to do it, you'll always know. Until then, there are no formulas like minute-per-pound. After all, every fire is different. (Though it's probably better to undercook, since you can finish the steak in the oven or even the microwave.)

And, surprisingly, cook it as well done as you like it, for there are no rules when it comes to that either. Schneller prefers

medium rare, but McIntosh likes his medium, and even cooks that way in contests. "The thing with beef," says Bart Thompson of Leggo My Angus, a medium-rare guy whose team won the Hico competition in 2005, "is that you don't want to trick it up. Keep it simple. Focus on temperature and time."

And then enjoy what you cooked.

---

*United Cooperative Services provides electric power for the Hico area. This year's competition was held in May.*

*Jeff Siegel, who lives in Dallas, wrote about salsa in our November 2006 issue.*



# COOL SUMMER SAFETY TIPS

## Swimming


**Don't be all wet.  
Remember these rules  
for safe pool-time fun  
this summer:**

- Keep electric radios, TVs, clocks, barbecues, lights and other electrical appliances at least 10 feet from a pool and wet surfaces. Use battery-powered appliances whenever possible.
- Electric appliances should not be used outdoors unless they are equipped with a heavy-duty cord and three-prong plug.
- Swimming pools should be well away from electric wires to avoid the risk of hitting the wires with long-handled cleaning equipment.
- All outdoor electrical outlets should be weatherproof and equipped with a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). This is especially important in damp locations where more protection is necessary.
- Check with your electric co-op before you dig to make sure you know the location of buried electrical lines.
- Label power and light switches for pool, hot tub and spa equipment.
- If you think you are being shocked while in the water, move away from the source of the shock. Get out of the water, if possible, without using a metal ladder.

**Stay safe this summer.  
Don't swim with shocks!**



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# Highway Havens

*Texas' Shiny New Rest Stops Are Attractions in Themselves*

BY CAMILLE WHEELER

**D**iesel fumes flood the nostrils. Even inside the restrooms, just a few long strides from the packed parking lot, there's no escaping the whooshing and hissing of truck brakes and the loud puh-puh-puh-puh-puh of idling 18-wheeler engines.

It's Sunday afternoon—the last day of spring break—at a busy-as-an-ant-hill rest stop south of Salado on Interstate 35. Truckers wedge into reserved spots, only to find their rigs boxed in. Frustrations flare. People have to go. That includes Trinh Doan and his family who are driving home to Richardson after visiting Austin. Doan nervously watches one of his daughters start walking into the women's restroom. “Wait,” Doan says to her. “Wait.”

Finally, Doan nods the OK for her to enter the dimly lit, open-air restroom with no doors, save for three stalls that latch shut. “It's dark in there,” Doan says, gathering his family around him at the Bell County facility. “I don't stop at the rest stops when the sun comes down.”

When it comes to Texas' old safety rest areas, three- to four-decade-old facilities once considered cutting edge but now showing their age, many travelers share the same gloomy view: Stop, if you must, but don't hang around. Especially after dark.

But a new era has dawned in the evolution of the Texas rest stop. As the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) raises the curtain on a new super-looking and super-sized model that features resculpted restrooms and separate truck parking, travelers are hitting the brakes and staying awhile.

Here's a dare: Just try not to stop at the Gray County rest stop east of Amarillo on Interstate 40, where red, white and blue lights pierce the pitch-black night. What looks remotely like a drive-in movie screen—but actually is a concrete wedge—rises from the darkness, glowing above the earth-sheltered rest stop as a 57-foot-tall night-light for all.

**Left, from top:** Many new rest stops feature indoor art or historical displays, original tile work, playscapes and landscaping. **Right:** The Kenedy County safety rest area, south of Kingsville on U.S. 77.







The lure of the giant lights alone—not to mention big Texas stars cut into the concrete and a wind turbine that appears like a white ghost in the night—brings drivers in from the dark.

“That’s the idea, to suck people off the road and make them take a break,” said Andy Keith, manager of TxDOT’s safety rest area program aimed at preventing fatigue-related vehicle crashes.

A study released last year by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute sheds new light on fatigued driving. In a 100-vehicle case study, researchers found that nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near crashes involved some sort of driver inattention—primarily cell-phone use and drowsiness—within three seconds of the event.

Since 1999, Texas officials have allocated \$92 million in federal transportation enhancement funds on 32 new, reconstructed or renovated rest stops, including six now under construction or design. Fifteen of the new facilities offer separate truck parking, as will the six being built. That includes a new Bell County pair scheduled to open in August, replacing the old pair.

TxDOT officials are pulling out all the stops to entice people to pull over, rest and relax. No lectures, no scare tactics: just a conversion of rest stops into oases that speak the vernacular of a region and steer tourism traffic back toward forgotten towns bypassed by major roads.

The new rest stops offer something for everybody: Playgrounds, nature trails, native plant and wildflower gardens, historical displays, movies and regional trivia. Free wireless Internet access is available at all 98 of Texas’ old and new rest stops, including 12 travel information centers. In 2003, through pilot projects, Texas became the first state to offer WiFi at rest stops.

But WiFi is far from the only drawing card. The Culberson County rest

**Clockwise from top: The Gray County Westbound rest stop on I-40, east of Amarillo. This “welcome wagon” features an interactive computer monitor that provides travel information. The Cherokee County location resembles the tomato sheds that used to pop up around local railroad lines. Free WiFi access is available at all rest stops.**

stop in far West Texas also features the spinning blades of a wind turbine. Like its Gray County counterpart, the machine generates renewable energy exclusively for the rest stops.

Stop to smell the flowers at a Gillespie County rest stop east of Fredericksburg on U.S. 290. A perfume-sweet Texas native garden rich with banquets of blossoms, including chrome-red turk's caps and red, yellow and orange lantana, attracts butterflies by the hundreds.

See how rest-stop architecture hammers the present to the past: In East Texas, north of Jacksonville on U.S. 69, a Cherokee County rest stop made of timber and brick resembles the old tomato sheds that once lined railroad tracks.

And at a travel information center just east of Amarillo, watch your dog try to round up a herd of steel-replica Longhorns. The sculptures stand out front on native prairie grass as the facility's signature feature.

"Dogs try to herd them," said Kim Maki, a travel counselor there. "The funny ones are the border collies. They'll run around and around 'em, trying to get 'em to move."

But, folks, you'll no longer want to run out of rest-stop restrooms. The new model wears ceramic-tile floors and walls and accessorizes with windows, skylights, vaulted ceilings and porcelain sinks. Lobbies typically include two enclosed men's and women's restrooms with ample stalls for all.

In the Panhandle, some rest-stop restrooms double as concrete-reinforced storm shelters, which were put to good use in late March when deadly tornadoes marched across the region.

Last fall, Gonzales rancher Clay Boscamp made a special trip to a new Guadalupe County rest stop east of Seguin. A history buff, Boscamp came to watch a movie about the 1835 Battle of Gonzales.

Boscamp couldn't help noticing security cameras, a video surveillance monitor and a law enforcement office inside the lobby.

"I would feel safe if my wife and daughter were to stop here, especially now that I've seen it," said Boscamp, a member of Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative. "It's not cold. It's not just a restroom and vending machine."

Wearing a straw cowboy hat, scuffed

boots and a gray T-shirt tucked into Wrangler jeans, Boscamp stared up at the lobby's ceiling, riveted by its construction of cedar wood and cable trusses. "I won't forget how this is made," he said.

Gray County visitors won't forget the grand design here, either, at arguably the state's most photogenic rest stop that can accommodate 50 trucks in a separate parking lot. From a windmill replica inside the lobby, to steel picnic arbors built like Plains

Indian shelters, it's almost too much to digest all at once.

Lights from distant farmhouses burn like candles on pitch-black Panhandle nights. During the day, "wows" ring out when rest-stop visitors look through viewfinders, stunned by the beauty of the Caprock escarpment tumbling down before them.

Use of the viewfinders is free—and the view is priceless from an observation deck guarded by a stone fence. When the wind's really blowing (yeah, when is it



Hot Weather

## Keep cool—you could save a life

- Take frequent cooling-off breaks in the shade or air conditioning.
- Drink plenty of water before starting any outdoor activity, and drink water during the day. Drink less tea, coffee and alcoholic beverages.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting, light-colored clothes.
- Limit your physical activity during the hottest part of the day.
- Kids, cars and heat make a deadly combination. Never leave a child—or pet—in a vehicle, even for "just a few minutes." That's long enough for a closed vehicle to heat up to dangerous levels, even on a 60-degree day.

If someone has heatstroke-related symptoms—nausea, fatigue, muscle cramps, confusion, dizziness—act rapidly: Remove excess clothing and lower the person's temperature with cold, wet sheets or a cool bath. Call a doctor immediately and transport the person to the nearest hospital—this is an emergency. This summer, don't sweat it. Keep cool.



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The Hardeman County Southbound design reflects the farming and ranching culture of the area.

not?), the fence railing rimmed with Texas stars mournfully moans. “You can hear different pitches,” TxDOT’s Keith said. “It’s like a wind flute.”

Texas’ rest stops are already well-used, with more than 50 million travelers visiting them every year. The issue is how long people are stopping at the

older models, some upgraded but still unable to handle increasing truck traffic and the needs of a diverse, mobile society.

As truck traffic increases nationwide, signs in Texas literally point toward bigger and better rest-stop parking: Trucks this way, cars that way.

On that chaotic Sunday afternoon in Bell County, trucker Randy Kopsick, who travels with his wife, Tonya, said he’s ready for separate parking. “I’d hate to sleep in a place like this,” he said. “I’d be so worried about getting hit by a car, or a truck swerving to miss cars.”

Bell County rest-stop supervisor José Rojas said he sometimes wakes up truckers who are blocking the entrance. “You can’t get in,” he said. “It’s outrageous. There ain’t no room no more.”

Back up at the Amarillo travel information center, there’s plenty of room for weary travelers to plop down in generous-sized Stickley-inspired chairs. Made of oak and leather and manipulated by wooden pegs, the chairs recline to a level of sleepy comfort.

“They fit everybody. We have people who just come in here and sack out,” said Maki, barely drawing a new breath as she greeted travelers walking in the door. “Hi, folks! Do y’all need a new Texas map?”

*Camille Wheeler, a freelance writer who lives in Austin, is a former newspaper editor and reporter. Her family is on Lyntegar Electric Cooperative lines.*

## The Beauty of Rest Stops

Texas’ safety rest area program has won a dozen environmental, architectural and context-sensitive (how well a facility reflects its surroundings) awards from entities including the Federal Highway Administration, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and the American Institute of Architects. To learn more about the program, go to [www.dot.state.tx.us/](http://www.dot.state.tx.us/)

The Donley County Northbound rest area on U.S. 287.

[services/maintenance/rest\\_areas.htm](#).

Some rest-stop highlights:

**Donley County, U.S. Highway 287.** This rest-stop pair pays homage to the nearby town of Hedley, a Panhandle railroad hub in the late 1800s. Facilities resembling train depots and cattle train cars prove the perfect historical ticket.

**Donley County, Interstate Highway 40 (the**

**historic Route 66).** At night, bright-red lights on a strange-looking structure beckon travelers. But what *is* that building? A bowling alley? Spaceship? Ding, ding, ding if diner’s your guess; this rest stop, modeled after an old motor court in nearby Groom, resembles the kind of diner found on the old Route 66.

**Brooks and Kenedy counties, U.S. Highways 281 and 77.** Official stops on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail as it winds through South Texas. In Brooks County, award-winning architecture mirrors early Texas ranches and mission compounds.

**Hale County, U.S. Highway 87.** Watch for the silo-shaped roofs north of Lubbock. Plow through agricultural displays about dry-land farming and cotton stripping and learn about center pivot irrigation—which creates those mysterious “crop circles” visible from aircraft.

**Guadalupe County, Interstate Highway 10.** Touch a replica of the “Come and Take It” cannon made famous in the 1835 Battle of Gonzales and watch historical movies, including one about Juan Nepomuceno Seguin, the first Tejano to serve in the Texas Senate. He is buried in nearby Seguin, his namesake.

—Camille Wheeler



**DON'T GO  
OUT ON  
A LIMB!**

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


## Safety Rules for Trees:

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

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



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## Cut Summer Electric Bills

**A**re you looking for ways to reduce your summer air-conditioning bills? Here are some things you can do to save money and still stay comfortable during the hot summer months. While it may seem a little late to take full advantage of some of these suggestions for this summer, you can begin implementing them for their full effect next summer.

**HUMAN COMFORT.** Most people are comfortable during the summer at temperatures between 72 and 78 degrees with a relative humidity of 35 to 60 percent. The comfort range can



**Trees are a natural source of shade that can help lower your summer electric bills.**

be increased to 82 degrees with modest air movement, such as that provided by ceiling fans.

**SOURCES OF UNWANTED HEAT.** There are three major sources of unwanted heat in your house during the summer: heat that conducts through your walls and ceiling from the outside, waste heat that is given off inside your

house by lights and appliances, and sunlight that shines through windows.

To reduce heat gains through walls and your ceiling, you can add insulation and seal cracks to reduce air infiltration. Ventilating your attic can be an important measure to reduce significant heat build-up during the summer.

To reduce waste heat from lights and appliances, the best solution is to buy energy-efficient products. A conventional incandescent light bulb, for example, uses only 10 percent of its input energy to produce visible light; the other 90 percent is radiated as heat. Fluorescent lighting, on the other hand, can produce the same amount of light as an incandescent lamp while consuming only one-fourth as much energy and producing only one-fourth as much heat—and the bulbs last 10 times longer.

To reduce the heat gain associated with sunlight shining in your windows, the two best strategies are shading and high-performance windows. Shading can be accomplished with overhangs and blinds, or with natural sources of shade such as trees. Deciduous trees, which lose their leaves in winter, are good for planting on the east and west sides of a house so that they provide shade in the summer but allow solar heat gain in the winter. High-performance windows with low-emissivity coatings and low-shading coefficients can help reject unwanted heat from the sun while allowing visible light to pass through the glass.

**GETTING RID OF UNWANTED HEAT THROUGH VENTILATION.** Natural or mechanical ventilation can help reduce air-conditioning costs. Exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms are very helpful, as are vents and fans in the attic.

Do you need more information about how to cut your summer energy bills? Call your electric cooperative for assistance.

## KEEP THE POWER ON AND THE FIRES OUT



**J**uly is a month for camping trips and celebrating the nation's independence. What do the two have in common? Fire. Unsafe campfires and fireworks can both lead to brushfires—and those brushfires can cause power outages.

Along with endless other safety concerns, heat from brushfires can damage electrical lines and equipment, causing major power problems. Even smoke and ash can cause a high-voltage transmission line to trip, leaving sections of the power grid without power.

Dry summers increase the chance of wildfires, but so do unsafe practices. During Fourth of July celebrations, use only legal fireworks and sparklers, and use them on concrete or pavement rather than dry grass. Never let children handle fireworks.

When making a campfire, keep a bucket of water nearby to control a spreading fire. Make a fire pit surrounded by rocks, not wood, and clear away leaves and other flammable materials that quickly spread flame. Never leave a campsite with a burning fire. Quench the fire with water to ensure the damp ashes cannot relight.

Keep the power going and the community safe by practicing fire safety.



## Why Is My Clock Blinking?



A power outage is inconvenient, whether it lasts for hours or just for a moment. But there is a difference between a prolonged power outage and a brief interruption.

Momentary power outages are split-second interruptions in service. They are a normal, unavoidable part of power delivery that have always occurred and used to go unnoticed.

Today's sophisticated computers and other electronic equipment are

supersensitive, though, and can be affected by a momentary outage—even one as brief as a thousandth of a second.

Yes, they are annoying. But momentary power outages actually serve an important purpose. For example, when a tree limb falls on an electric wire, your co-op's sensing equipment might detect a potentially dangerous condition and break the circuit for a split second. This very brief break in the flow of electricity protects essential parts of your cooperative's delivery system from major damage and actually helps prevent wider outages.

However, the power may be off just long enough that home electronic equipment, such as your digital clock or microwave oven, detects it. That's why you may sometimes find your clock blinking when you get home.

## 'Summer' School: Lessons on Keeping Cool

School may be out for the summer, but here's a test: On a hot day, will setting the thermostat at a very low temperature cool your house faster?

If you answered yes, you're in need of summer school. Lowering the thermostat beyond the temperature you desire only makes your air conditioner run longer, not faster. You could end up paying more money for an uncomfortably chilly house. Here are a few more lessons to add to your air-conditioning know-how:

Want to pay to be cool only when you're at home? Install a programmable thermostat, which lets you set the thermostat higher for hours when the house is empty, but lower during your at-home hours. It takes less energy to re-cool your home when you return than it

does to keep it cool while you're gone.

Set the thermostat at 78 degrees. You'll save about 15 percent on your cooling bill over a 72-degree setting, while remaining comfortable.

Keep lamps and other heat-emitting devices—such as TVs and large electronics—away from the thermostat. Such appliances can trick the thermostat into “thinking” the air is warmer than it really is, so it will keep running when the house is already cool.

The morning sun might help you wake up, but don't forget to close your curtains and window shades before you leave the house for the day to keep the sun's heat out.

If you use room air conditioners, make sure they fit snugly into window frames, and close all heating ducts.

## IN SUMMER HEAT, KEEP AN EYE ON NEIGHBORS



Hot summer days put people at risk for heat-related illnesses and can exacerbate existing medical conditions. Doctors recommend you spend the hottest part of the day indoors enjoying the air conditioning.

But for those whose homes don't have air conditioning or who can't afford to turn it on, the risk is acute. That's especially true for the elderly or ill, who could be at risk for heat stroke or even death.

If you know someone whose house might get too hot to handle this summer, call them or stop by to check on them every day. Arrange phone calls during the summer months to elderly neighbors or those who live alone. Encourage neighbors or family members to use air conditioners during the hottest part of the day or spend it in an air-conditioned public place, such as a mall or library. If you find someone in medical distress, call 911.

# How Do You Want Your Change?

*Out of thousands of customers, I have remembered her face, her voice, her words, for many years. Her actions have something to tell us: Take your time.*

BY BETTINA RESTREPO

O

nce, I worked for a supermarket. In addition to selling food, we had a customer-service department that cashed checks, wired money and paid bills. Our customers lived paycheck to paycheck. It amazed me how a person walked in each week to begin and end their financial life all in a grocery store.

After 40 hours of hard work, plus maybe some lucky overtime, they stood at my counter to pay their bills in segments, purchase money orders for the rent and buy bus tokens. They left with enough to pay the cashier for their cart of groceries. Their children hungrily waited for the final receipt and for the hope of loose change for an ice cream cone.

Seven days later, it would all happen again.

I learned the customers. Week in and week out, their patterns never changed. The seniors appeared on the third of each month, just after the postman placed Social Security checks into their mailboxes.

The third was busy, and no one wanted to wait in a long line.

Hattie Mae Wilson edged her way out of the roped line up to my window. She clutched her purse tightly to her chest as she pulled out a brown envelope.

She wore a floral housedress. Her lipstick was a bright fuchsia. "Good morning, Mrs. Wilson. How are you today?" I asked.

She passed her check and driver's license across the counter. Her nails were short. A thin silver band encircled her left wrist.

"Any morning I'm breathing is a good day, Missy."

I looked down at her driver's license and noted her birthday: March 15, 1901. Hattie Mae Wilson was 102 years old!

Her brilliant smile captured my full attention. "I think you're right, Mrs. Wilson. What can I do for you today?"

She was the rare customer who wanted to chat rather than just shove through a busy day. Unfortunately, I had 40 other customers with checks like hers waiting in the line behind her.

"Come on, old lady," I heard someone whine from the roped area.

"Well, Missy, first I want you to cash that check."

I felt the heated stares from the line. I had no choice but to serve one customer at a time. I knew the customers wouldn't leave. We didn't charge fees for the serv-

ice, and no one could afford to go to the pawnshop where they cashed checks for a 5 percent service charge. They were stuck.

“Yes ma’am, would you like big or small bills?”

It’s funny how people are particular about how they like to receive their money. I imagined people having their own system of money management, and getting the currency in different ways just makes them all feel in control. To me, \$500 is all the same, whether you have it in fives or hundreds.

“It doesn’t matter, big or small, because you’re getting all of it back. I just want to hold it for a while.”

Several customers made sighing noises. Impatience flowed through the crowd. Two children ran in and out of the roped area. A baby fussed in frustration.

The pressure to move her along grew when the manager of the front end stared at me and made a face about the line. “If you need other transactions like paying a bill or money orders, I can do that all at once,” I said. This was my feeble attempt to move the lady along. The customers back in the line strained their necks to look at me.

Hattie Mae would not be rushed. “No, Missy, I’m in no hurry this morning. I just want to hold the money for a while,” she said for the second time.

I cashed the check and handed over five crisp hundred-dollar bills and a twenty—the sum total. She smiled, and her white teeth gleamed against her black skin. She counted each bill to herself. She touched them as if each had a special meaning. She laid them out on the counter, folded her arms and smiled.

One customer made a circle with her finger, her attempt to tell me that Hattie Mae needed to wrap it up. I could hear the other customers in line grumbling.

Hattie Mae could not have cared less. She was deaf to their remarks, and nothing was interrupting her as she counted the money for the fourth time.

With a wide smile and a wink, she shoved all the money back at me.

“I need a \$300 money order, and put the rest on my light and phone bill. I only need some quarters. A lady still has to do her laundry.”

After double-checking my math on the computer, I saw that exactly \$10 was left of the check. A roll of quarters.

She wouldn’t have any money left. “You don’t need anything for groceries this week?” I asked.

“Nope. I got enough to last for a few days.”

“Move the line!” Several customers thought that they could bully me into scaring this lady along. I shot them an ugly look.

“But you won’t get another check for a month.”

“I know.”

“I could put less on the utility bills.” I didn’t want to see her go hungry.

“No, I need to be paid up this time. God and me, we got a deal. I handle the money down here. He promises to do it up there.”

She buckled her raffia purse and then patted my hand. “I sure will miss holding it.”

“The money?” I asked.

She winked. “No, honey. Life.”

I never saw her again. Mrs. Wilson’s obituary appeared in the local newspaper several days later. She had died in her sleep.

Out of thousands of customers, I have remembered her face, her voice, her words, for many years. Her actions have something to tell us: Take your time. Ignore the comments from the crowd around you. Pay attention to the task at hand.

Just hold it in your hands for a while.



## LIVINGSTON

# Escape to Rainbow's End

*A place to put down roots, even if you love life on the road.*

**By Spike Gillespie**



A few miles outside of Livingston, which lies an hour or so north and slightly east of Houston, it's 4 p.m. at the Rainbow's End campground, home to the Escapees RV Club. Monday through Saturday this means it's time to socialize, and dozens of retirees who live full-time in the park have gathered to meet and greet, swap news, welcome visitors, and send off those hitting the road with wishes for safe travels.

Known collectively as Escapees, they come together in a large community hall filled with folding chairs and long tables decorated with yellow silk roses tucked in bud vases. There's a dry-erase board the size of a schoolroom chalkboard, and the calendar grid on it is jam-packed with activities. There is not a single empty day. In the back is a poolroom. Another room houses gym equipment.

George Overton, aka "Lonesome George," is a standout with his black leather jacket featuring an American flag on the back, his none-too-subtle Christian Motorcyclists' belt buckle and his own brand of "bling," including a chunky gold bracelet, a diamond pinky ring and a Harley Davidson ring. Asked to explain to an outsider just what the club is about, George, who's been a member for nine years, instantly responds with a sentiment that will later be echoed by many other members: "It's my second family."

In 1978 when club co-founder Kay Peterson was traveling full-time in an RV with her husband, Joe, she wrote a regular column for a travel magazine. In one column, she asked whether anyone would be interested in a club to help maximize the RV lifestyle. A handful of folks responded, and, thus inspired, Kay and Joe started the Escapees RV Club. Now, nearly three decades in, there are over 34,000 member-families around the country. Not every member can tell you every location (there are eight Rainbow Parks, 11 co-op parks and two other related parks), but they all know about Rainbow's End, which became the club's headquarters in 1984.

Sam Houston Electric Cooperative serves Rainbow's End, and club members are enthusiastic attendees of the co-op's annual meeting. In 2006, some of them waltzed in the aisle during the musical entertainment.

George introduces the snowy-haired Lovie Curtis, who is 85 and has been in the club "forever," as she puts it. She's wearing crocheted earmuffs and a big grin, and she talks a bit like Katharine Hepburn.

Originally from St. Louis, Lovie was a Navy wife who followed her career military husband, David, all around the country until he retired in 1960. They then settled in Sacramento for 30 years so he could work for the California Highway Patrol. After that, they went straight from CHP to SKP, an acronym for Escapee members, who receive "Support, Knowledge and Parking." Typically, members refer to themselves as SKiPs.

"When he retired from that job in 1982, he said to me, 'Baby, people told me where to go my whole life.' He wanted to go where he wanted to go." They joined

the Escapees in Washington state and traveled in their Airstream, life on the road rounding out their 53 years together before David's death.

Now Lovie lives in a brick house on one of 220 deeded lots in the park (there are an additional 167 campsites). Her home is big and cozy with two bedrooms on opposite sides of a living room with a nice fireplace. She shares the space with her daughter, Monya Curtis Lyon, who came to stay after Lovie fell and hurt herself in 2000. Now Monya is recovering from surgery, so Lovie takes care of her.

Like Lonesome George, Marv Butz is quick to point out that the reason he and his wife, Lois, are full-time Rainbow's End SKiPs is because of the extended family feeling the group exudes. They met at Lois' automotive shop outside of Toledo, Ohio—he was a mechanic, she was his boss. When they retired, they sold their home and set out for the highway.

Back when they were on the road all the time, he and Lois were VCRs—volunteer club representatives—traveling to different motor home rallies to sing the praises of SKiPs and urge others to join. It was at their first rally, in Alaska, when they realized they were onto something bigger than they thought. They had expected 18 other RVs but, Marv says, "57 rigs showed up!"

For 10 years, they traveled full time. "We traveled wherever we wanted," says Lois. "Neither one of us wanted to be anchored." They've been east to west and drove to Alaska twice. When Marv started experiencing health problems, they decided to settle down finally, and Livingston was the perfect place for them.

As a tribute to their beloved on-the-road lifestyle, they took the wheels off their fifth-wheel rig (a motor home that, in tow, rests on top of a pickup bed), set it on a base and then added a small, permanent living room (decorated with, among other beloved objects, Lois' socket-wrench set) to add a bit more space. But not too much. "We're perfectly happy with what we have," says Lois. "We had a big home, but we're past that."

Even if they had a mansion, there would be little time to spend in it. There are so many opportunities for community gathering that many SKiPs are fully immersed in social activities seemingly around the clock.

There are two huge annual gatherings where thousands of SKiPs come together to take and teach workshops. There are 50 Birds of a Feather groups catering to SKiPs with similar interests, from computers to quilting. Head Out Programs (HOPs) gather members together to attend special events like hot-air balloon launches and NASCAR races. The group has a website, [www.escapees.com](http://www.escapees.com).

But in the end, more than any of these things, concur George and Marv and the rest of the SKiPs, what members treasure most about the group is that sense of family. It's a sense that extends to bad times as well as festive occasions. The Livingston headquarters houses CARE (Continuing Assistance for Retired Escapees). This is an adult daycare center licensed by the state of Texas to provide care for ailing SKiPs and respite for the caregivers. With many SKiPs being advanced in age and sometimes brought down by health issues, it is a comfort to know that, if they do fall ill, they can park their rig at CARE and have meals and love delivered directly to their (motor) home.

As one member put it, unlike some travel clubs where you say you're a member of the club, with this group, you say, "I am an Escapee."



Lovie Curtis, a Navy widow, has a deeded lot at Rainbow's End, headquarters for the Escapees RV Club.

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*Spike Gillespie is an Austin-based essayist whose work appears in The New York Times Sunday Magazine.*

Because many pieces of farm equipment reach heights of 14 feet or higher, always remember to look up when entering fields and barn lots to make sure there is enough room to pass beneath electric lines. Electric contact accidents can result in loss of limbs or even death.

## **Farm Safety Rules:**

- The number one electrical farm hazard is the potential contact from a grain auger to a power line. Always look up before raising or moving an auger.
- The same is true of metal irrigation pipe, often stored along fence lines under an electric line. Never raise or move irrigation pipe without looking up. A few seconds of caution can mean the difference between life and death.
- Be sure hand tools are in good working order and use them according to manufacturers' instructions.
- Ensure that the wiring in your workshop is adequate to handle your tools. And never operate any electric tools near water.
- Read labels and handling instructions carefully and follow them when using chemicals and herbicides. Never leave chemicals where children or animals can get into them; store them in a locked cabinet if possible. Safely dispose of containers.

# **CULTIVATE FARM SAFETY**



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# Roadside Memories

BY CAMILLE WHEELER

Childhood memories of roadside parks taste good in my mind: potato chips and sandwiches, ice-cold Dr Pepper and Big Red.

Four decades later, I can still see the family station wagon pulling into yet another tree-shaded picnic area along a Texas highway. I can feel those concrete picnic tables, cool to the touch. And I can hear the wind blowing through oaks and pecans.

My siblings and I grew up on a farm southeast of Lubbock, where the land is flat, trees are scarce and the rows of cotton are interminably long. Summer vacations—often spur-of-the-moment events when it rained an inch or more and my dad declared the fields too muddy to hoe or plow—were cause for great excitement.

So off we'd go, to Corpus Christi, to Palo Duro Canyon, to Cloudcroft, New Mexico. And on every trip across Texas, we stopped at roadside parks—commonly called picnic areas—to rest, play and soak up new scenery.

I still get excited about stopping at picnic areas—the genesis of Texas' safety rest areas, which are now undergoing extravagant renovations (see page 10). And since 1933, when Texas opened its first roadside park in Fayette County between Smithville and West Point on Texas 71, the reason for building rest stops remains unchanged: providing a safe place for motorists to stop and relax, thus reducing accidents when they resume their travels.

State highway engineer Gibb Gilchrist and Jac Gubbels, the Texas Highway Department's first landscape architect, stressed that roadside facilities should reflect their surroundings, including natural flora. By today's standards, that

first roadside park built on donated land was quite simple. But in 1933, its picturesque setting of tables and benches cloaked by live oak trees was considered advanced.

From that humble beginning, the marriage between safety and good looks took root. Early on, the Texas Highway Department built nearly 500 roadside parks.

Along the way, the program got a boost from Lyndon B. Johnson, then the administrator for the National Youth Administration for Texas, who proposed that unemployed young men go to work by improving the roadside facilities.

By the late 1940s, the number of roadside parks—including scenic overlooks—had swelled to more than 900. Travelers gasped at the views from the overlooks, such as above the Pecos River and the Rio Grande.

Then, in May 1963, a great evolution occurred: Texas dedicated its first safety rest area east of San Antonio, on Interstate 10. And in 1967, the state's first rest area with restrooms, called a comfort station, opened on Interstate 35 north of Round Rock.

On Texas travel maps today, big green dots denote rest stops, and little green dots mark picnic areas. One stormy March afternoon, while driving home to Austin, I stopped at one of those little green dots—one of 665 picnic areas left in Texas—on U.S. 281, just south of Windthorst.

Even though I was tired, I couldn't resist this roadside park—especially upon seeing its historical marker. So I stood in the rain, reading about Joseph Sterling Bridwell (1885-1966), an oilman and rancher who donated the land upon which I stood.

Satisfied, I climbed back in the car. Now I could rest.

**Left to right: Oil derrick-styled rest area on Interstate 20 approximately 14 miles northeast of Tyler. Picnic arbor at roadside park on U.S. Highway 180/U.S. Highway 62 at the Guadalupe Mountains. Tepee arbor safety rest area on Interstate 10, 12 miles west of Sierra Blanca.**



# A Cut Above

**BY SHANNON OELRICH** My husband, Dave, doesn't like to eat steak at a restaurant because he thinks he can do just as well at home with a good steak on the grill. I disagree, not because of his grilling ability, which is stellar, but because I like the ambiance of a steak house.

A real steak house serves its meat with pride and elegance. The surroundings, whether opulent or down-home, should make you feel a little like a cattle baron or baroness. The waitperson should set your dish down with pride, the steak commanding its place on the plate, unencumbered by too many side dishes or garnishes.

But although we differ in opinion on where to eat one, we both agree that the most significant detail is the quality of the steak. Choice is good, Prime is better (see sidebar), but what about that new darling of top chefs and aficionados, Kobe beef? It's been praised for its succulent texture and superb taste, but it comes with a steep price tag.

## WHAT IS KOBE BEEF?

Here in Texas, there isn't any real "Kobe" beef unless it's been imported from the Kobe region of Japan. Rumors abound about how the Japanese cattle are treated, including regular massage and sake-soaked feed, but in Texas, the emphasis is on genetics and healthy cows.

Some Texas ranchers have imported the Japanese Wagyu (wahg-you) breed and crossbred it with Angus to create a hearty cow with more intramuscular fat, or "marbling," than other U.S. breeds. Most Kobe-style beef is raised on a grain and grass diet, without hormones or antibiotics.

Even though there's technically more fat, it turns out that it's healthier fat. Stephen Smith, a researcher at Texas A&M University, found that

Wagyu beef is higher in unsaturated fat and has higher levels of oleic acid (which lowers bad LDL cholesterol) than U.S. beef.

A&M researchers have also discovered that the U.S. Prime beef supply is not keeping up with consumer demand, leaving the market wide open for the super-rich Wagyu, even at its premium price. Consumer demand for Prime beef is around 9 percent, whereas only about 6 percent of the U.S. beef supply is graded Prime.

## PUT IT TO THE TEST

On a Friday afternoon, *Texas Co-op Power* staff and friends gathered to sample and rate different types of steak. We purchased a few each of Choice, Prime and Wagyu New York strips to compare. (The Choice and Prime were Certified Grass-Fed Angus purchased from Central Market; the Wagyu was from Yama Beef in East Texas.)

I respectfully asked Dave to follow the grilling directions of Fred Thompson, cookbook author and pit master (see facing page). He grilled the steaks to medium rare.

For most tasters, the biggest difference was between Choice and Prime. While all of us thought the Choice was good, and said we'd certainly serve it at home, we agreed that the Prime steaks were juicier, more tender and had a better overall flavor—definitely worth the price difference. The divide between Prime and Wagyu was more subjective, and split along gender lines. The men noticed a difference, particularly in flavor, but agreed that "for the price," they liked the Prime better. The women said they could "taste the fat" in the Wagyu beef—in a good way. We found it more succulent and more flavorful. However, unless for a very special occasion, we agreed that our pocketbooks were more comfortable with the price of Prime.

**From top: Dave Oelrich readies three types of steak (from left: Kobe-style, Prime and Choice) for the grill while Rose Van Overbeek looks on. The steaks are grilled to medium-rare while hungry testers wait. The Oelrich family dog, 14-year-old Saxon, is an enthusiastic, though not discerning, tester.**





In Fred Thompson's newest book, *Barbecue Nation* (The Taunton Press, 2007), he has this to say about grilling steaks:

"Grilling a steak seems simple, but a few home truths need to be observed. Start with the best-quality meat. If you can find American-raised, grass-fed beef that's Prime or aged, I urge you to purchase it. Look for good marbling: That's the little white lines of fat running through the solid muscle of the meat. Remember that fat transfers flavor, so check your cholesterol fears at the door. My recommendation is eat good red meat, just less often. When it comes to fuel, both charcoal briquettes and gas are fine, although you might want to give true hardwood charcoal a try. It burns hotter, which is what you want (most steakhouses are cooking at 800 degrees F plus). Also, the flavor from hardwood charcoal is clean, natural, and unadulterated. Season your steak very simply. Make sure the surface is dry except for a little oil. Wet beef won't sear as well. I drizzle oil on my steaks to help the heat transfer begin—I get a better sear and more caramelizing, a 10-cent word for lots of flavor. Gild the lily at the end with butter, either a purchased seasoned butter or mix up your own. Plain unsalted butter is just fine as well."

### THE PERFECT GRILLED STEAK

- 4 well-marbled 1 1/2-inch-thick New York strip steaks, bone on if possible
- Kosher salt to taste, about 1 teaspoon

per steak  
Freshly ground black pepper, about 1 teaspoon per steak  
Olive oil (not extra virgin), as needed  
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) unsalted or seasoned butter

Remove the steaks from the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before cooking.

Light a charcoal fire or preheat your gas grill on high. Oil the grill's cooking surface.

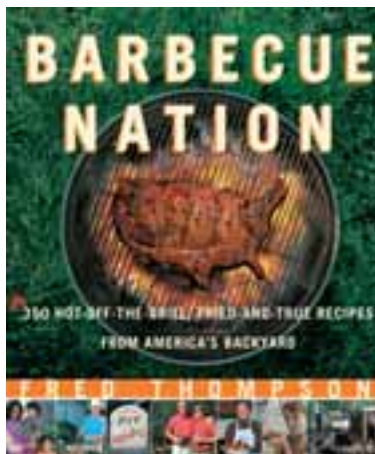
Pat the steaks dry with a paper towel and sprinkle each on both sides with the salt and pepper, then drizzle with a light coating of olive oil. Put the grill grates in place and wait a few minutes as they heat. Place the steaks on the grill. Cook for a couple of minutes, until you can lift them up from the grill without sticking,

then give each steak a quarter turn. Continue cooking for another couple of minutes, then flip the steaks over. So far they've cooked for 5 to 6 minutes. Grill for another 5 to 6 minutes on the second side.

Touch the meat to gauge its doneness\* and remove or continue cooking. When

done, remove the steaks to a platter, top each one with a pat of butter, then wait 5 minutes, giving the butter time to melt and the internal juices time to settle. Serve, pouring any melted butter and accumulated juices over the steaks.

\*Checking for doneness without cutting: Touch your cheek. When you push on a steak and it feels like that, it's rare. The tip of your nose is medium, and your forehead is well done. Timing helps, but feeling it in your fingertips is foolproof.



### USDA BEEF GRADES

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), beef grading began back in the 1920s to "ensure a uniform quality in contract beef purchases." The USDA separates beef into eight grades: Prime, Choice, Select, Standard, Commercial, Utility, Cutter and Canner. In most restaurants, you'll find only Prime or Choice beef. In the grocery store, you may find any of the top three grades: Prime, Choice or Select.

Marbling, the amount of fat in the muscle, is the main criterion by which the grades are assigned. To be labeled "Prime," a cut of beef must contain no less than 8 percent intramuscular fat. The USDA notes that the grading process is voluntary, but most beef producers comply with it because of the marketing benefits associated with, especially, the top three grades.

Note: Beef graded "Prime" has nothing to do with "prime rib," which refers to the part of the cow from where the meat is cut.

### RECIPE CONTEST

November's recipe contest topic is **SOUTHERN CAKES**. Get out those tattered, stained recipe cards and share with us your recipes for genteel, old-fashioned cakes. Send them 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](mailto: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 July 15. The top winner will receive a tin filled with Pioneer products. Runners-up will also receive a prize.

# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

## 3rd Annual Holiday Recipe Contest

### \$5,000 in Total Prizes!

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**GRAND-PRIZE WINNER TAKES HOME \$3,000. FOUR RUNNERS-UP WILL EACH WIN \$500.**

Once again, we're looking for the best original recipes from your holiday celebrations. All recipes must include a Pioneer product such as Pioneer Brand Flour, Pioneer Brand Gravy Mixes or the new Pioneer Brand Microwaveable Gravies, Pioneer Brand Biscuit & Baking Mixes, or Pioneer Brand Pancake Mixes. Winners will be announced in our December issue.

Up to three entries are allowed per person. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper. Entries MUST include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your electric cooperative, or they will be disqualified. All entries must be postmarked by September 10, 2007. Send entries to: Holiday Recipe Contest, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, or fax to (512) 486-6254. To enter by e-mail (recipes@texas-ec.org), you must include "Holiday Recipe Contest" in the subject line and submit one recipe per e-mail (no attachments). For official rules, visit [www.texascooppower.com](http://www.texascooppower.com) or send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the address above.

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▲ Brothers **Zach** and **Peyton Bates** make seaweed wigs during a family vacation to Galveston. The boys' parents, **Billy** and **Leanna**, are members of McLennan County Electric Cooperative.



◀ **Alvin** and **Marsha Smith**, Big Country Electric Cooperative members, sent this photo of their grandsons, **Caleb** and **Taylor**, on their first trip to Rangers Ballpark.



▼ Two-year-old **Tate Duncan** inspects his 6-week-old brother **Cade**. "It looks like Tate is wondering who this is invading his territory," says grandmother **Lucille Hipp**. Lucille and her husband **Joe** are members of Cherokee County Electric Cooperative.

Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Sept	Birdhouses	July 10
Oct	Hats and Caps	Aug 10
Nov	Hunting with a Camera	Sep 10
Dec	Holiday Decorations	Oct 10
Jan	Little Helpers	Nov 10
Feb	Landscapes	Dec 10

**BIRDHOUSES** is the topic for our **SEPTEMBER 2007** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **Birdhouses, Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704**, before **July 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](mailto:focus@texas-ec.org). (If you have questions about your camera's capabilities and settings, please refer to the operating manual.)

**BROTHERS**

From hand-me-downs and bunk beds to camping trips and lengthy phone calls, being a brother is a lifelong job. Through all the ups and downs, brothers always have someone to turn to for advice and support. As demonstrated in this month's winning photos, the bond that exists between brothers is unique and strong. **DACIA RIVERS**



▲ **Ceburn Parker**, member of Houston County Electric Cooperative, and his brother, **Nelson**, recreate a photo taken of them in 1928, when they were just 6 and 7 years old.

▼ Mother **Jenny Kelly**, Pedernales Electric Cooperative member, calls this photo of her two sons, big brother **Kade** and baby **Kyle**, "Oh, Brother."



# AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

## JULY

**03 CALDWELL** Celebration & Fireworks Display, (979) 567-4286

**FORT STOCKTON** [3-4] July Fourth Celebration, (432) 336-2264

**GRANBURY** [3-4] Old Fashioned July Fourth Celebration, (817) 573-1622, www.granburychamber.com

**LONGVIEW** Fireworks Festival & Freedom Celebration, (903) 759-0010

**WAXAHACHIE** Crape Myrtle Festival, Fireworks Show, Parade & Driving Trail, (972) 937-2390

**04 ABILENE** July Fourth Family Festival & Benefit, (325) 672-1712

**04 BELTON** [4-7] July Fourth Celebration & PRCA Rodeo, (254) 939-3551, www.rodeobelton.com

**BIG SANDY** Explosion in the Park, (903) 636-5517

**BUDA** Red, White & Buda, (512) 295-9999

**COLUMBUS** Texas' Oldest Independence Day Celebration, (979) 732-8385, www.columbustexas.org

**GAINESVILLE** Fireworks Show, (940) 668-4530

**HENDERSON** Independence Day Parade & Fireworks, 1-866-650-5529

**HUNTSVILLE** Old Fashioned July Fourth Celebration, (936) 295-8113, www.huntsvillemainstreet.com

**04 JACKSONVILLE** Fireworks Display at Lake Jacksonville, 1-800-376-2217, www.jacksonvilletexas.com

**JEFFERSON** Independence Day Celebration, (903) 665-3733

**KERRVILLE** July Fourth on the River Concert, (830) 792-8387

**LAGO VISTA** July Fourth Patriotic Day Event & Fireworks, (512) 970-4400, www.lagovistajuly4.org

**LOCKHART** Family Picnic & Fireworks Display, (512) 398-2818, www.lockhartchamber.com

**NACOGDOCHES** Freedom Fest, 1-888-653-3788

**ODESSA** Firecracker Fandango, (432) 335-4682

**04 PORT ARTHUR** Independence Day Celebration, (409) 984-6156, www.portarthurtexas.com

**RICHMOND** Independence Day Celebration, (281) 343-0218, www.georgeranch.org

**ROCKPORT** Fireworks Display and Patriotic Boat Parade, (361) 729-6445

**ROSENBERG** Family Fourth Celebration, 1-866-367-8236, www.visitrosenberg.com

**SAN ANGELO** July Fourth Celebration, (325) 245-7762

**SLATON** July Fourth Festival, (806) 828-6238, www.slatonchamberofcommerce.org

**WIMBERLEY** Old Time Parade, (512) 847-2201

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Make check or money order payable to Texas Electric Cooperatives. Send \$15 for each poster (price includes tax, shipping and handling) to Posters, Texas Co-op Power, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You may order online at www.texascoopower.com. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.

# AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

- 06 CENTER** [6-7] What-A-Melon Festival, (936) 598-7911
- EDINBURG** [6-7] Texas Cook'em: High Steaks, (956) 383-4974, [www.edinburg.com](http://www.edinburg.com)
- KEMP** Aley Picnic, (903) 498-6482
- 07 GOODLETT** Let Freedom Ring Opry, (940) 663-5905
- LEAKEY** July Jubilee, (830) 232-5222, [www.friocanyonchamber.com](http://www.friocanyonchamber.com)
- MARATHON** [7-8] Cowboy Chili Cook-Off, (512) 282-1199
- TIMPSON** Frontier Days, (936) 254-3958
- 09 LAMPASAS** [9-15] Spring Ho Festival, (512) 556-5301

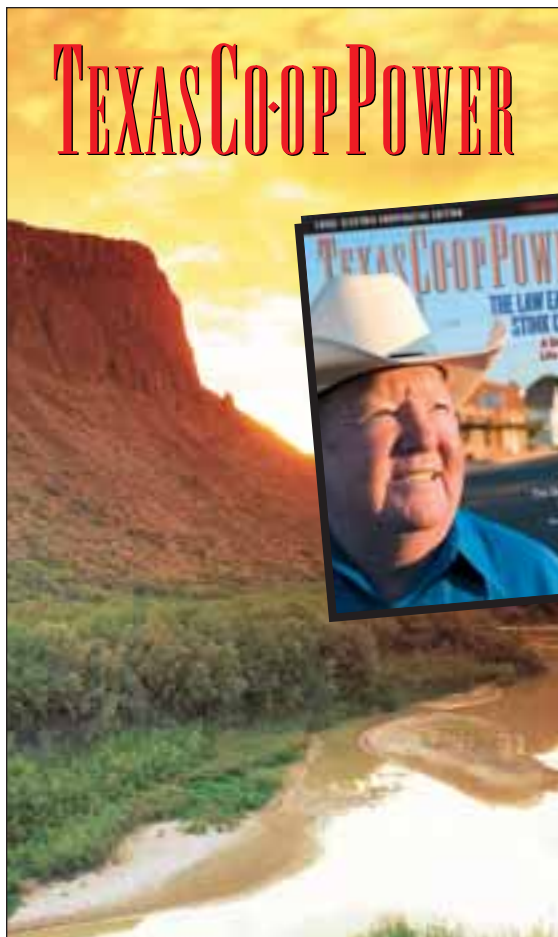
- 13 JEWETT** [13-15] Flea Market, (936) 536-7689
- 14 MARBLE FALLS** Founders' Day Celebration, (830) 798-2157
- MCDADE** Watermelon Festival, (512) 273-0018, [www.mcdadetexas.com](http://www.mcdadetexas.com)
- UVALDE** [14-15] Arts-N-Crafts Show, (830) 278-1407
- 21 ANDICE** [21-22] Crafter's Fair, (254) 793-9438
- FRIONA** Cheeseburger Cook-Off & Festival, (806) 250-3491
- TULIA** Swisher County Founders Celebration, (806) 995-2296
- 26 CLUTE** [26-28] Great Texas Mosquito Festival, 1-800-371-2971

- 27 CORN HILL** [27-28] Barbecue Cook-Off, (512) 746-2591, [www.moravianclub.com](http://www.moravianclub.com)
- MOULTON** [27-29] Town & Country Jamboree, (361) 596-7205, [www.moulton-texas.com](http://www.moulton-texas.com)
- WALLIS** [27-29] Old Time Fun Festival, (979) 478-2349
- 28 ELDORADO** [28-29] Running of the Bull, (325) 853-3678
- FREDERICKSBURG** [28-29] Gourmet Chili Pepper & Salsa Festival, (830) 997-8515
- MONAHANS** Butterfield-Overland Stagecoach & Wagon Festival, (432) 943-2187
- 28 NAVASOTA** Legends of Western Swing Show & Dance, (936) 825-7338

## AUGUST

- 04 WIMBERLEY** Market Day, (512) 847-2201
- 05 FRELSBURG** Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church Festival & Fish Fry, (979) 732-3430
- 11 CORSICANA** Concerts for Local Charities, (903) 872-8226
- CHAPPELL HILL** Lavender Fest, (979) 251-8114, [www.chappellhilllavender.com](http://www.chappellhilllavender.com)

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](mailto:aroundtx@texas-ec.org). Please submit events for September by July 10. **Events are listed according to space available; see the full listing at [www.texascooppower.com](http://www.texascooppower.com).**



## SHARE THE POWER!

*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.

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John Wayne could have filmed all his Westerns smack in the middle of the Texas Panhandle, so ruggedly story-book is the landscape here. You have the forbidding High Plains giving way to exquisite, ancient gashes in the earth beautifully painted by nature. You can imagine Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's expedition cutting through the vast wildness, and you understand how the Native Americans wandering here were deeply toughened by its harshness. And you can't help but marvel at hardy pioneers who had the fortitude and vision to carve out an existence for their families here.

Today, explorers have an easy time embracing the wilds of the Panhandle, although it's scarcely tamed. The marvelous journey outlined here is only about 140 miles, but it's not something you want to rush. Start in **AMARILLO**, then travel roughly 32 miles south to **PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK**, then another 90 miles or so to **CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK**. Your final leg is a 15-mile jaunt to **TURKEY**.

Take a couple of days, going slowly to drink in the wonder. You won't be disappointed.

## AMARILLO

Once you get your kicks shopping at the antique stores and cool boutiques on historic **ROUTE 66** just west of downtown, treat yourself to the happiest surprise in this dry, flat city. At the recently renovated **AMARILLO BOTANICAL GARDENS**, find the new **MARY E. BIVINS TROPICAL CONSERVATORY**. Within its glass pyramid, you'll roam through more than 6,000 square feet of lush flowers and trees meant to transport you to a South American rainforest. Sit by the rock waterfall and pond and feel stress slipping away. Depending on the calendar you may stumble upon a horticulture workshop or lecture, or perhaps catch an art exhibit.

**Mary E. Bivins Tropical Conservatory** at the **Amarillo Botanical Gardens**, 1400 Streit Dr., Amarillo; (806) 352-6513; [www.amarillobotanicalgardens.org](http://www.amarillobotanicalgardens.org)

# AMARILLO to TURKEY

*The Panhandle's rugged beauty and wild roots are on display.*

BY JUNE NAYLOR



## PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK

You'll have a hard time finding anything more impressive than the summer sunrise in this majestic canyon, which is 120 miles long and up to 20 miles wide in places. The air is clear and cool, the light wind whips that famous sagebrush perfume into your face, and the first rays of sunlight skitter over the richly colored crevices and along rocky buttes and spires rising from the desert. These are served in massive quantities at the Cowboy Morning Breakfast, a daily ritual at the **ELKINS RANCH** through August. Camp cooks rustle up a hearty chuck wagon breakfast in the traditional cowboy style, and local singer/songwriter Ed Montana entertains crowds that gather from around the globe. In the evenings in the summer, head to Palo

Duro Canyon State Park's Pioneer Amphitheater to see **"TEXAS!"**—the long-running outdoor musical that tells a dramatic story of life, death, love and war among the pioneers, cowboys and Native Americans who shaped the region.

**Palo Duro Canyon State Park**, (806) 488-2227; [www.palodurocanyon.com](http://www.palodurocanyon.com)

**Texas! Musical Drama in Palo Duro Canyon**, (806) 655-2181; [www.texas-show.com](http://www.texas-show.com)

## CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK

Just three miles beyond the town of Quitaque (say it "KIT-uh-kway"), this 15,317-acre spread of mountain, canyons, streams and trees sitting atop the region's caprock escarpment is guaranteed to open your eyes. Once roamed by the Folsom people more than 10,000 years ago, the canyons are revered today by equestrians, mountain bikers and hikers. You can explore the landscape on your horse, bicycle or feet along the 64.25-mile-long Trailway, a rails-to-trails conversion that incorporates 46 bridges and the **CLARITY TUNNEL**, one of the last railroad tunnels used in Texas. Check in at park headquarters to borrow one of the audio driving tour CDs or tapes to guide you through the park.

**Caprock Canyons State Park**, (806) 455-1492; [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)

## TURKEY

Bob Wills, the King of Western Swing, came from a farm near this Hall County town, and his legacy is celebrated inside the museum bearing his name. You'll see memorabilia from Wills and the Texas Playboys, including fiddles, hats, music, boots, photographs and more. There's a springtime festival honoring Bob Wills; you can learn more at the party headquarters, the historic **HOTEL TURKEY**.

**Bob Wills Museum**, Sixth at Lyle streets, Turkey; inquire at Hotel Turkey, Third and Alexander streets, (806) 423-1151

*June Naylor wrote Texas: Off the Beaten Path.*